

Hannah Pingree:

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Announcer:

Coming up on Sustainable Healthcare, a chat with Hannah Pingree, the co-chair of the Maine Climate Council, to learn how Maine is affected by climate change and what actions its leaders are taking.

Tim Doak:

Welcome, podcast listeners, to this edition of Sustainable Healthcare. I'm your host, Tim Doak. Sustainable Healthcare is part of our new Healthy, Happy, and Wise podcast series designed to heal, inspire, and inform you. Thanks for being here.

We know that Maine's natural beauty and quality of life draw people from across the world to our state to see our rugged coastline and our inland forests, lakes and mountains. Any changes to our climate can adversely affect our state's geography as well as the health of our people. Joining me to talk about the impacts to Maine and the solutions underway is Hannah Pingree, the director of the Governor's Office of Policy and Innovation and the Future and the co-chair of the Maine Climate Council. Hannah, thanks so much for joining us today.

Hannah Pingree:

Thank you for doing this, Tim. And you are a working group member of the Maine Climate Council, right?

Tim Doak:

I am.

Hannah Pingree:

So I'm thrilled to be here with you.

Tim Doak:

Thanks. And I'm so proud to serve on that group. We're doing really great things. So let's start by discussing the Maine Climate Council and the Maine Won't Wait initiative. Can you give our listeners a bit of an overview of what that group is doing, their efforts, and their significance in addressing climate change in Maine?

Hannah Pingree:

Sure. So big picture, when Governor Mills took office in 2019, she said that climate change was important, that the state needed to take action. We passed a law in 2019 that set specific emission reduction requirements in law. The state is required to reduce emissions 45% by 2030 and at least 80% by 2050. And it also said, we need a plan. We need a plan to prepare for climate change, to prepare our communities to ensure that people are safe and ready, and we also need a plan to make sure that we're doing our part globally to reduce emissions. So the new law created the Maine Climate Council. It said it should be made up of experts, of Maine citizens, of people in government, of people on both sides of the aisle, people in industry, people with a public health background.

Lots of different folks came together, 39 people on the Maine Climate Council, hundreds of people serving on our working groups. And in 2020 we delivered the first climate plan, Maine Won't Wait. Every

four years we're required to update that plan and that plan speaks to resilience of our communities, to public health, to our buildings, to our transportation systems, all the components required to both reduce emissions and prepare the state for climate change, and to be more resilient.

Tim Doak:

Right. Ambitious goals for sure. And I've been very, very proud to be involved with this group and certainly an amazing collection of folks from across the state, from every sector of the economy that we can think of. We're very fortunate to have the talent in the state of Maine that we do with the university and state government and in the private sector. One of those groups in particular is the Scientific and Technical Subcommittee. They not so long ago provided an update on climate science and it was, I think, very eye-opening for many. What does that update tell us about the work that we have ahead of us?

Hannah Pingree:

Sure. So from the very beginning, we've said science and facts matter. They are important. All the work of the Climate Council should be based on what are the scientists telling us? What are they predicting? What will it mean for Maine? So the Science and Technical Subcommittee has been providing updates all along, and they have just recently provided the most recent update. And they're telling us honestly what we're all feeling, that we are seeing the impacts of climate change in more increased precipitation events. We are starting to see the sea level rise and storm surge that they had prepared us for. They tell us that will only get worse. And some of the predictions they've made we've now put into law about sea level rise. They tell us that the world is warming and we see that in statistics in Maine and around the country. They tell us the Gulf of Maine is warming faster than most bodies of water around the world, which is having impacts on our fisheries, on our oceans, on certainly our health in other ways.

So what the scientists are telling us are what we're all feeling. The climate is changing. It's impacting our natural environment. It's impacting the weather events that we see. And unfortunately, the challenging news is they tell us that it will get worse. So it's sobering, but I think what's motivating is that scientists tell us that the climate is changing but that we can play a role in slowing that change through reducing our emissions globally. And so Maine is just trying to play our part, that is part of the reason we have the Climate Council. We have set these goals and that we are working every day to take action because we're not just passively listening to this news. We know that we can play a role in changing the trajectory of the science and the global climate challenges that we're all facing. It's daunting, but it should be motivating.

Tim Doak:

Daunting for sure. But thinking a little bit about the role of the Climate Council and maybe some of the successes already, because as you mentioned, the council's been in existence for a few years now and starting to do some really, really interesting and noteworthy things. Can you talk a little bit about that?

Hannah Pingree:

I would say we are proud of so many of the things that have happened in the last three and a half years. I think the governor said from the very beginning that this is not a plan that's going to sit on a shelf. This is a plan that we are going to actively work to implement it. Every year, we're going to report on results. And there's lots of things we're proud of. We're incredibly proud of the progress we've made on heat pumps. The governor and the Climate Council set a goal to install a hundred thousand heat pumps by 2025. I think, as you probably heard, we exceeded that goal several years early. We've made a more ambitious goal. We know that heat pumps are a technology that can save people money. They make their homes more efficient. They're not reliant on fossil fuels. They both heat and provide cooling in the summer as we face increasingly warm summers. So they are a win-win. They're technology that is

improving people's lives, they're part of our climate plan, and they're an area where we're having huge success.

Lots of other exciting things happening with clean energy, the deployment of charging infrastructure for electric vehicles. But a ton of good work happening at the local level to prepare for climate change. One of the things we said in the climate plan is that communities need more support. They're on the front lines of climate changes. Citizens are concerned, town leaders are asking for support. So we started a program called the Community Resilience Partnership Program, and every year that program has grown. More than 225 towns in Maine are now involved. The state legislature just put another \$5 million into that program to specifically help with resilience and vulnerability planning. We know that's incredibly important right now. So lots of things to be proud of, and I think most importantly, we're not going to stand still. We are going to be accountable every day to the goals that we set out there. We have an update to the climate plan due this December. So lots of good news, but still lots of work to be done.

Tim Doak:

Lots of things for sure that are ahead of this. When I think about work in this space, it really falls into three buckets for me: mitigation, leadership, and resiliency. And certainly the Maine Climate Council is touching on each of those three buckets in a variety of different ways. Resiliency seems to be top of mind for many, many Mainers now, given the recent storm events that don't really seem to be slowing down a whole lot this year. Can you talk about some of the resiliency efforts that are being supported? You've already talked about the Community Resiliency program. What else is happening?

Hannah Pingree:

I mean, resilience has always been important and it's a very broad word. But I think as we understand it in the climate context, we realize that it is important across all the work that we do. I think the December storm events, the two January storm events, they are among the six federal disasters we've seen in the state of Maine, most ever in recorded history for our state. And obviously I think people are much more concerned than previously. They realize our working waterfronts are at risk. The flooding we saw in December is going to continue and they want to do more to prepare. Resilience is how do we really help people prepare? How do we help people stay safe in their homes and communities, and how do we make our economy, our schools, our towns more resilient to the impacts of climate?

I would say across the six working groups of the Climate Council, everyone is thinking about resilience strategies. How do we prepare our homes and our electrical grid for resilience? Clearly six days with no power is untenable. For an aging Mainer at home who relies on a furnace and doesn't have a backup power system, that is a devastating storm event. Our coastal communities who saw fishing wharves washed away, and they're trying to think, how do I get back on the water and go fishing? Having a more resilient working waterfront infrastructure, absolutely critical to our economy. So I would say resilience will be among the themes of the next climate plan. How do we build resilience into all the work that we do? We have incredible backing right now from the federal government investing in infrastructure.

We have a lot of, I would say, thoughtful people on the Climate Council thinking about resilience in terms of our mental health resilience to really understanding climate impacts, our public health resilience. So we were thinking about it in a lot of different ways. It's a broad word, but it's incredibly essential when we think about preparing Maine for climate impacts.

Tim Doak:

So Hannah, certainly we've had our share of storms this year, and I know the legislature just adjourned and they took some pretty meaningful action in terms of addressing that storm damage. Can you speak about that?

Hannah Pingree:

Yeah. I mean, great question. Obviously it's been a rough winter, and I think the governor as well as the legislature understands that federal resources can't help with all of the recovery. One of the things that we've seen specifically is that businesses are not eligible for FEMA funding. Similarly, working waterfronts are not eligible. So the state just passed a \$60 million storm recovery bill that is really meant to invest in recovery and resilience. So about 25 million is going to go specifically to working waterfront. The other 25 million is going to be available for communities to invest in resilience. How do we reduce flood impacts in the future? Another \$10 million was put out for businesses, businesses who want to invest specifically in resilient infrastructure. So I would say it's probably the tip of the iceberg. We know that these storm events were severe, but we need to do all we can to prepare for next winter, for the next storm.

Unfortunately, climate scientists tell us this will continue to happen. So I'm incredibly proud of this legislature and the governor for making this happen. And our office is working with DOT, the Department of Marine Resources, Economic Development Office right next door. And I think we'll all be making sure that businesses and communities understand that these funds are available. People are feeling pretty desperate right now and they're asking us, what can we do? How do we rebuild? How do we get back to work this summer? And I hope these funds will be helpful.

Tim Doak:

Important and timely relief. And if we think about so many stories that we hear, especially with the working waterfront folks, they're really falling through the cracks in many cases with the damage not being covered by necessarily their insurance policy or FEMA or different elements as you mentioned. So I think this will be very meaningful relief.

Hannah Pingree:

Absolutely.

Tim Doak:

So you touched on the federal government, and I just want to talk a little more about that. How is the federal government helping support work in this space?

Hannah Pingree:

Well, I will just say on Earth Day in Maine, we had our partners from NOAA who were in Maine to make a big federal announcement of resilience grants. They were culverts in Washington County and in Brunswick. It was Marsh Restoration in Scarborough. And I will say that is just one example coming out of the bipartisan infrastructure law where incredible amounts of federal funding are being sent to all of the states across the country to focus on resilience. And there are specific portions of funding for resilience in our transportation systems, for our energy grid, for our natural systems, again like Marsh Restoration that could actually protect public health, protect roadways. So I would say it's a transformational opportunity for the state to ensure that we can maximize the ability to take advantage of those federal funds for resilience. There are programs also under the Inflation Reduction Act that allow investments in clean energy. We just saw announcement of a \$62 million federal grant for a program called Solar for All.

And that is really to make sure that the benefits of clean energy are being felt in all the communities in Maine, especially moderate and low-income communities. So the State of Maine is going to deploy those funds to communities across our state, affordable housing projects, community solar projects. And we know that building a more resilient grid that doesn't just rely on energy coming from one source in Southern Maine or a specific part of Maine will make our grid more resilient. So lots of different investments being made. It's an exciting time, but also an urgent time, and it's helpful to have our federal

partners at the table. And I will say all four members of our congressional delegation really believe in this. I think Susan Collins has been a leader on the Appropriations committee bringing resilience dollars to our state, as have the other three members, including my mom, who really understands this firsthand. So it's an important time. And I would say the federal government right now is a good partner in this effort.

Tim Doak:

It seems they've been an outstanding partner as well. So Maine businesses, if you own a business in Maine, what advice would you give them for ... How can you help? How can you be part of the solution here? What's an appropriate step and how do they even get started?

Hannah Pingree:

Yeah. Our team has worked with lots of others in state government and in the private sector thinking about how do we ensure that programs that the state is offering are relevant to businesses or relevant to other types of entities, whether they be healthcare facilities or schools. I would highly encourage people to visit our website called mainewontwait.org, and we have a specific section about opportunities for businesses to take action on climate. So it has discussions of federal opportunities available, efficiency Maine rebates. I would say we have already seen businesses across the state be leaders in climate action. You have the out front Hannafords who are doing all kinds of work to make their buildings more energy efficient, investing in clean energy, electric vehicle charging infrastructure, but also tackling food waste, thinking about their employees and public health.

There are, I would say, large and small businesses who understand that Mainers care about climate, they care about the environment. They like to go to companies that also care about those things. But I would also say that we see working waterfront infrastructure tourism businesses who realize they need to think about climate change and climate impacts, both what's their role in solving this problem, but how do they prepare? The Maine State Chamber of Commerce has been doing a whole series on resilience because it is the reality of the times we're living in and they know that businesses, large and small, want to do more to prepare.

So I would say it's an exciting time with incredible federal tax credits available for investments in clean energy, electric vehicle charging infrastructure. It's a time for businesses to be involved in their communities in preparing for climate change because a lot of it is about larger infrastructure. We need a transportation system that's resilient so businesses can operate, so can the rest of us get around and public safety can operate in times of emergency. So I think businesses are, I would say, on the front lines of climate change and we have a number of them involved in the climate council, including healthcare organizations, including big entities. Again, I mentioned Hannaford, but lots of other companies.

The one other thing I would mention is that part of our climate plan is to double the number of clean energy jobs in the state by 2030. And we are seeing exciting growth in the clean energy sectors, energy efficiency, transportation sector. I mean, there's a lot of work to be done. These are good paying jobs. We have hundreds of small businesses out there deploying heat pumps, for example. So it's an opportunity for business as well. This is a huge transition for our state. This is an opportunity to do a good thing and run a good business. And so we're seeing so many people take advantage of that opportunity in a way that's important to actually make all these goals a reality.

Tim Doak:

Sure. And what if we bring that down to a personal level? What can the average citizen ... Maybe they don't own a business. You've talked about heat pumps and their importance and the tremendous subsidies that are available out there through Efficiency Maine and others to help you be able to afford that new technology. What else can they do? What can the average citizen do?

Hannah Pingree:

I think the average citizen, again, mainewontwait.org has sort of a guide for people, whether it's your home, the way you drive and get around, the way you buy energy, I think there are a number of things people can do. And whether or not you have time to make a small investment and you think about, okay, transportation, should I start using GoMaine and do ride-sharing and reduce my transportation emissions, or can I invest in electric vehicle or a hybrid vehicle, or can I fully weatherize my home to figure out how to further reduce my energy bills and reduce my fossil fuel usage? I mean, there are things you can do in your home. There are things you can do with your transportation. There are things you can do out in the world by being a good citizen and participating. So there's lots of suggestions on that website.

I will say I don't think it's up to any one person to make a difference, but we think a lot of the things that the climate plan is asking people to do also make people's lives better. To invest in a heat pump, to weatherize your home, that makes your home warmer in the wintertime. It improves your quality of life. It makes you cooler in the summertime. So most of these solutions are win-wins. Things like electric vehicles or using public transportation, some of those things are things that people at Maine are, I think, just starting to think about and not quite sure if they'll work for them. I've been driving an electric vehicle since 2019 and I would say took a little getting used to, but it is a really fun car to drive. I bought it for an affordable price in 2019. There are used cars now available like mine, and obviously I think we all learn, okay, where do I charge this vehicle? How do I charge it at home? How does it work? But it's fun to drive.

I don't pay for maintenance because I don't need to change the oil. There's not a lot of maintenance on an electric vehicle. But it's a learning curve. So I would say think about the kinds of technologies and the opportunities that help with climate, and I think figure out what you can do in your town. Every town, nearly every town in Maine is thinking about climate change. What can we be doing? They're all looking for volunteer board members, people to sit on local committees, people to get involved in the school, thinking about what can a school do? What can a business do? So I think whatever time you have available, it can be overwhelming, but you can find a big or small way to make a difference.

Tim Doak:

Hannah, thanks. All such important things. And as we think about that list of actions people can take in their own personal or business lives, we should really emphasize that many of these actions often provide an ongoing cost savings, whether it's better thermal insulation or a conversion to heat pumps or driving an electric car, as you mentioned. And I should also mention that these are all strategies that Northern Light Health has embraced and that are helping us contribute to our decarbonization efforts. And as you know, Dirigo is Maine's motto and of course that means, I lead. And clearly all of the great work of the Maine Climate Council is helping Maine to lead the way with climate action and resources.

Hannah, thanks so much for being our guest today and for your leadership with the Maine Climate Council. Thank you to our podcast listeners as well for tuning in. Until next time, I'm Tim Doak and I'm asking you to think sustainably.

Announcer:

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