

THE BROOKINGS INSTITUTION

WEBINAR

SETTING A NEW AGENDA FOR AMERICAN CITIES
A CONVERSATION WITH
MAYOR TODD GLORIA AND MAYOR STEVEN REED

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THE HONORABLE TODD GLORIA
Mayor
City of San Diego, California

THE HONORABLE STEVEN L. REED
Mayor
City of Montgomery, Alabama

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P R O C E E D I N G S

MS. LIU: Good afternoon. I want to thank you all for tuning in today. My name is Amy Liu, and I am vice president at Brookings, and I lead the Metropolitan Policy Program here, and I am delighted to host a conversation with two dynamic mayors, about their vision for the cities, at a time when just so many issues are at stake.

With us today, we have Mayor Todd Gloria of San Diego, California, who was just newly elected as mayor this past November, so, congratulations, Mayor. And we also have Mayor Steven Reed of Montgomery, Alabama, who has been in office, now, for just a little over a year. Now, both these mayors represent the newest voices among those leading our cities. Both these mayors represent America's future, in that both represent cities that are majority non-white, with Montgomery, a Black majority city, in the deep South, and San Diego, a Sunbelt superstar city, where more than half of local residents are Latinos, Asians, and of other mixed races. And both these Mayors have similar goals, even though their respective cities have different histories and economies. Mayor Gloria and Mayor Reed want their communities, for instance, to emerge from the COVID-19 recession more prosperous, and more opportunity rich, for all residents and all neighborhoods, while embracing a more climate resilient future. This is a vision that I'm sure that many of us here, on the Zoom event, share. The issue is how do we get there? What are the actions that these Mayors are going to take, and how can state and federal policies help, or even -- maybe even undermine their efforts?

So, we're going to explore all those issues and those policy dynamics, with the mayors, today. But before we do, I just want to say a few words about our program, Brookings Metro. Now, in the last 25 years, our experts and our team have literally help put cities and metropolitan areas on the economic and political map. So, back in 1996, when we founded this program, urban policy was considered dead. Today, cities and their large metros are a source of dynamism and optimism, and place-based strategies are becoming more commonplace, in state and federal policies, which are simply critical today, given how we need to address the pockets of advantage and disadvantage, that now dot the American landscape.

So, in the coming months, you're going to hear more from us about what's next for cities

and American governance. For now, I'll just say this. Leaders, like Mayor Reed and Mayor Gloria, will be charting America's future. They and their many partners, whether it's business, civic, nonprofits, university, philanthropy, they work together every day, putting community over party, to do the work of a nation. They are addressing racial equity, by investing in Black and Brown talent, businesses, and communities. They are trying to replace neighborhood segregation with wealth creation. They are prioritizing quality jobs and connecting a rapidly diversified workforce to those jobs.

They are reimagining the future of the built environment, which must be more dense, more walkable, more equitable, more sustainable, and they are helping their firms, their industries, and their workers adapt to new technologies, so we can collectively expand opportunity. This is just not easy work, yet local is the one level of governing, in our American federalist system, that never stops moving on these objectives, even when higher levels of governing can come and go, as reliable partners. And there is no doubt, our system of democracy is being tested, and we need all levels of governing to work, and to work better together. Through it all, though, we simply ought to help coalitions of local and regional leaders be more effective and create more nationally significant change to further America's promise. So, without further ado, let's get this conversation going. So, please help me welcome Mayor Gloria and Mayor Reed to our virtual stage. And while we have them, I also want to say that I'm grateful that we have a lot of great questions from the audience, and we will try to get to them at the end of this conversation. You can join this conversation by using #MetroMayors, on Twitter, and you can also send us questions using that hashtag, as you're listening to this conversation.

So, I want to start by asking you questions about your home cities. So, both of you were born and raised in the city that you now lead. So, let me start with Mayor Gloria. Can you give our viewers a story that captures what is so special and unique about San Diego?

MAYOR GLORIA: Ooh, boy, I know we have an hour, but you don't have enough time in the day. You know, as only a native is, I'm so proud of my hometown, in part, because the story I would share with you is that of my own. You know, I like to point out, or it's often pointed out, after I was elected, the many firsts that my election to -- as mayor represents, the first mayor of Color, the first LGBTQ mayor of our city. The point on the -- it's a little more specific than that. I'm the first Native

American, Pilipino, Puerto Rican, Dutch, gay mayor of San Diego. And the way that that happened is my grandparents came from all around the country, all around the world, because of their military service, and then stayed in San Diego. That's unique about our city. We're a proud military town, and, you know, my -- my 23 and Me is reflective of our military roots, and what would attract people from all around the globe to come, and stay, and build lives here. I think, also, what is unique is that my mom was a hotel maid, my dad was a gardener, and yet, somehow, their son, the first in our family to go to college, managed to become the mayor of our city.

What I think that means, Amy, is that San Diego, really, is a place of opportunity, and my interest in leading the city has really been about making sure that door of opportunity is open, as wide as possible, for as many people, who are willing to work hard, and I just -- I think that that is in some ways unique. I recognize that opportunities are not often found in some of our other cities, that are struggling to keep up in the 21st century. San Diego is resource blessed with a beautiful climate. We have a lot of innovation economy sectors, that really position us well to make good on that opportunity message, I mentioned. But really and truly, I think that we are city that welcomes the world to our community.

We're place here on the Pacific Rim, right on the U.S.-Mexico border. There's an openness here, that's unique, and I'll end with an observation, or a part of the Military DNA. You know, what I find about San Diego, is that, if you are a newcomer here, you are often welcomed with open arms. You don't have to spend 20 years toiling in neighborhood politics, in order to be on the Chamber of Commerce Board. We are very open, and part of that is that we experience new military leadership, every two years or so, they rotate in and they rotate out, and that has created a culture of openness of receptivity, of, you know, interest in new ideas, and new personalities, new perspectives, that I think gives us a competitive edge, in an economy that is increasingly smaller and smaller, where we're not competing just with our peer cities in California, but across the country and around the world. So, we're a city of opportunity, and I think I'm living proof of that.

MS. LIU: Great. Mayor Reed, what is so special about your home city, Montgomery?

MAYOR REED: Well -- well, listen, Amy. First of all, thanks for having me. It really is a pleasure to be on with you, and, you know, one of the things -- you know, Brookings has been such a

great resource for me, prior to coming into this job, and certainly since we've come into this administration, in working with you and many other, help us kind of reimagine our city, and reimagine what we can do better, and listening to Mayor Gloria, he makes me really hunger for the day when this COVID cloud is lifted above all of us, and I can get back out to San Diego because I love his city. I love the people and the weather there, and, you know, you do have a great -- a great community, you know, a military town, we're pretty much the same here, with the United States Air Force, and the Air War College being here, and so, we see a lot of military members coming to Montgomery, you know, for a couple of years, due to their station, and trying move up through the U.S. Air Force, and so, we're proud of that.

But I think certainly, you know, from Montgomery's standpoint, what we have is a rich history, a rich history, surrounding civil rights, surrounding equality, and pushing for progress in this country, and I think when we consider the things that took place here, in 1955, with Mrs. Rosa Parks refusing to give up her seat on the bus, and the transformational change that impacted throughout not only Montgomery and Alabama, but the rest of this nation, it is something that we reflect on quite a bit. It's something that's in the spirit, and it's in the DNA, not just of those leaders, like the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., who was leading that movement, as a 26-year-old, newly installed pastor, at a church, right, three blocks from City Hall, right now, but also the hundreds of everyday people, who were part of that movement, who really spurred the change, and I think that's what we're still longing for, here in Montgomery. It's to try to change that, as becoming the first Black mayor, in our 200-year history, in 2019, you know, I know there is still a long way for us to go. We still have some challenges ahead of us. But the spirit of cooperation with people here in the city and the community, and the feeling of optimism is something that undergirds me every day, and it really gives me, you know, a positive sense about what we can do as a community, together, and bringing about some of those changes that we want to see, in education, certainly in economic outcomes, and in healthcare access. Those are things that are very important here. You know, when you think about the South, and you think about cities like this, we've had some growth centers here, in areas around us.

Montgomery has not participated in that as much, but it's not because of the people. I think it's really because of our self-imposed limitations. I think, in some cases, it's been because hard

and long-standing traditions have been a challenge for us to break from, but I think, with my election, and with the coalition, that we were able to build, and in particular with the partnerships that we've been forming since our administration has started, we're starting to see a lot of awareness, around the city, and what's possible, not only here, but what's possible throughout the South. And, I think, for us, you know, there's a big push around racial reconciliation, led by Brian Stevens, in the Equal Justice Initiative, and we're seeing that from philanthropies, we're seeing that from corporations, we're seeing that from everyday people, and so, we feel like we should be the hub of that conversation. We feel like we should be the center of how we move forward in a progressive manner, not just here in the city, but throughout, because of what we've done in the past. And this city has been very honest about some of our challenges, and some of the things we aren't so proud of, in decades and centuries going by.

But I think that because of the people, and because of our faith, and because of our just ethos, we're looking forward to overcoming that, and so, I'm proud to represent my hometown, and it's been great to lead it, even throughout these challenging last, you know, 12 months or so, throughout the pandemic.

MS. LIU: Yeah, Mayor Reed, let's stay with you for a moment, and we are going to get to talking about the immediate impacts of COVID, and how we're going to address that, and move forward from there, but I want to talk about your vision for your city and your agenda. You mentioned that you were the first Black mayor of Montgomery. Both of you, actually, had historic elections because of that -- because, Mayor Gloria, you're the first person of color, elected to your city, and Mayor Reed, the first African American Mayor, to your -- to your city, 400 years after the first Black slaves arrived in the United States. And I guess my questions for you is, how are you planning to take this historic moment? What do you see is the mandate behind your election?

MAYOR REED: I think the mandate is to bring about not just equality, but equity, across the board, and to expand the opportunity for everyone, regardless of zip codes, background, race, ethnicity, or what their last name may be. We want to provide ladders to opportunity in this city, and we know that we have to be deliberate, and we have to be intentional, and we have to be very honest about how we got here, and why it took so long. I certainly don't think I was the best person to do this, that

could have done it.

But there were racial barriers that stood in the way of many others, and we have to be very honest about acknowledging that painful past, and using that to leverage us, and to propel us into a more prominent future, and what we want to do is, our thought is that starts with education. We believe economic empowerment is very, very important. We think that we have to do a better job of supporting minority, in particular Black owned businesses and helping entrepreneurs get access to capital, bringing about a more equitable educational experience, one that has not been funded in the past on a very fair basis, and we also know that we have to kind of change our economic model, that we cannot just be a service or manufacturing community.

We cannot be one that's just based on being the capital of the state government, but we have to make sure that we are, as Mayor Gloria pointed out, you know, in the knowledge-based economy, that we're looking into those emerging trends, and we're going out to talk about a new Montgomery, and to change the narrative. But the history that we have, again, provides a blueprint for me as well, and the blueprint for me, as the first Black mayor of the city, is that there's opportunity. There are willing partners, and there are people who want is to succeed, and there are people who really want us to help turn the page, not just in Montgomery, but because of what it represents to the rest of this nation. And that has been, you know, very fulfilling for me, and what my staff and I have been trying to do has been to try to work with many organizations on various fronts, from public safety to neighborhood revitalization, to affordable housing, to even addressing food deserts, to really bring about a more fair and just approach to government, and how responsive we are to our citizens because many of them, Amy, for so long, have felt left out --

MS. LIU: Yep.

MAYOR REED: -- looked over and left behind, and when one looks at the things that we see on a day-to-day basis here, I have to agree. So, we know there has to be some right sizing in this, and we know that takes more than government to do it. It takes more than hopes, and wishes, and prayers. It takes partnerships, it takes actions, and it takes deliberate intentions to get that done.

MS. LIU: Great. Mayor Gloria, I just want to stress this situ -- what you mentioned

earlier, which is that San Diego's situated right on the Mexico border. It is a binational region, and it's always had great economic ties to Tijuana, and Baja, California. What I really was struck by something you said recently, which is the city also shares cultural and family ties to your neighbor. And here you are, after all the connections to the border, you are the first mayor of color, for the city. So, what is the mandate for you? What is the moment -- how are you planning on seizing this moment?

MAYOR GLORIA: I really appreciate that question because I do think it underlines somewhat Mayor Reed was just discussing, in terms of how much further we still have to go, right, that we can be a city that is situated on the U.S.-Mexican Border, but have never elected anyone, that looks like me, to this office. And it does present opportunity to approach this a different way. My observation, Amy, is that, generally, we have talked about the border in economic terms, dollars and cents, what the amount of trade and commerce, across that, a busy land border means for our community, as well as the communities in Baja, and that's not insignificant. But I think the last four years have shown us what happens when you talk about immigration, not in humanistic terms, but in money terms, and the amount of human suffering that has happened, over the last number of years, and honestly continues a bit today, because we're still trying to make a transition to a more humane and compassionate system, and I appreciate the Biden administration's creative engagement on that.

But the point is we have to talk about this more about people and about families, recognizing that, in San Diego, a lot of our folks live on both sides of the border. They may work on one side and live on the other. Their children may matriculate on one side, their job may be on the other side. The point is, is that the border is not a dividing line, as much as it is about a seam, really, that we have to knit tighter and closer together, and by doing so, our economy does improve, but so do the outcomes for the people of our region.

You know, when I think about so many of the challenges we face as a community, when it comes to water quality, and environmental stewardship, climate action, energy, housing, so much of this requires a binational approach, that is just perhaps different than it would have seemed before. We want to get past just ceremonial engagement, and really into a depth of engagement that really lifts up our community. A quick example would be, you know, we have a very small airport, here in San Diego. It

makes it very convenient when I -- when I welcome Mayor Reed here soon, when they can allow travel again, he'll have a quick little three-minute drive to my office because it's that convenient. That said, it constricts our capacity. Well, Tijuana has an incredible airport, that we have been able to build across border terminal, where you can check-in in the American side, walk across a pedestrian bridge, and access the host of flights that are there, solving, partially, the problems we have in the San Diego area. That kind of collaboration has the ability to lift up our quality of life, not just to improve trade, but improve our region's quality of life. We need more of that in our financial and mobile region.

MS. LIU: Great. Let's talk about COVID-19, and its impact on your local community. I want to keep it with you, Mayor Gloria, and as a way of opening this up, I thought it was very interesting that in your recent State of the City Speech, you declared that the state of the city is, quote, fragile. So, can you expand upon that?

MAYOR GLORIA: Yeah, you know, I -- I'm not surprised that caught your attention. I think, it caught some other folks' attention. You know, you're supposed to say, it is strong, it is vibrant, it's, you know, what -- what have you, and I just believe in being honest, and the fact of the matter is the pandemic has hurt our economy. It has hurt our people. It has caused thousands of our folks to be sick. Thousands pass away. And it has exposed other challenges the city has long faced but has not necessarily spoken about. And I thought that by describing it as fragile, which I think is an accurate description, it was being truthful, at a time where we need to build trust with the public. You know, as we ask people to follow public health orders, as we ask them to believe in the science, and get vaccinated, they need to know that their leaders are being honest with them, leveling with them, even when the information is not something that is positive. And so, when I look at our enormous budget deficit, again, Amy, a deficit that pre-existed the pandemic, but is far worse because of it, I have to be honest with people. And my hope is that, typically, at the beginning of a new administration, that that transparency, that honesty, that being really forthright will build a level of credibility with the public, that will allow us to get through this pandemic, and then help us to actually address these longstanding issues, that have long been ignored, but can be ignored no longer because the pandemic has made them just so much more acute. So, yeah, not an interesting word choice, one that I believe is accurate, and one that I think helps

me to be honest with the public, and hopefully gain creditability to tackle the many significant challenges that are ahead of us, just to entail the virus, and then will have to be addressed during the recovery.

MS. LIU: Okay, we'll spend more on the response, but, Mayor Reed, I want to give you a chance to just tell us what the pandemic crisis has been on your city's budget, in your community, and you became mayor right at the center of the pandemic.

MAYOR REED: Yeah, you know, the pandemic hit, again, just -- just a little bit over a year ago. We probably started preparing for it, sometime in February, kind of mid-February, right after, actually, the U.S. Conference of Mayors, when -- while I was in D.C., is where I was first alerted to it, by a good friend, and, you know, for us, it has been difficult because it hit right in our first 100 days, and we had a very ambitious agenda, that we wanted to get accomplished, and that, you know, had to be kind of put on pause. But we put all hands-on deck, in order to try to address it, and we wanted to take the approach of making sure that we were overprepared for whatever might come. And I think, you know, some of the things that probably helped us, to the degree that we could, was how we responded to it, fiscally.

We implemented a hiring freeze. We cut budgets across the board, 10%, which is not something I would normally do, but we thought this was a very unique scenario, and even if I wasn't up to -- up to the task, initially, my finance director, who had been here, had been working for the city about 18 years, she made sure that I understood what the implications were on some things that I thought we could do, and I think, in hindsight, it was certainly the best move for us. So, we saw, you know, revenues plummet, like a lot of cities, but we were able to stave off any furloughs, or any layoffs, and we didn't have to touch our reserves. So, we came out of this -- we're coming out of this, I think, a little better than most, and certainly went into the 2021 budget season better than we thought because of those aggressive approaches that we took. And I think, you know, in terms of the community, that's been a different story. You know, virtual learning has impacted a lot of people, and this community has shown us the educational gap, that we know is there, it has laid that out in the opening for everyone to see. We tried to do what we could, by enabling mobile Wi-Fi units on school buses, to go out to various neighborhoods.

And we tried to think innovatively, in ways of how we could support our small businesses,

raising hundreds of thousand dollars to go to small businesses, to give them as grant and not loans. We really tried to work with our financial institutions, both local and those outside of Montgomery, to assist us in various programs, and we worked, you know, with the SBA, as well, to get small businesses and entrepreneurs the information they needed, whether it was for the PPP Loans, or other loan programs that were out there. So, we tried to do our part, but that still was not enough to save all the livelihoods that we wanted to save, and we have seen that impact, along our retail corridors, and certainly as it has hurt family businesses and businesses that have been open for generations.

And finally, and I think certainly the most important part, is that the healthcare access that we've seen, again, we've seen that gap between those who have, and those who have not, and that has often come across racial lines, and certainly economic lines, and it's also shown us where the faults are in our public healthcare system, and things that we have to work on, not just as a municipality, or as a state, but as a nation, in order to better serve our most vulnerable residents and citizens.

MS. LIU: I want to spend some time talking about your relationship with your governors, as we've approached the public health crisis. Both your governors have -- have come to the crisis very differently. Gov -- you know, Governor Newsom, you know, clearly had a very strict shutdown of the state economy. Governor Kay Ivey came late to masking -- shutting down, and probably has a very different reopening approach at this moment. Tell me how that -- how your relationship with the governor -- how did that play out during the year? Obviously, Mayor Gloria, you were in the State Assembly, actually, at the time. But how do you see this, either both in the reopening -- how did -- how did this state relationship play out, particularly for you, Mayor Reed, and then how do you see that partnership playing out over the next couple of months?

MAYOR REED: You know, I think from my end, the State Capitol is less than a mile from my office, and so, we have a very good relationship with our governor and her chief of staff. Certainly, there are many things that our politics don't agree on, and the mask mandate was one. But we thought, early on, that we were going to have to kind of go it alone because even other mayors in our state really weren't where we were, based on the information that we had, and we just believed that we had to look for our residents, and really try to set the tone, and set the example of what needed to be done,

irrespective of what was happening at the state level, because as -- as, you know, we've talked about it before, in various forms, you know, often, you have a different dynamic in, particularly in the South, in your urban core, in your cities, politically, versus what you have throughout your state politics, and that, in itself, can present a challenge, and it did present a challenge for us. But we were always upfront with Governor Ivey, we were very transparent, she was very open to listening to the mayors of the larger cities, in the state.

But she was hearing from hundreds of mayors, and hundreds of county commissioners, and things along those lines, and I understood the, you know, the -- the juggling act, she kind of had to do. Our thought was, let's lead by example, let's set the tone, and let's do what we think is in the best interest of our residents, and I think we were able to do that, and we saw other communities and maybe even some of our state leaders come along with that, as well.

MS. LIU: Mayor Gloria?

MAYOR GLORIA: Well, as you say, Amy, like, most of the year has been spent with me serving with the governor in Sacramento, working collaboratively on the state response. Now, my role has shifted, but that relationship is really, I think, accruing to the benefit of San Diego. You might imagine my predecessor, who is now running against the governor, that that dimension of politics is unhelpful, right, this alignment, in terms of an approach of understanding that science and data has to drive this conversation, that we need to work collaboratively to better outcomes for our residents. That's actually, I think, working much, much better. And I will just say that I am grateful for Governor Newsom's leadership during this difficult year. All of us are burdened with leadership at this time. We all sought these jobs, so, no I'm not complaining, but my point is that this is a difficult time to be in leadership. Again, I think, it's undeniable that what the governor has done, over the last year, has saved thousands of lives.

And it has been difficult, there's no two ways about it. But what I have found with the governor is a receptivity of -- to feedback, to information, to data, and similarly, he has been willing to support our efforts here, in San Diego. Shortly after I became the mayor, we took Tailgate Park, which is where Petco Park, where the Padres play, and turned it into the state's first vaccination superstation, vaccinating 5,000 people a day, on what is a city parcel of land. They now have entrusted the city of San

Diego, to provide vaccines ourselves, and we are assisting the county of San Diego, who is the lead on our public health and response. But we can play an assisted role, in targeting hard hit communities, hard hit zip codes, to make sure vulnerable populations, like our homeless population, are served.

This has been through the partnership with the state of California and the county of San Diego, again, saving lives at a time that is so critical, and in your go forward basis, I'm extremely optimistic of what we can do with the state, frankly, because of smart fiscal stewardship by Governor Brown, before him, and continued under Governor Newsom. They have a substantial budget surplus, that I think will be able to find its way down to cities, like ours, that have been hard-hit because of lack of tourism and travel and be able to use those dollars strategically to address, again, those hard-hitting difficult issues, that we've long ignored, but that Governor Newsom, by his own political brand, has been one that has never been shying away from tough issues.

So, I'm hopeful, Amy, and I'll just maybe wrap up with one thing. Governor Newsom had a program -- has a program, Project Homekey, where we have been -- the state has been providing localities, like the city of San Diego, millions of dollars to acquire hotels and to convert them into permanent supportive housing. So, in the midst of a public health pandemic, in the midst of an economic crisis, the governor has not taken his eye off the ball, and what I still hear is the number one issue for my constituents, homelessness.

MS. LIU: Yep.

MAYOR GLORIA: And what we have done now is actually add over 300 units of permanent housing in months, not years, that is literally housing over 400 unsheltered San Diegans tonight. That has been done during a pandemic. I cannot wait to see what we can get accomplished after this pandemic, through this improved city-state relationship.

MS. LIU: Since you've got the mic, let me just follow up and talk about the new American Rescue Plan, the \$1.9 billion -- trillion plan that the president will soon sign. There's been some concern that state and localities didn't need the state and local aid that has been included. Tell me, you know, how helpful is that aid, and how do you plan to use it, as well as, perhaps, feel free to comment on other parts of the bill package that will be helpful to you.

MAYOR GLORIA: Absolutely. Well, Amy, if I could spend the next half hour praising and thanking President Biden, Speaker Pelosi, Leader Schumer, I mean, they have done something transformative and incredible. You know, Amy, right now, every one of my city firefighters is capable of providing COVID vaccinations, and they're doing that. They're doing that at our municipal gym, they're doing it at our city libraries, they're on mobile units, going out and vaccinating senior citizens, who are not able to make it to vaccination stations. They have done this in a pandemic, setting aside their own health and getting out there and doing the hard work, and at a time when I'm facing a nearly quarter of a billion dollar budget deficit, over two fiscal years.

So, the \$300 million dollars that is in the American Rescue Act is going to help us bridge that gap, so that I don't have to tell those firefighters, those EMTs, who are out helping save lives right now, that they have to take a pay cut, or they have to take a piece. That's what Joe Biden has done. That is what Congress has done. And I am eternally grateful. It is baloney to say that this is not necessary. It is absolutely necessary to make sure that we're not laying off librarians, at a time when we need our libraries open, so that people can access the computers there to find jobs, right, that we don't have to tell our homeless services providers to pack up shop and go away, at a time when, again, San Diegans are pressing for -- for change.

This money will be extremely helpful to get through the next difficult series of months that we will face and will set us up for success. Now, I've mentioned our city's budget, which I want to say the number one priority for these dollars is helping to defeat COVID-19, so that those vaccination efforts I just mentioned to you don't have to cease, right. Amy, that stuff is not free, and some of it's reimbursable, but some of it's coming out of our city's coffers, at a time when, again, we're facing a deficit. That's job number one. Job number two is to make sure that we're not laying folks off, that we can maintain neighborhood services, at a time when the public is asking for more public help. They are turning to the city, to the county, to the state for help, and we have to be able to meet that, those calls for help. This plan will help us do that.

And the last thing, Amy, is it helps us to kind of keep an eye on the horizon for what we can do going forward. You know, we have hard-hit industries here, right, our hospitality industry, our

travel industry, our restaurants, our small businesses, our moms and pops. The dollars in this particular plan will allow the city to initiate programs that will actually help us to help them. So, absent this legislation, none of that would be happening. We would be having a very different -- different conversation today, and that's why, again, I would take the remainder of the time to just repeatedly say thank you to President Biden, thank you, Vice President Harris, thank you to the leaders in Congress because I shudder to think what we would be doing, as a city, if we did not have this key legislation possible.

MS. LIU: Mayor Reed, why don't you jump on that and say how -- how will that aid package help you and your community?

MAYOR REED: I mean, everything Mayor Gloria just said, I mean, I can't add much to that, really, really, across the board, and as mayors, I think, regardless of the size of our cities and the size of the residents we're trying to serve, we have very much the same type of problems, it's just a matter of scale, and it -- it's incredulous to imagine that people don't think that state and local governments need that, and I know that's a great talking point for some sides, but in actuality, people are hurting, their businesses are hurting, and I think it's up to leaders to acknowledge that, that this type of investment was the least that was needed.

And I think, when you consider the billions of dollars going to metropolitan areas and cities, directly, it cuts out some of the bureaucracy that we've had to deal with, over the last year, with many of those resources going to the states, and then having to fight that through our counties, and then our municipalities, and so, I'm excited to be able to help out our first responders, to help out those frontline workers, those small businesses, to be able to give more support to those businesses that have managed to hang on, to help them get afloat, so they can put people back to work. And then when we think about the nonprofits, that are helping out in so many ways, that government has short-circuited them over the years, in the social services area, whether that is mental health, whether that is access to hospital and medical appointments, whether that is even looking at other issues that impact people on a daily basis, being able to provide funds for those organizations that have been kind of standing in the breeze, if you will, is a benefit to all of us, as mayors, because government can't do it alone --

MS. LIU: Yeah.

MAYOR REED: -- it never has, and so, it needs the private sector, it needs the nonprofit community, and it needs for people to feel good about not only the next day, but the next week and the next month, and that they're going to get help, and that the leaders that they've elected are responding to their needs and responding to the things that they have had to go without, many cases for well over a year. So, I think the stimulus is well-deserved for this nation, and I'm certainly glad that President Biden, and Vice President Harris, and the Congress passed this, and I think that we will see the benefits of this in the very short and long term.

MS. LIU: I want to ask you both, now, concrete actions you're going to take around a more equitable recovery. You know, this is something you both care about. I think, for Mayor Reed, I just have to ask this other question, first, which is very related to that. It's really hard for me not to talk about Tuskegee because the Tuskegee Experiment took place in the county next to yours.

MAYOR REED: Yep.

MS. LIU: I want to know how the Black community, in Montgomery, in your community, is reacting to the availability of vaccines, given the history that is so close to your back yard.

MAYOR REED: Sure. I think that the response has been positive. I was just on a call this morning, with faith leaders, about this very issue and about trying to get the word out. We've also been working with Partners In Health, through a community healthcare workers program, which is designed to pay community leaders to go out and try to educate and inform members of the community about why it's important to be vaccinated. There is some hesitancy because of the history there.

There certainly has been a public information campaign, that we've tried to wage, to get people to respect the views and the understanding of those who are suspicious of the federal government, in particular because of the Tuskegee Syphilis Experiment here, but that, you know, experiment is known throughout this nation, and one of the things that we've tried to share, being right here, is we know the ups and we know the downs of that, and we certainly also understand the gap that exists between healthcare access. And so, if there's one thing that I'll follow a point to, that's been the biggest challenge, it is for people to get access to the vaccine. I think that we've gotten to a decent point

in the skepticism that exists around whether or not it's safe. I think now it's just a matter of getting people to the point to where they can actually get it, and now with the Biden administration purchasing another 100 million vaccines from Johnson & Johnson, along with what they already had planned, I feel much better, that we'll be able to narrow the gap that exists between those that have been -- that have gotten access to the vaccine, that are Black and Brown, and those that are white, and being able to address that here, in Montgomery, and I think we're over the information side, but we'll continue to work on that, when we run into people who are somewhat suspicious of it.

MS. LIU: Yeah. So, let's stay with, then, beyond healthcare, what are other things that you are doing, concretely, to change the structure of opportunity in Montgomery, that is more racially inclusive, and, in fact, dismantles a lot of the systemic racism, that still permeates a lot of our structures? This is obviously something that's been top of mind in your community, for -- for centuries. Well, I want to know what -- what are you doing, specifically, to make progress?

MAYOR REED: Sure. Well, the first thing we did was we passed a tax increase for our public schools, which are overwhelmingly serving Black students, in November. This is the first time in 50 years, and we still aren't where we need to be for cities our size, in a per student basis, but we thought that was the bedrock of things that we had to do. I campaigned on it, and it's something that I wanted to do in my first year in office, and we were able to overcome a lot of doubt and a lot of opposition, in order to get that done because we just aren't a state that reinvests a lot into public institutions, regardless of what that may be.

For some reason, at some point, things that were public became poor, and then it almost seems that coincided with integration, and it coincided with many other people getting -- gaining access, to where then it became a handout, whereas in generations prior, it was just part of the experience of getting to the next level. So, we invested heavily in our public education system, and we're continuing to do that, not just in tax dollars, but also through partnerships and collaborations, with companies, such as Amazon, with Apple, Air Farm, and others. So, we're continuing to do that.

But, secondly, we're working with Partners In Health and other organizations like that, to address the healthcare disparities that we see because when we think about a lot of the things in a place

like Montgomery, in Alabama, it comes down a long ways, and healthcare stands right at the top, along with wages. And so, those are things we're also trying to work outside in on to address, whether it be infant mortality, whether it be the -- the level of chronic disease that exists, and the disparities that exist between people of color and those that are not. We're trying to make sure that we are reaching out to those organizations, as well, and then I think from the financial standpoint, where we are is we're trying to do more around financial literacy, with various financial institutions and businesses, to bring about more conversation and more delivery and intentional action around economic empowerment.

Again, when we think about the wage gap, as it's defined by race in the South, it is a chasm between those that are white and those that are African American or maybe Latino, and so, when we consider those things, we know there has to be a deliberate approach to equity and not just equality, and that means intentional and deliberate policies addressed to that, and so, we've had some tough conversations about how we got here and what we need to do to get out of this. And the last part that we believe is very important is on making sure that there's a really sizeable minority participation program, that targets minority and Black owned businesses with contracting opportunities, with procurement opportunities, and explain to them the importance of -- of getting bonded and explaining to them the licensing process, as well as getting our financial institutions to do more, and that's important.

Many of our financial institutions do the bare minimum, as required by the federal government, but we're -- we're urging them to do more and trying to show them that if they invest in businesses, and those business owners tend to hire people from their own communities, then that is going to multiply economic output. It makes business sense to invest and to support minority and Black owned businesses and businesses of color, and we have to make sure we do that, and we think the best way for us is to make sure that we're setting an example, at the city, through a strong minority participation program, and one that really brings about racial equity, and not just one that talks about racial equality.

MS. LIU: Great. We have about 15 minutes left. I want to make sure we get through a couple additional questions and those from the audience. So, but, Mayor Gloria, let's talk about your vision for San Diego, as an equitable city, and the actions you're taking. Yep.

MAYOR GLORIA: Yeah, I mean, I've said that we need to run every decision of the city through an equity lens, and we're beginning that work now, and, you know, Amy, it would shock you, probably, to know how basic our work has begun, I mean, in terms of where we're at. Just last week, I issued the city's first report on equity, in terms of pay, for how we compensate our employees, identifying significant gaps in pay, for both women and for people of color. I think some other executives might have, in the past, just put that in the bottom drawer and not let it see the light of day. Instead, we lifted it up, and it's going back to being honest and forthright with the public, to try and build trust and credibility. So, we've put that out there, and now we're going to go about the work, the difficult work, and I heard what Mayor Reed said. I'm still looking for the easy conversations in the Mayor Office. I haven't found one yet, they're all tough, but I like doing tough work, so, it's okay.

But whether it's issuing that plan, we are currently recruiting for our first office executive director, or chief officer, for our Office of Race and Equity. So, if there's a pearl out there, that wants to help a city understand how to integrate equity into everything that we do, I know a beautiful city with a new energetic administration, who would be willing to take your resume right now, we're actively recruiting. And we have appointed the first African American to our Planning Commission, to our Water Board. I mean, we are still in the very basic phase of this, so, you know, putting out data, standing up a recruitment for the first office, appointing the first individuals. I'm anxious to get to the point when we start going deeper, when we start driving budgeting decisions, based on equity, when we start standing up programs. I'll tell you, one little glint of positivity, this conversation's happening over Zoom, it really illustrates the need for internet access, the digital divide exacerbating the inequities that currently exist. I will tell you that we are marketing the philanthropic support to outfit most of our city's rec centers with public free Wi-Fi, and we're starting in our lowest income, most concentrated communities of concern, for that particular effort. The last thing I would just say because I know we want to get to some more stuff, Amy, is that I cannot underscore how much equity is driven by housing --

MS. LIU: Yep.

MAYOR GLORIA: -- and the fact that the generational divide, in terms of wealth creation or lack thereof, really is around this, and so, if I had to say, we put the virus to bed, we get the economy

going back again, we have to be laser focused on housing production because while that will help everybody, I think it disproportionately will benefit those who have been shut out of the housing economy and the opportunity to buy a home and to build well.

MS. LIU: And while -- while you're speaking, I want you to also elaborate on the role of neighborhoods and geography, and how to make sure that more neighborhoods are part of San Diego's knowledge economy. You talk -- so, talk about that, and talk about -- I, also, I want to get in here environmental. You have a really strong vision around green and equity in a Climate Equity Fund, which I think is also spatial. So, talk -- again, bring -- bring in the notion of neighborhood investments and environment.

MAYOR GLORIA: Well, that's right, like, with the Wi-Fi at the rec centers, right? We -- it is -- has a geographic overlay on top of that, of where do we start first? Where is the need the greatest, so that whatever months or years has to go between the first rec center and the last rec center is in the community where the most benefit can happen. You mentioned our Climate Equity Fund, which the Council adopted unanimously, on Tuesday, and it does have a spatial component. It's recognizing that not every neighborhood's going to have a lot of testing, but every neighborhood has to have access to renewable energy, to clean -- clean energy, etc., and so, this Climate Equity Fund is focused in the neighborhoods where we have the greatest level of environmental racism, environmental injustice of historic disinvestment. It creates a permanent funding source.

I'm not going to represent to you that the initial dollars are going to be changing the world, but it's a start in a city that really is putting its first steps forward, when it comes to leading with an equity lens. But, yeah, you know, Amy, I think a lot of cities have what we have here, in San Diego. If you ask most San Diegans, the divide in our city is north of Interstate 8 and south of Interstate 8. If you talk to the people who are really in the know, they'd know that south of state Route 94 is really where the inequities super -- are super concentrated, and that's why, in the middle of a pandemic, where our city's mobile popups are in those communities, south of the 8, in those hard-hit zip codes, because there is, as you mentioned, a spatial component to this, and I cannot wait to get past this emergency posture that we currently are in, and then work with employers and investors to start putting the good jobs, that we have

an abundance in the north part of our city, and bring them and those opportunities down.

I'll tell you one quick story. Later this year, I will be the Mayor that gets to cut the ribbon on our new mid-coast trolley extension. This goes from, essentially, Old Town San Diego, up to the University of California San Diego. What that means, Amy, is that you'll have a one-seat ride from the U.S.-Mexico Border (inaudible) to the southernmost neighborhoods of this city, a one-seat ride to the -- one of the best public universities in the world. That is going to be transformative in my 20-year effort to get that project completed. It started when I was a young congressional staffer for Congresswoman Susan Davis. You can imagine how transformative that will be. And that shouldn't be, again, one of the initial steps towards making sure that people from the south don't have to travel to the north to access quality education and jobs, but that more of those educational opportunities and jobs are in the southern part of our city. That is work that is underway.

MS. LIU: There are -- from the audience, there are questions -- there's one question about the role of anchor institutions, you were just talking about the university. People want to know, what is the role of anchor institutions, in helping you build community wealth and place-based wealth? Either one of you.

MAYOR GLORIA: (overtalking). I don't mean to get in front of Mayor Reed. He's got more time as mayor, so, he can probably give you a more informed answer, but, you know, anchor institutions is who was in my line of sight for the housing we talked about, you know, because in here, in the city of San Diego, we build a lot of luxury housing. We have some progressive policies in place to build low-income housing, but we are building next to nothing for working and middle class San Diegans, and that has to change. We can't be a great city, if we don't have a thriving middle class.

And so, I see anchor institutions, businesses that are wonderful companies, who create good paying jobs, but even their workers are hard-pressed to find a home that they can afford, let alone buy, in this city. I think, in the way that we have seen large high-tech companies in the Bay Area make landmark gifts to try and address the housing prices, we need to set up an -- a Middle-Income Housing Trust Fund, in San Diego. We've long had an Affordable Housing Trust Fund, but we should have a Middle-Income Housing Trust Fund, where we can invite anchor institutions to make key investments,

recognizing that their philanthropic contributions will ensure that the talent they worked so hard to recruit and to retain, in San Diego, can actually stay here, build wealth, and move forward.

That is an area where I think anchor institutions can be transformative going forward. We are having those negotiations and discussions now, and again, it's one of those conversations that I cannot wait to be able to do more attention and more time to and stay tuned on that front. I hope to be able to make some good news in that space.

MS. LIU: Great. Mayor Reed, let me just ask you a different question. We actually have several questions from the audience about the role of arts, and I do think that with the EJI Institute, that you have an experience about the power of art in a community. Can you talk about that, now?

MAYOR REED: Absolutely. You know, through our -- we tell stories. We tell stories of promise, we tell stories of pain, and, you know, when you think about the arts, it is a very creative way, but a very important way of expressing oneself, and we have a thriving art scene, through our museums, through our Alabama Shakespeare Festival, and certainly through our civil rights museums and memorials, that we have here, and so, we tell a story about not just Montgomery, Alabama, but of this nation, and we do it in a way that allows each individual to come away with their own interpretation of that, and it's something that we have felt has been overlooked in the past, which is why, under my administration, we set up the Department of Cultural Affairs, for that very reason because what we also recognized was that there was a class divide, there was a race divide between the symphony, between the ballet, between our, you know, our plays and our theaters, and those in the neighborhoods, those who were living one mile, three miles away, who had never been to any of these institutions, and so, we realized that we didn't want to continue to play into that.

What we wanted to do was to bring people together, through the arts, to share various stories, and to interact with one another, and certainly to have that space where our visitors and our tourists that come here, you know, each year, to learn more about racial reconciliation, and to learn more about the Civil Rights Movement, and to learn more about the American South and its overall impact in this nation, as a whole.

MS. LIU: Yeah.

MAYOR REED: And so, we're excited about our Cultural Affairs Department and what the vision of our director has, and we're looking to do more with that, to show a different side of Montgomery and the South, itself, and to really just talk more about America, through those entities that we have.

MS. LIU: Another question we've received from several of our audience members is about the future of children, and, Mayor Reed, you already talked about your concern about the educational inequality, the disparities that are going to be exacerbated by COVID. So, both of you, can you tell us, A, are your schools opened, and, B, how you plan to help close those education gaps, that may have been made worse by this recession? Mayor Gloria, why don't you start?

MAYOR GLORIA: Sure. No, the majority of our schools are not opened. We have had a -- an inequitable situation, where many of our private schools, some of our charter schools have been open, but our public schools, it's in large part, are not. We do have a reopening date of April the 12th, and I believe that we will make that reopening date, with great appreciation to Governor Newsom, as well as others, for making that possible. This is -- it's critical. You know, we know that online school is a sore substitute for in person instruction, and that it's difficult to impossible to reopen our economy, unless our schools reopen, so that workers can go back to work with confidence of not having to juggle things.

On a go forward basis, you know, Amy, this is going to be an area of some experimentation for our city. In San Diego, we have a separate and elected school board, and this is their jurisdiction and their legal responsibility, but you'll never hear me wash my hands of any responsibility on public education. You can't build a great city without great public schools, and so, whether it's working with our school districts and our teachers' unions to try and get the schools reopened, which I believe we're on track to do, we have to take some of these lessons learned, these connections that have been made, and use them to benefit our children going forward. We had a unique collaboration with our school district, it's literally a joint partnership with the city and the school district, to build our new central library, which is in downtown. It's truly a palace for the people, a civic monument in our downtown community. That was possible because of collaboration between the city, municipal corporation, and our school district. We need to do a lot more of that, and it should improve the benefit of our kids, who have really

struggled this last year.

MS. LIU: Mayor Reed?

MAYOR REED: Well, like Mayor Gloria, our schools are not opened yet. Students will go back in the beginning of April, to finish out the year, and I just talked with our superintendent yesterday, who, like Mayor Gloria, does not report to me, and nor do our appointed schoolboard members, just about what the plans were for the summer, and there will be summer academies, that will be highly encouraged, for students to try to make up ground, throughout the summer, and it's my hope that we will get the support that's needed, in order to try to do what we can to close the gap, but that's also why we're trying to work with other organizations, that are looking to help, you know, close those educational divides that we have, in any way possible. And certainly, given what not only Montgomery and San Diego have dealt with, but all of this nation, if not beyond, has dealt with through the pandemic, has been how you try to make this up, and I think by working with our foundation institutions, like our higher educational schools that we have here, our K-12, as well as our community college, we're working through that, as part of an education and stakeholder group, to come up with solutions for working adults, to come up with solutions for those that are also looking to reskill themselves, and for those students who may have felt left behind, and those parents, who also are trying to grapple with that same deficit, on their end.

MS. LIU: Let me just close with one final question before we wrap up for today, which is that we now have an opportunity to forge a much more productive partnership with the federal government, with the arrival of the Biden-Harris administration, which will obviously be more friendly to cities and mayors than what we've seen in the last four years. Given what all that you've got on your plate, where -- can you just name one promising area of collaboration you hope to see with the Biden-Harris administration? Let's start with Mayor Gloria.

MAYOR GLORIA: Just one?

MS. LIU: Just one, I know, we've -- running out of time. We could just spend -- I know.

MAYOR GLORIA: I know -- let me just say I applaud the passage of the American Rescue Act, and I think that the next step on infrastructure could be truly helpful. We have a multibillion-

dollar backlog for infrastructure, in the -- in the city. Federal partnership could help us take care of that situation. We could use it as an incredible jobs program to put people back to work, at a time when we have relatively high unemployment, and we could do it with both a climate injustice lens and with an equity lens. I think that, not to be greedy because I'm super grateful for what has happened today, with the president's signature on this bill, as we look at what's next, what have you done for me lately, let's work on infrastructure, let's have a transformative investment, we can match it with local dollars, put a lot of people to work, and address some of that spatial differential that you talked about before.

MS. LIU: Great. Mayor Reed?

MAYOR REED: Broadband access, you know, I think, as Mayor Gloria pointed out earlier, that is so important. We see that digital divide, that's impacting things from education to access to remote healthcare to economic mobility. That, to me, is one of the biggest things, from the city side, that we could utilize, and I could go on with another long list, as well, but that one probably jumps out of the things that we -- that maybe I haven't mentioned, throughout this conversation.

MS. LIU: Well, listen, I -- we could have kept on going, with a lot of other topics I -- that we didn't even get to. I wanted to ask you more about immigration reform, Mayor Gloria, but we will have to invite you back to the Brookings platform. I want to thank all of you for tuning in for today. I think what you -- I want to just close with where we began, which is that San Diego and Montgomery are two cities that absolutely represent our American future, and I hope that all of you who have tuned in today got from this conversation that our future is hopeful because of leaders, like Mayor Gloria and Mayor Reed. I want to thank you both for your time today, and I really do hope we stay in touch. And thank you all.

MAYOR GLORIA: Thanks. Thank you, Amy.

MAYOR REED: Thank you, Amy. Mayor Gloria, you're welcome in Montgomery, any time.

MAYOR GLORIA: I'd love to see you in person soon. We'll do it.

MAYOR REED: I look forward to it.

MAYOR GLORIA: Thank you, sir.

MS. LIU: Okay. Thank you all. I want to thank you, Mayors.

MAYOR REED: Thank you, as well, Amy. Thank you so much for inviting me.

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