

NINA MOINI: This winter's surge of federal agents left its mark on many Minnesotans, and the full scope of the impact is still being pieced together. Well, tomorrow, dozens of researchers, journalists, and community leaders will convene at the University of Minnesota to share their findings on how the events of this winter continue to impact people across the state.

The event is called documenting the impact of US DHS in Minnesota. North Star Policy Action was one of the organizations behind the event. And joining me now for more about it is executive director of North Star, Jake Schweitzer. Thanks so much for your time, Jake.

JAKE Thanks for having me, Nina.

SCHWEITZER:

NINA MOINI: I talked a little in my introduction there about folks piecing together some of the ripple impacts or longer term impacts of the surge this winter. But what specifically prompted this event? How did this event come to be?

JAKE Yeah, so our work at North Star Policy Action had been pretty exclusively focused on documenting the economic harms created by Operation Metro Surge and other DHS activity in Minnesota. And we know this unprecedented attack by the federal government on our state affected basically every single aspect of daily life. So we got together with other researchers looking at all these issues and put out a call for basically anyone researching any impact during this time.

And we decided to hold an event to discuss all this work together in one place so we can learn from one another and figure out basically the entire scope of the impacts.

NINA MOINI: And this is a whole day event with dozens of people that'll be presenting. Can you give a preview of some of the breakdown of the different topics? You mentioned economic, but there were so many other ripple effects.

JAKE Yeah, so we've got everything from research into what the community response was, things like mutual aid and the amount of money that went flowing through community to what happened in the housing market, what happened to students and education in schools. Was there learning loss that took place? To what happened to our health care system.

To everything from-- the gentleman who was tracking the flights that were leaving, taking detainees out of Minnesota every day. So it's really the full scope of tracking impacts and trying to measure that through data and academic research.

NINA MOINI: Can you explain a little bit about how these efforts fit into the broader work of the Truth Council? And for folks who don't recall what that is, the governor of the state put that together as a way to try to chronicle history and what's happened. But I think a lot of listeners might be wondering about that patchwork of different places that are trying to chronicle history. How are you informing each other? Why is it important to work with the Truth Council in this way?

JAKE Absolutely. So the governor's Truth Council that he set up was pretty exclusively focused on collecting human impact stories, which, to be clear, is the most important thing here. What the specific human impact. And so folks telling their stories is very, very important. We feel that data and research contributes a lot to this discussion as well, because we can take those individual stories and magnify them by saying that we know that hundreds of millions of dollars in wages were lost, for instance, or this was the impact on students across the state.

Where you might not have a story from every student or every student in the state, might not be willing to speak up and tell their story to the Truth Council. So the blending, the combining of data research and real human impact story is how you get the full spectrum of the impact. So we're working closely together with them. Folks working, organizing the Truth Council will be at our event tomorrow. Will be speaking at our event and learning from all of the work that's being presented tomorrow as well.

NINA MOINI: Do you think, Jake, about what questions still remain unanswered or where there is a specific need to make sure that stories are told or that facts and figures are quantified beyond anecdotes?

JAKE Yeah, absolutely. I mean, all of the work we're going to hear presented tomorrow is it's pretty remarkable that we were able to turn around research in such a short period of time. The worst impacts of this started just really just a few months ago. And so we know with the economic arms, for instance, that we're not done seeing the economic harm.

So if someone loses a shift at work or many shifts at work, they're probably making decisions to cut back on spending at, say, the grocery store. The grocery store is probably cutting back on someone's hours then as a result, and that person is having to make the same economic decisions, and that ripples out through the economy.

You can imagine those same impacts taking place in health care or in education. We know that there was learning loss that took place, that students who stopped going to school, maybe because their parents were afraid to leave the house and couldn't take them. So what is that students learning loss? If they're behind on their learning, how is that going to impact them next year and in the future as they're trying to catch up on their learning? These are all things that are going to take time to measure and document and then figure out how to respond to.

NINA MOINI: And what are you hoping happens with this data in terms of-- I mean, is it going to be ready in time for folks to consider it at the Capitol when the legislative session begins early next year?

JAKE That's certainly our goal is to present whatever we can as early as we can. Our goal at North Star Policy Action is turning research and data into policy action, hence our name. So we're going to be taking everything that we hear tomorrow over to the Capitol because there's a number of routes.

We can-- once we've documented the harm, we can figure out what the right steps might be to repair that harm. We can figure out how to prevent this from ever happening again. And we can figure out how to best respond if it does happen again. So those are all angles that we need to have a public policy response to. And we can't appropriately respond through our policies if we don't know what the real impact is across all of these different measures.

NINA MOINI: Can you tell us just a little bit more about the fact finding and the data and the gathering? Is this something that relies on algorithms and projections? Is it literally face-to-face talking with folks? Or how-- can you tell us a little bit more about gathering the data?

JAKE SCHWEITZER: Yeah, so it's a combination of a lot of different creative research capabilities. So I mentioned the gentleman who literally was at the airport every day taking pictures of these ICE flights and--

NINA MOINI: Nick Benson.

JAKE --documenting. That's right. Documenting exactly how many people were being taken out of our state every day.

SCHWEITZER: That's real eyes on the ground, counting people in shackles. That's firsthand documentation. Some of our work has been looking at credit card spending data and extrapolating that out to make an economy-wide estimate of an economic impact or payroll system data, to try to figure out how many hours were lost by working people across this time period.

So it's a real combination of really, really creative data sourcing and then analyzing how to make use of that data. And one of the things that we're hoping for tomorrow is to make connections between these researchers, because maybe someone working in one discipline might see work being done in another and say, hang on, we can get more creative with how we're combining these two impacts to figure out a third impact.

So by bringing researchers together where we can all discuss our work and learn from one another and from the public, we can really improve on the work that we're able to do.

NINA MOINI: And just lastly, Jake, beyond this event, what follow up for this event will be happening? Are there going to be more events? Or where does it go after that?

JAKE That's a great question. The most immediate steps is we'll be compiling all the work that's presented tomorrow
SCHWEITZER: into one central location and delivering that to the governor's Truth Council. So that's step one. So that this data is informing the reports that the governor's council is reporting back out to the state government and to the general public.

Speaking for our organization, North Star Policy Action, we're going to be taking everything that we learn tomorrow and figuring out what policies need to change in response. And then we'll be taking that to the state legislature and advocating for those to try to protect Minnesotans. There's certainly could be another event like this in the future if we need follow ups on the work that's presented, if there's more research to be done. But this is a really exciting start.

NINA MOINI: Jake, thanks so much for your time. We appreciate it.

JAKE Thank you, Nina.
SCHWEITZER:

NINA MOINI: Jake Schweitzer is the executive director of North Star Policy Action.