

[AUDIO LOGO]

CATHY WURZER:

It's *Minnesota Now*. I'm Cathy Wurzer. Three Minnesota members of Congress are being called out for stock trades. We'll get the back story on what's going on. We remember a true leader and a hero from East Grand Forks Minnesota who passed away this week and what that person did.

[MUSIC PLAYING]

Chief meteorologist Paul Huttner is here with a deep dive into what's happening with our weather. We'll check in with a reporter from the Rainy Lake Gazette on the top stories in her town. And this weekend, a handful of media personalities are being inducted into the Minnesota Broadcasting Hall of Fame, including the wonderful Freddie Bell. I'll talk to him. We'll have the Minnesota Music Minute and the song of the day picked by Freddie by the way. All that and more coming up right after the news.

AMY HELD:

Live from NPR News in Washington, I'm Amy Held. A vital artery in the nation's network of transportation is on the line as freight rail workers threaten to go on strike by midnight tomorrow, bringing to a halt the trains that carry close to a third of the products moving through the country on a daily basis. Power plants, manufacturing businesses all could be affected. White House press Secretary, Karine Jean-Pierre, says there's still time to avoid that.

KARINE JEAN-PIERRE:

All parties need to stay at the table, bargain in good faith to resolve outstanding issues, and come to an agreement. A shutdown of our freight rail system is unacceptable outcome for our economy and the American people, and all parties must work to avoid just that.

AMY HELD:

Meantime, the administration is preparing emergency powers to keep some essential goods moving by rail should a strike occur. In a surprise move, the defense for the Parkland, Florida high school gunman abruptly rested its case. *NPR's* Greg Allen reports the jury is considering whether Nikolas Cruz received the death penalty.

GREG ALLEN:

Cruz's defense attorney had said they planned to call any witnesses. In recent days, jurors heard from acquaintances, school counselors, and psychologists about Cruz's troubled childhood. A doctor testified that Cruz's mother abused alcohol while pregnant, leaving him with a disorder related to fetal alcohol syndrome. In court, judge Elizabeth Scherer was not happy with some 40 witnesses still scheduled to testify. Defense attorneys said they were resting their case. The judge called it unprofessional, saying it leaves the government and the court unprepared for the trial's next phase-- a rebuttal by the prosecution. Closing arguments are set for next month. Greg Allen, *NPR News*, Miami.

AMY HELD:

Lawmakers are debating a House Bill today aimed at preventing political interference in the next US Census. *NPR'S* Hansi Lo Wang has the story.

HANSI LO WANG:

The House Bill would limit the reasons the president could remove the Census Bureau director. To quote-- inefficiency, neglect of duty, or malfeasance in office, but also help prevent future census forms from including untested questions, like the citizenship question former President Donald Trump's administration tried and failed to add. Census advocates have been calling for policies like these to better protect the 2030 census and other future counts, but it's not clear who in the Senate would help carry this legislation to the finish line. So far, no senators have introduced a companion bill with just over three months left before this session of Congress ends. Hansi Lo Wang, *NPR News*, Washington.

AMY HELD:

In Southern California, rescue crews are using search dogs and heavy equipment. At least one person is missing in major mudslides. Thousands of people had evacuated parts of San Bernardino County. Some are being allowed back home. Others are sheltering in place. Fire Chief, Mike McClintock, says conditions are not back to normal.

MIKE MCCLINTOCK:

We have significant mudflows that are impacting roadways. We have no power, and water's impacted to a significant amount of forest falls.

AMY HELD:

Recent wildfires have created burn scars, which turned to mudslides in recent heavy rains. It's *NPR News*.

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[MUSIC PLAYING]

CATHY WURZER:

Around Minnesota right now, the skies are a milky white thanks to upper level wildfire smoke. They'll stay that way today with highs in the mid 70s and lower 80s. At noon in Grand Marais, it's sunny and 59. 72 in Worthington and outside the Munson Feed company in Melrose, Minnesota. It's hazy in 63. I'm Cathy Wurzer with Minnesota news headlines.

Our top story remains the Minnesota Nurses strike. We're in the third day of the strike that has about 15,000 registered nurses walking picket lines at some of the largest hospitals in the Twin Cities and in Duluth Superior. Hospitals have brought in temporary replacement nurses. Nurse Judy Goebel and a small crowd of her colleagues stood beside Smith Avenue in St. Paul yesterday morning watching a line of people boarding a bus behind a tarp near Children's Hospital.

JUDY GOEBEL:

We're watching the replacement nurses get on the bus. I think it's sad that it's come to this point. I'm on the negotiating team for children, St. Paul. Our sticking point is staffing. We want to have a voice. We want to have a voice in staffing.

CATHY WURZER:

The strike is due to end tomorrow morning, after which the Minnesota Nurses Association says it will assess next steps. Hospitals say they're committed to negotiating a fair contract with nurses. The transportation slowdown ahead of a potential nationwide rail workers strike is picking up today. Tim Nelson has that story.

TIM NELSON:

One of Minnesota's principal railroads, BNSF, says it is no longer accepting temperature-controlled containers, like refrigeration units full of food, as of today. That's in anticipation that the shipments could be stranded and possibly damaged if there is a strike. The company started new procedures for hazardous materials and security-sensitive freight on Monday-- also citing a potential labor impasse. Amtrak has announced cancelation of some passenger service, including the empire builder across Minnesota.

Federal officials and Union representatives are meeting in Washington DC today. A presidential emergency board intervened with recommendations earlier this summer, but differences over working conditions reportedly remain unresolved. Thousands of train engineers and conductors could go on strike on Friday with a major impact on the nation's economy. I'm Tim Nelson.

CATHY WURZER:

By the way, Metro Transit is advising riders who use its North Star commuter rail line to and from the Twin Cities. That service could be disrupted as soon as Friday if a potential nationwide rail workers' strike happens. The North Star line is operated under contract with BNSF Railway, which would be affected if there's a strike. Contract talks are ongoing.

[MUSIC PLAYING]

A report from the New York Times shows that three Minnesota members of Congress had conflicts with trading stocks, bonds, and other financial assets that intersected with their congressional work. US Democratic representatives Dean Phillips, and Angie Craig, as well as Senator Tina Smith all reported trading stocks for themselves or family members in companies that could be affected by their legislative work. The Minnesotans are among 97 current US legislators listed in the report. To explain this ethical issue, we're joined by Professor Larry Jacobs. He's chair of Public Affairs and political studies at the University of Minnesota's Humphrey School of Public Policy. Professor Jacobs, welcome back. How are you?

LARRY JACOBS:

Good to be with you, Cathy.

CATHY WURZER:

Thank you for joining us. Let's start with the basics of the story. The times did this extensive analysis of stock trades by members of Congress from 2019 to 2021. And over that three-year period, more than 3,700 trades reported by lawmakers from both parties. Why is that an issue?

LARRY JACOBS:

Well, obviously, if you've got members of Congress sitting on committees, taking votes, making decisions that could impact their holdings, that would be a big issue. So for instance, we've got a Senator who is involved in cattle raising and he's involved on the Ag Committee and making policy on the committee that makes policy that affects the price of cattle when they're sold, and that is just rampant throughout Congress-- the potential conflict of interest between the work of members of Congress on committees and their financial holdings or that of their families.

CATHY WURZER:

But members of Congress are allowed to buy and sell stocks and bonds and other financial instruments, as long as they don't trade on that inside information. They're terms of the Stock Act. Is that right?

LARRY JACOBS:

That is exactly right. That's the sticking question though, which is do we-- or do they have access to information, even if that information is not necessarily on their committee? Are they hearing it from colleagues? We've got-- in our case in Minnesota, we've got one of the members, Dean Phillips.

CATHY WURZER:

Are you still with me, Larry? Oh, my goodness. We appear to have lost Larry Jacobs. We just had a dropped cell there. That's always difficult when you're doing something live on the radio. We are talking, by the way, about this New York Times report that showed that 97 sitting members of Congress, including three members of the Minnesota congressional delegation, were trading stocks and bonds and other financial assets that intersected-- could intersect with their congressional work. And Larry Jacobs who's from the University of Minnesota was talking about the ethics of that, and then, of course, we just happened to lose him. So I'm hoping we get him back somewhere along the line. If not, of course, we'll have to move on to other news of the day. Larry, are you with us? Evidently not. We'll continue to work on this situation.

LARRY JACOBS:

I can hear you.

CATHY WURZER:

Hi, there, professor Jacobs. Sorry about that. We have some gremlins in our system.

LARRY JACOBS:

Yes, well, they're out there.

CATHY WURZER:

It happens. At any rate, we were talking a little bit about the Stock Act, why this could be a potential problem. This is allowed under congressional rules, but as you know, perception is everything in politics. So is there a perception of impropriety? And what does that do for public confidence in lawmakers, which really isn't terribly high?

LARRY JACOBS:

Right, exactly. If you've got a member of Congress whose committee that they sit on is making decisions or issuing damning reports about a industry that they hold stock in or a member of their family does, it looks terrible, and it could be terrible. It could be corruption, so that's the problem. And I think the more you go into the details, the more difficult. Some of these conclusions become.

CATHY WURZER:

You know, you were talking about Congress member, Dean Phillips, one of the Minnesotans involved-- at least mentioned in this New York Times article. He seems to have had by far the most stock trades of the three Minnesotans. How much of a problem is that for him?

LARRY JACOBS:

Well, it looks terrible. Oh, the impression is bad. On the other hand, it really helps to know that he put all of his financial holdings with the law firm that is making his financial decisions, so it's a blind trust. He does not have access to information that he can then turn around and use. So to me, that is a case that we're protected against a actual conflict of interest, but the potential and the public perception of it is quite damning.

CATHY WURZER:

Have there been calls in the past to tighten up the rules and to maybe require that all members of Congress put their assets into blind trusts?

LARRY JACOBS:

Yes. This has been an ongoing issue, and Congress-- in both parties. This is not just Democrats. There-- if you look on the Republican side, there are plenty of Republicans, including the Senate leader and Mitch McConnell, who's been listed in the times report. But the problem in the past reform is that members of Congress are saying, wait a second. I'm not taking a vow of poverty, and I need to be able to be engaged with my financial holdings, and that we're going to take protections to avoid any impropriety or the perception of it. Obviously, that doesn't work though, and I understand why people are might be outraged by what's happened with the Democrats in Minnesota-- the three Democrats listed by the times and the dozens of Republicans who are also listed.

CATHY WURZER:

So legislators, they will not face any consequences for this?

LARRY JACOBS:

Well, I think there needs to be a close look, but I would say based so far on what we know about the three Minnesotans, you know, I don't see grounds for it. But again, we're just, maybe, at the early stages of this. You know-- excuse me. [? Angie ?] Craig is listed, and the financial transactions were by her college age son. And she says, I had no idea that was going on. She actually favors this tougher legislation that would bar all members of Congress and their families from having the perception that they're trading on insider information.

CATHY WURZER:

By the way, is the Stock Act-- is that a fairly recent bit of legislation? Has this gone on for decades?

LARRY JACOBS:

The conversation has gone on for decades. The Act is more recent.

CATHY WURZER:

All right. Larry, I'm sorry. I have to run. I appreciate your time. Thank you so much, and I'm sorry about the technical issues.

LARRY JACOBS:

Always good to be with you, Cathy.

CATHY WURZER:

Likewise. We, of course, have been talking to Professor Larry Jacobs. He's the chair of Public Affairs and political studies at the U of M's Humphrey School of Public Policy.

[MUSIC - CHRIS BEARDEN, "ONE LAST TIME"]

This is our Minnesota Music Minute. This is Chris Bearden with "One Last Time," a song he released last year. Chris is best known as a bassist in the Minneapolis Band Polica, and he's currently recovering from surgery for a brain. Tumor there is a benefit concert in his honor tonight at the Icehouse in Minneapolis. Chris, if you're listening, I hope you're feeling better.

[MUSIC - CHRIS BEARDEN, "ONE LAST TIME"]

CHRIS BEARDEN:

(SINGING) I said, we could go down to the river bed. Lay on the side and see the ghost who swam to furthest stars. We could escape the traps inside our heads. Nobody waits for love like flowers wait for rain, she said. The moment you hold me, the moment I want to-- so tell me when you swing back [INAUDIBLE], but I'll get the chance to lay beside you. The more that you want me--

CATHY WURZER:

12:15 here at *Minnesota Now* from *NPR News*. I'm Cathy Wurzer. Being a small city mayor means you are a jack of all trades. You need to be prepared to handle a little bit of everything. But how on Earth can you be prepared for a historic flood and fire all on the same day? That's exactly what East Grand Forks mayor, Lynn Strauss, had to deal with on April 19, 1997.

On that day, the Red River rolled over its dikes, inundating the town and sending nearly 61,000 people fleeing from their homes. It was the largest single evacuation in US history at the time. Then a raging fire that afternoon burned down 11 buildings in downtown Grand Forks. It was unreal. So why am I talking about this today? Well, because the mayor of East Grand Forks at the time died this week. Former mayor, Lynn Strauss, was considered a true hero, and we wanted to remember the leadership he showed during this incredible disaster. Here he is in 1998 reflecting on his role during that emergency.

LYNN STRAUSS:

We always try to use the words bigger, better, and stronger than ever. Those are things that we've been using positive words for rebuilding our community. But sometimes when you mention, we actually have been elevated to a different level of mayor than it has been in our community from the past, and sometimes it is almost embarrassing at times because Pat or myself do not look upon ourselves as heroes. We feel we're part of the whole communities, and the whole communities are the heroes of this flood.

CATHY WURZER:

That was a lot of humility there. In that clip, Lynn Strauss was talking about Pat. Well, that was then Grand Forks mayor, Pat Owens. Joining us now to remember former mayor Lynn Strauss is the current mayor of East Grand Forks, Steve Gander. Mayor Gander, welcome.

STEVE GANDER:

Thank you for having me today.

CATHY WURZER:

I understand you were in East Grand Forks during the flood and the fire. Gosh, what do you remember of that day?

STEVE GANDER:

Yes, it was-- to say it any other way would be just not true. It was a very surreal time. I remember where I was at the time when the whole cities started to go under, and I'd have to back it up one day to the 18th of April. And I was helping guide a sandbagging effort along a certain section of town, and the air raid sirens went off once again, and the choppers were flying over from the National Guard. And right then, someone walked up and said, do you hear those sirens? And I said, yeah, don't worry about it. It's been-- they've been going off all day. And it was someone from the guard saying, no, you don't understand. This one's different. We've got a 10-foot wall of water coming out the back of the dike, where the dike was breached at the bridge about a mile and a half up the river. And so you need to evacuate this area immediately. It will fill with water in minutes.

And so I went to where my vehicle was parked on supposed high ground and ended up being taken out that hour by a deuce and a half over a bridge through several feet of water. And that vehicle ended up totaled in a part of town that, again, was supposed to be the high ground, but there was no way off that section of town. By then, all the bridges had failed and on we went. So indeed, it was a surreal time. Oh, by the way, the next morning my parents in their 70s were airlifted off by chopper from the same area. So for our whole community, it was quite a time.

Today we're here to talk about Mayor Strauss, and I appreciated those words. Kind of actually removed hearing his voice after knowing that he's not with us any longer. He really is-- I like to think of folks who've passed in the present tense. He is a hero for our community. He's a hero for our country. He came out of the University of North Dakota and was right away drafted and sent to Vietnam, where he served in a medical group that helped pick people up from the battlefield.

And he came back home and schoolteacher for elementary kids and helped coach the youth hockey and on into serving on the city council. This is a man who's dedicated his life to service of this country, of our community, of really everyone that's anywhere nearby him, and we've all been recipients of his kindness, his optimism, his energy, his enthusiasm, and it's all contagious. I love it.

CATHY WURZER:

You know, I remember covering that flood, and of course, talking to Mayor Lynn and thinking, boy, this guy really is a humble person-- just a real down-to-Earth kind of a guy. And I know you just mentioned you were on the city council during the time with Mayor Strauss. How would you describe his leadership style?

STEVE GANDER:

He was I'd say a very, very effective leader in the fact that he counted on everybody to give their best. He didn't try to spoon feed anybody or drag them along. Occasionally, you'd butt heads, which is a very good thing. When we're doing the people's work and you have an honest disagreement or difference of opinion, you'd butt heads. But his method, his whole mood and his whole approach to things was very cooperative but also really dedicated to accomplishing a vision.

He would take the time to establish a proper vision for the direction that we would want to go. He would take the input of every relevant stakeholder. And then we'd bring it together, and he would be tenacious then to accomplish the vision that we'd all agreed to. And he wouldn't stop with his intentional drive until that vision had been accomplished. So that combination of optimism of being very visionary of being very group minded as to establishing and guiding to the vision and then pushing right to the end-- boy, those are the hallmarks, in my view, of what made him so effective.

CATHY WURZER:

Have you taken some of those hints, that learning, those lessons into your own time as mayor?

STEVE GANDER:

Absolutely, yes. I have a ton of admiration for mayor Strauss. Now, I'm sure I've had a few departures as to going a slightly different way, because we're two different people, but clearly, really, if you want to partner with people and everybody contributes the best they have, it's a foolish thing to browbeat them. It's a foolish thing to badger them, and yet we do hold them accountable.

So there's that nice middle area where we want to be as we partner with one another, and I saw Lynn do it well. And occasionally, I saw him drift off the rails just a little to one side or the other, and that's-- I mean, I'm sure I'm doing the exact same thing. You want to hit that sweet spot, but inevitably, you do bump the rails and wake up and realize, oops, I guess I could have done that a bit better.

CATHY WURZER:

What was his vision for the town after all that devastation? The flood and the fire. Did he see that vision come to fruition?

STEVE GANDER:

He absolutely did. And have to say that his connection with Joan Kroc as the heiress of the Fortune of McDonald's Corporation-- and Joan and Lynn developed a partnership. They became fast friends and Marjorie-- last name is [? Stous. ?] Marj [? Stous ?] and Lynn actually traveled to visit Joan in her home in California, and Joan helped Lynn, I think, cast a broader vision, a greater horizon of what our community could be. I think when you hear Lynn talk about let's make it better, let's not just put it back how it was, but we have an opportunity here to reframe our community to really see it in a new way. And sure enough, you did.

So the key components-- you will know if you come to visit, our downtown has turned into a real Mecca of activity. Bringing Cabela's now, Bass Pro, into the downtown was huge. From there, we developed a big movie theater complex and a really nice restaurant. Business has come up all around there, multiple restaurants. You probably know Molly Yeh of the Food Network is opening a restaurant in our downtown in the next couple of weeks now, so that's going to be the latest addition-- the Girl Meets Farm individual. So she'll be opening a new restaurant there.

And then the state campground came in. It's one of the top reserved campgrounds in all of the state of Minnesota right adjacent to all of the stuff that's happened. And so our downtown-- oh, by the way, we're connected to 40 miles of recreational trails into East Grand Forks and Grand Forks across recreational bridges, Ted bridges that have been put in as part of the core project. We have protection to 60 feet elevation. We had a flood of 54. We can top these dikes at 64-- 65 if we need to.

So you talk about what was Lynn's vision. His vision was, first of all, protection. We need to be protected. Nobody's going to invest in a community that's vulnerable to repeat flooding. Thank the good Lord in the US of A because this [INAUDIBLE] levee project to Grand Forks and East Grand Forks is amazing. It's engineered to a 500-year flood event with a 500-year rainfall and everything worst-case scenario, and that's how our core design and certified levee system is. Then you have the freedom to go ahead and invest back into the community, and sure enough it's happened. It's pretty good.

CATHY WURZER:

I appreciate everything you said. Thank you so much for taking time, Steve gander, to talk about Mayor Lynn Strauss. Thank you so much and best of luck.

STEVE GANDER:

My pleasure. Thanks for taking the call.

CATHY WURZER:

Absolutely. Steve Gander is the mayor of East Grand Forks, Minnesota.

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- Support comes from the American Swedish Institute with their museum galleries and the historic Turnblad mansion open to all. No tickets needed. Thursdays 3:00 to 8:00 PM and Happy Hour at FICA cafe, live music on select days and more. ASIMN.org.

CATHY WURZER:

Time for news with John Wanamaker. John?

JOHN WANAMAKER:

Cathy, Queen Elizabeth has left Buckingham Palace for the last time. The late monarch's coffin was carried to Westminster Hall by horse drawn gun carriage. Her son, King Charles the Third, and his siblings and sons marched behind the Queen, who will lie in state for four days until her funeral on Monday.

Attorneys for Florida's school shooter, Nikolas Cruz, have suddenly and surprisingly rested their case, leading to a shouting match after the judge accused them of a lack of professionalism. Cruz's attorneys had told the judge and prosecutors they would be calling 80 witnesses but rested at the beginning of this morning's court session after calling only about 25. Cruz has pleaded guilty of murdering 17 at Parkland's Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in 2018. The trial is to decide whether he is sentenced to death or life without parole.

Teachers, administrators, and parent volunteers welcome children back to school in Seattle today following a week long educators strike that delayed the start of classes. Seattle Public Schools and the Seattle Education Association say they've reached a tentative agreement on a new contract, and the Union's membership voted yesterday to suspend the walkout pending ratification. It's a three-year deal that will maintain ratios of special education students and staff and add baseline mental health staffing in all schools and raise pay above inflation markers according to the Association, although the exact terms were not disclosed.

New court documents show the Mississippi governor in 2017 knew of a plan for a nonprofit profit group to pay former Minnesota Vikings and Green Bay Packers quarterback, Brett Favre, more than \$1 million in welfare grant money to help fund a volleyball facility. The building is at the University of Southern Mississippi, where Favre's daughter played volleyball. Court documents filed this week include text messages, exchanges between Favre and the director of the nonprofit that had contacts with the Mississippi Department of Human Services. In August 2017, the director texted Favre that then-governor Phil Bryant was, quote, "on board with payment to Favre to help fund the volleyball building. This is *NPR News*.

CATHY WURZER:

Thank you John Wanamaker. Here's your forecast. Hazy sunshine today with highs in the mid 70s and lower 80s. Cooler near Lake Superior. It's always cool near the big Lake. If you like cool nights and warm days, you are loving this weather right now. Let's take a deeper dive into what's happening with our weather. *NPR's* chief meteorologist, Paul Hunter, is with us right now. Hey, how are you doing?

PAUL HUNTER:

Hey, I'm doing great. Thank you. What a weird looking sky out there today with all that wildfire smoke.

CATHY WURZER:

Right? I know. So where is all this smoke coming from?

PAUL HUNTER:

Yeah, there are literally hundreds of wildfires in the Western US from California into the northern Rockies. Idaho, Western Montana, the real concentration there, Cathy. And they're just belching out these thick smoke plumes. Most of that smoke between about 5 to 15,000 feet aloft, and the mid-level wind flow has been from West to East. So that's blown it right into the Dakotas right into Minnesota. The thickest plume really over Minnesota right now, and those southerly winds that will have tomorrow finally will start to blow that smoke a bit to the North. So the good news is most of the smoke has stayed aloft. I do see the latest MPCA air quality readings 53 just into the moderate range in the Twin Cities.

And this is good because most of it's going to stay aloft. Now, sometimes we get a cold front that can push in heavier air, denser air. We get subsidence. That's sinking air in the lowest part of the atmosphere. That's the condition that can force that down to ground level, but it doesn't look like that'll happen this time. The main plume too, Cathy, I'm watching. Winds have shifted out in the Northwest, and so it's blowing North into Canada. So there's less smoke now to the West of Minnesota, so tomorrow we might actually see a bit of a break in this smoke layer over Minnesota.

CATHY WURZER:

Winds are going to kick up as well, which are going to help. Can I ask you about the meteorology of smoke forecasting? I've always wanted to know about that.

PAUL HUNTER:

Yeah, and you know it's interesting because there's a group at the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency of meteorologists that, of course, deals with our air quality. But increasingly, they've seen wildfire smoke events in Minnesota. So they are forecasting and tracking these plumes using computer models to do that. And really what happens is it stays aloft as I said. They're looking for conditions that will force that smoke to the ground and then see it in their monitors. So it's a tough thing to forecast whether that subsidence will occur and get it down to ground level, but pollution control agency meteorologists, like Daniel Dix who used to work at The Weather Channel, are on that every day.

CATHY WURZER:

Let's talk about rain. I note that there is rain in the forecast starting what? Tomorrow night.

PAUL HUNTER:

Yeah, and I think that's mainly a northern Minnesota event. And there could be some heavy rainfall up there. Basically, draw a line from Brainerd over to Duluth. I think everywhere along and North of that line will get an inch and a half-- inch and a half of rain, but it'll be heavier as you go North. So Iron Range, North Shore, Grand Moray up toward Ely could get 1 to 3, maybe 4 inches of rain. Mainly Thursday night, Friday, into the weekend.

Twin Cities I think just a chance tomorrow evening, and then a better chance Friday for some afternoon thunderstorms, Cathy. The heaviest rains will be in Northern Minnesota, but we'll have scattered thunderstorm chances into Friday and Saturday and highs still in the low 80s, so it still feels like summer out there.

CATHY WURZER:

It'd be nice to get some rain in the Twin Cities. Of course, I've not been following this. It's been dry, but how dry-- how far off are we when it comes to rainfall amounts?

PAUL HUNTER:

Well, about 6 inches overall in precipitation since the first of the year, Cathy, in the Twin Cities. We started wet, and then it just shut off as we head into June and July. It's not as bad as last year. 86% of Minnesota was in drought status last year. 36% was extreme to exceptional. Now, it's 9% in Minnesota, but about 25% of Minnesota is what we call abnormally dry or in drought.

And the moderate drought area really goes from the Twin Cities Southwest toward Redwood Falls, Southwest Minnesota. But severe drought now-- Central and Southern Twin Cities, especially Hennepin and Scott counties. As I said, we're down about 6 inches this year. Water level in the lakes is dropping. You're seeing it in the lakes and the rivers. Lake Minnetonka came up in the spring to about June 1-- about 8 to 10 inches. But now, it's down. Again, lower than it was. So the lakes are dropping. The rivers are dropping. The Minnesota River around Mankato-- the reading 1.94 feet. That's close to the top 10 lowest of 1.8 feet back in 1974. So that drought area, lakes and rivers are very low. Northern Minnesota doing much better on rainfall this year.

CATHY WURZER:

We should remind people as we go into fall then to maybe water your trees and some of the-- well, I think about trees specifically because they could be stress going into winter, right?

PAUL HUNTER:

Oh, absolutely. That's a great idea. And what they like is a long, slow soak. So if you can just put the hose out there and turn it on gently, and that's the best way to water your trees and shrubs.

CATHY WURZER:

Climate Cast, what's happening tomorrow on *Climate Cast*?

PAUL HUNTER:

Yeah, there's a bit of a rural energy-- renewable energy Renaissance going on, Cathy. Renewable energy, wind, and solar-- actually creating some economic benefits in rural Minnesota, the USA as well. Studies show increase in jobs. Farmers are getting money for solar and wind leases on their land. Property values are actually going up faster in counties that have renewable energy than counties that don't. Tomorrow, I'll talk with Elle Michelle Moore. She wrote a book called *Rural Renaissance, Revitalizing America's Home Towns Through Clean Power*. And that we will air on *Climate Cast* tomorrow all things considered in the 3:00 and 5:00 o'clock hours.

CATHY WURZER:

We'll be listening. Before you go, of course, you know that my track record was seeing the Aurora as horrific. I've missed every single opportunity.

PAUL HUNTER:

Oh.

CATHY WURZER:

I know. I know. So just tell me-- are there better chances coming up here in the fall?

PAUL HUNTER:

There are, and we've had a couple of decent events here in the last couple of weeks, especially Northern Minnesota. You really got to get away from the city lights to do that. But there are actually two times more likely in spring and fall. We get about six days of geomagnetic disturbances-- March, April, September, October versus three days in the summer and winter. And researchers call that the Russell McPherson effect. That basically around the equinoxes, cracks open up in Earth's magnetic field, and it takes less solar wind to cause an Aurora. It's still an evolving area of research, but hey, get out there. The fall equinox-- 8:03 PM, next Thursday, September 22, Cathy.

CATHY WURZER:

What? Already?

PAUL HUNTER:

Yeah.

CATHY WURZER:

No. I don't know. OK, It's fine. It's good. It has to happen somewhere along the line. OK.

PAUL HUNTER:

We're going to be OK.

CATHY WURZER:

I know. It's going to be fine. All right. I hope you have a good day, thanks.

PAUL HUNTER:

You too. Thanks Cathy. That's our chief meteorologist, Paul Hunter. By the way, you can listen to Paul later this afternoon with Tom Crann on *All Things Considered*.

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CATHY WURZER:

12:35-- here on *Minnesota Now*. Occasionally on the program, we like to reach out to local reporters in small towns around Minnesota to find out what is going on in their communities. Laurel Beager is editor of the Rainy Lake Gazette in International Falls, which geographically speaking is the northernmost point in Minnesota. Now, this has been a wet year for the city. We've talked about that in the past-- historic flooding has been seen on Rainy Lake. But Laurel has also been following a quieter and equally serious story. Hey, Laurel. Thanks for coming on *Minnesota Now*.

LAUREL BEAGER:

Hi Cathy. How are you?

CATHY WURZER: I'm great. Did I get your last name right? Beaker?

LAUREL BEAGER: Yes.

CATHY WURZER: Thank you. In June, I know you reported that there was a hunger crisis in the schools in and around International falls, and that was as the end of last school year. What information were you getting at the time?

LAUREL BEAGER: Well, they were seeing rises in the use of food shelves that are located in each of our schools. They were worried about when the free and reduced lunch as a result of the COVID grants ran out, which is this year, how that would affect student hunger.

CATHY WURZER: We talked a few weeks ago to the head of the Food shelf and International Falls, Ashley Hall. It was a terrific interview, by the way, and she painted a pretty dire picture though of hunger in that part of the state. What's going on in your area that's leading to this problem?

LAUREL BEAGER: Well, I think there's just a large wealth and poverty gap in our community. Some of the jobs that we have are much higher paying, but also some of the very lower jobs are going unfilled. I think that there just is a large poverty issue up here, and food insecurity is a high issue because of our location. We're a food desert in many of the areas of our county.

CATHY WURZER: What are the closest grocery stores? Where are they? In International Falls?

LAUREL BEAGER: Yeah, we have International Falls and a small town about 20 miles from here at Little Fork. But otherwise, that's about it.

CATHY WURZER: My goodness. So getting back to the kids and students who are hungry, the federal government has announced the school meal changes for the current school year. Will those changes be helpful in your community?

LAUREL BEAGER: If they're returning the free lunch and breakfasts, that will play a huge role in curbing some of the hunger in our schools.

CATHY WURZER: OK. So I know that there have been meetings in your community looking at solutions that are being investigated. How have those meetings gone?

LAUREL BEAGER: Very good. They're still looking at how the need can best be filled in our schools. Right now, I know there's a plan to help with some of the extra after-school curricular activities that go past the supper hour. When buses stop and all the kids don't have enough money to go into the fast food place on their way to a game or on their way home from a game, it can be tough. I know Ashley's talked about the coaches and advisors each every year paying for kids who don't have the money to pay for them. So they're looking at ways that they can address that in the after school activities.

CATHY WURZER:

OK. And then anything else that's on the horizon that maybe as for governmental help and that kind of thing?

LAUREL BEAGER:

Well, they're-- right now, they just met with our county board, actually, to find a new site for the entire food shelf operation-- the Falls hunger coalition's operation, which would make serving clients as well as in-taking food much easier and better for everyone. They're looking at some growing opportunities as far as fresh produce. It's an old armory building that hasn't been used in years for that purpose, and so it would certainly meet a need for the Hunger Coalition as well as take a good building and put it to good use.

CATHY WURZER:

Before you go here-- and thank you for outlining this very serious problem in your area. What else are you covering? What other stories are folks talking about?

LAUREL BEAGER:

Well, our flood recovery is in full gear right now. We had a million sandbags out helping to protect homes and other infrastructure, and that has all been collected and is now being deposited in the right places. But at the same time, we've just found out that our local residents aren't eligible for assistance. But the Small Business Development Center has made low interest loans for some of the private individuals to get some help, so that's a big issue still in our community.

CATHY WURZER:

And that is a huge issue because don't you have-- the folks who have been really affected by the flooding, they're maybe a little bit older and an older demographic that maybe needs that help.

LAUREL BEAGER:

Yeah that was-- it's tough. People want to stay in their homes no matter where they are for as long as they can, and so the aging population here did suffer. And so we're hoping that some of the small or low interest loans will help people rebuild.

CATHY WURZER:

All right. Laurel, thank you so much. I appreciate your time.

LAUREL BEAGER:

Thank you, and Thanks for reaching out. We appreciate it.

CATHY WURZER:

Absolutely. Laurel Beager is the editor of the *Rainy Lake Gazette* in International Falls. You can read about this story and others at the *Rainy Lake Gazette* website. That's RainyLakeGazette.com. And oh, by the way, I always appreciate hearing from listeners, and I give tons of credit to John Dahl, who says, hey, quick note. International Falls is on the Canadian border, but it's not the most northern part of the state. That is true. I'm so sorry, John. You are correct. The Northwest Angle is the most northern point in the state of Minnesota. John's from Northwestern Minnesota, so he says he feels responsible so that's why he sent a note. I appreciate that John, who's now in St. Paul. Thanks for listening.

[MUSIC PLAYING]

This is *Minnesota Now* on *NPR news*. I'm Cathy Wurzer. Every year since 2001, a short list of well-known and well respected broadcasters are inducted into the Minnesota Broadcasters Hall of Fame at the Pavek Museum in St. Louis Park. This year's five inductees will be celebrated at a ceremony this weekend. Now, in the interest of full disclosure, I'm one of those to be inducted, and I am honored and blown away that I'm going into the Hall of Fame with other notables like Dave Lee from WCCO Radio, Dan Barreiro from KFAN, and our next guest, Freddie Bell.

Freddie Bell is a broadcast icon. He's a DJ and the general manager at KMOJ Radio in Minneapolis. He actually manages two stations and is the host of some three radio shows. Freddie is a speaker and an author. You hear him on this program for a song of the day segment. Freddie Bell joins us. Oh, what an honor. Congratulations to you.

FREDDIE BELL:

Well, thank you, and congratulations to you too Cathy Wurzer, are Hall of Famer.

CATHY WURZER:

Isn't that just something? I don't know. Well, what a well-deserved honor for you, for all of us that are being inducted. Where were you when you heard the news?

FREDDIE BELL:

I was actually sitting at my desk, Cathy, and a good friend of mine called me-- Dan Seaman, from over across the waters. And at first, I thought it was a joke, and I said, there is no such thing as a Hall of Fame. And he goes, no, no, no, no. Don't hang up. Don't hang up. This is real. This is real. And from that date-- it was a few months ago, and I'm still trying to process this, Cathy. I mean, how do you act when you're inducted into Minnesota Broadcasting Hall of Fame? I'm trying to find a script that tells me how you're supposed to react to this and what you're supposed to say, and I'm yet to find it.

CATHY WURZER:

Yeah, I hear you. I'm with you. I just-- I shook my head and said, are you kidding me? Me? What? You know, yeah. Hey, let me ask you. I'm curious now. What was the spark that got you interested in broadcasting to begin with? Was it in college?

FREDDIE BELL:

It was in college. Believe it or not, when I was at Creighton University, it's known for its medical classes or its curriculum there. And I was going to be a medical technician of some sort. And I was walking into a building, and I was lost on campus. I was still a freshman. Walked into a building, and they all looked alike. And I was standing at the top of the staircase, and there was a gentleman down at the bottom of the case, and I asked him for directions.

He gave them to me, and over his shoulder, Cathy, I saw what looked like a broadcast studio. And I asked him-- I said, do they teach broadcasting at college? The look he gave me said, well are you crazy? And he goes, yeah, of course. And so now, the whole thing starts to flip. My career flipped in college, and I changed my major that afternoon.

CATHY WURZER:

Oh. I love that mental picture, by the way. I know you started your career at KETV while you're also working for KOWH FM in Omaha. What was that like?

FREDDIE BELL:

Oh, my goodness. Leave it to Cathy to bring up the ancient history. So I'm telling you what-- well, it was an ABC affiliate KETV. Still there oddly enough, even though it was the dark ages. But while I was still at Creighton University, I was recruited to come into their news department, and that started my professional journalism career. And immediately, I went into education. I was an education reporter, and I also found myself as the assistant Bureau Chief-- the first for our legislative coverage coming from the state Capitol of Lincoln, Nebraska.

So it was different. We called it a one-man band. I was doing the writing. I was shooting my own video. At that time, editing my own film and narrating all of it. Doing my own standups. That was a feat to position the camera then run around in front of it and record stand up, which are always the best. It was a lot of fun, but I learned a lot too. Within months of starting, I received another offer to do radio at 100,000 watt clear channel radio station, heard across the country. And I accepted that as well, and that's how Freddie Bell was born in radio broadcasting.

CATHY WURZER:

Well, I can see why you went to radio. I mean, your voice is just God-given. It is just smooth as silk. You were born to do this kind of work. What do you like about radio?

FREDDIE BELL:

I like the spontaneity. I love the creativity that you get. It's like a wonderful tapestry. I'll go into different interviews, and I've my script. I've got the facts. I have my questions ready, and at the end of it, I look back at it, and I'll understand that I didn't use anything that I had planned because I was so concentrated on how this story was unweaving in front of me, and that's the magic, I believe, of radio.

CATHY WURZER:

You got to listen more really than you talk, I think, and you do that so, so well, and you really connect with your guests. Let me ask you this too about your leadership. Now, when I'm on the air I say, Freddie Bell is a DJ and general manager at KMOJ. That's an interesting combo there. Tell me about working at a station which is so rooted in the North Minneapolis community and being a leader there.

FREDDIE BELL:

It's an interesting walk, and I'll just say that it's really interesting. I was recruited to come on and help with their morning show, and a couple of years later things changed, and they asked me to lead the radio station. And it's not for-- and I've led a couple of other radio stations here in the metro, but to ask to come to help at KMOJ at a time when it was in some peril at that point, I just did not want to be the person that where the headlines would read-- and the Cathy Wurzer would call and say, why did KMOJ fail? I didn't want that to happen.

And the key is to be really sensitive to the needs of our community and to answer the call before the call is brought to us. It was difficult to get the people to understand that this fellow who was a broadcaster was now their leader. And there are some people who are still trying to wrap their heads around that, but we've got a fine group of folks. I'm just in love with our community. They've really embraced the work that we're doing.

CATHY WURZER:

Say-- I need to, of course, note that you are the second Black broadcaster to be inducted into the Minnesota Broadcasters Hall of Fame. Robin Robinson is currently the only person to this point to be inducted who is a person of color. What do you make of that?

FREDDIE BELL:

Robin's the first-- a good friend of mine-- in television, and I'm the first in radio. And I've got this wonderful picture of us from a New Year's Eve party in downtown Minneapolis. Both of us are wearing red. She's in a wonderful cocktail dress, and I'm in a tuxedo. We're just having a great time. But it's just really interesting that a good friend of mine and I shared something that's called Minnesota Broadcasting Hall of Fame.

CATHY WURZER:

When you were coming up through the ranks as a person of color, did you feel pressure to-- this is a very difficult business as you know, and you have bosses that you run into that try to-- and program directors and music programmers who try to bend you to what they think you should sound like. Did you run into that, and how did you battle that?

FREDDIE BELL:

The answer is, yes. Even in the very beginning, I had to shave my mustache in order to conform with the look that this program director-- in this case a news director-- wanted his people to look like. And I said, well, what am I going to do next? Do something to alter my color? There are people who just don't know how to manage people of color. They don't know how to manage the differences and to embrace the gifts that these individuals bring to the business. It is the diversity of thought.

It is the diversity of writing that really helps to tell the real stories that we're trying to uncover as journalists and as broadcasters in this industry. It's been difficult. I've been benched because of the way that I happen to look. I can't change that. I've never tried to change it, but the whole idea is that I've never strayed away from what it is that I've been trained to do to tell the true story, tell the right story, do it in an objective way that arms people with the information that they're looking for and helps them to make cogent decisions about their lives.

CATHY WURZER:

Amen. Sounds like good advice to the next generation of broadcasters too.

FREDDIE BELL:

Maya Angelou told me several years ago that the key to communicating is to be completely present, and I'm sharing with you what she shared with me. Nothing else matters right now other than the conversation that we're having. There's a lot of things going on around both of us, I would imagine, right now, making sure this connection is clear for our audiences, but Cathy Wurzer is the only individual that I'm concerned with right now. So what are you going to do with this Hall of Fame title Cathy Wurzer?

CATHY WURZER:

I don't even know.

[LAUGHTER]

I don't even know, Freddie. Oh, for goodness sakes. I guess-- what do you do? Put it on your resume? I guess you put the plaque on your wall and you look at it and go, well, that was-- yeah, that was OK. I don't know. Since you are-- thank you for being a regular contributor to this show. You share music with us for a song of the day. What song would you play to commemorate this achievement?

FREDDIE BELL:

Well, it would be Diana Ross, and it would either be "Upside Down" or "I'm coming Out and I want the world to Know."

[MUSIC - DIANA ROSS, "I'M COMING OUT"]

(SINGING) I'm coming out. I want the world to know. Got to let it show. I'm coming out--

CATHY WURZER:

I would go with that one for sure. Well, you know what? I've told you this privately, but I am a huge fan. When I think of a true broadcaster, you are it, and I'm just so honored to be going into the Hall of Fame with you. Thank you so much Freddie for everything you've done for this community.

FREDDIE BELL:

Well, the pleasure is mine, and thank you for making a difference in the lives of the people that you touch. Folks just love you, and I see why because you're the consummate professional with a wonderful voice. And such-- it's so cool to go into the Hall of Fame with you.

CATHY WURZER:

Oh, I appreciate. Freddie Bell, thank you.

FREDDIE BELL:

Thank you, Cathy. Thanks for asking me to be a part of your show.

CATHY WURZER:

That of course, is the incomparable Freddie Bell-- general manager and DJ at KMOJ Radio in the Twin Cities and a new Minnesota Broadcasting Hall of Fame inductee.