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SPEAKERS

Lani Jennings-Hall, Senator Joyce Elliott, Ally Thomlinson, Rebecca Zimmerman



Lani Jennings-Hall 00:00

Hi, I'm Lani Jennings-Hall and you're listening to speak up Arkansas on KABF 88.3 FM. Disability Rights Arkansas is proud to be a part of KABF Weekly Speak Up Arkansas program to encourage dialogue about the issues that matter most to people with disabilities, their families and caregivers, and to educate the public about these issues to make Arkansas a truly inclusive state where everyone's personhood and contributions are valued. The show is pre-recorded so we won't be taking calls, but we always welcome your questions and comments. Give us a call at 800-482-1174 or you can find us online at DisabilityRightsar.org. We're also on Facebook @DisabilityRightsAR annual find us on Twitter @drArkansas. Today I'm here with my co-host Ally Thomlinson with Arkansas Alliance for Disability Advocacy. We are joined by Senator Joyce Elliot with Get Loud Arkansas as well as Rebecca Zimmerman from Arkansas Advocates for Children and Families. We're going to dive into voting, barriers to voting and really discuss why voting in every single election is important. Thank you for joining us here today. Let's talk a little bit about you guys and what you do. Senator Elliott.



Senator Joyce Elliott 01:14

I'm Joyce Elliott. And I was a public school teacher for 30 years and absolutely loved that it was the thing I wanted to do with my life. And but I got into politics, which was the other thing I wanted to do with my life. There was never a time that I thought politics was not a worthy endeavor. Never. And I wanted to be a politician. And as I wanted to be a teacher, I am not one of those people who says I am not a politician I am it is up to me to make sure I'm a good one. And I'm doing the things I should do by people. So currently, I'm in the state senate, I'm about to be term limited. At the end of well, technically when the session is convened in and on the second Monday in January 2023. And currently I am doing something else I really want to do with my life. I'm the Executive Director of Get Loud Arkansas, which is a 5013 C. group that is whose mission is to register, engage folks in civic responsibility type work, and get them all the way to the polls, mobilize them to the polls, because one thing we have learned is for sure, just registering people is not enough but to get them to the polls. So all in all, I'm the sort of a

person who's gotten to do exactly what she wants to do with her life three times. I don't take that for granted. I think that's a phenomenal privilege for me to have this opportunity. And thank you guys for inviting me today.

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Lani Jennings-Hall 02:50

Thank you so much, Joyce. And Rebecca, you want to talk a little bit about what you do as well.

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Rebecca Zimmerman 02:56

Hi, yes, thank you. I'm Rebecca Zimmerman. I'm the community engagement director at Arkansas Advocates for Children Families, and we lobby for laws at the state capitol that would improve the lives of kids and families in this state and advanced racial equity, and lobby against laws that we think would be harmful for children and families in our state. And we work on a wide range of issues education, health care, family, economic well being immigrant families, racial equity. And one new thing that we've started working on in the past few years with our partners is around voting rights as well. So happy to be here. Did they listening or Elliott,

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Senator Joyce Elliott 03:38

I just want to say to you too, about Advocates for Children and Families get I cannot tell you, in my work as a state senator, how indispensable the work of advocates for children and families. This has been great for me for resources and helping me find ways forward when there was seemed like there was no way forward. So I just want to just give a shout out to advocates for children and families because it's matter to me and being able to do my work to be a good politician. Thanks.

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Rebecca Zimmerman 04:10

we've been really proud to work with Senator Elliot over the years on a range of issues of kids and families. And sometimes she's been the only one on a specific issue for kids and families. But she she does it anyway. So we really appreciated working with her over the years.

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Lani Jennings-Hall 04:28

I do think it is important that you know we have these organizations and these resources that we can all share and band together to get that information out there because I mean, it's a fight. It is so we've got a big topic today we are here talking about voting, voting accessibility and why it's important to vote in every election because everyone you know talks about the big general election, but there is so much more that impacts your daily life. I want to start out with a little bit of history in voting because, I mean, it's while it has come a long way, not everyone can still vote. So back in the 1800s, it was just the landowning white men and in in 1869 black men were allowed to vote with the 15th Amendment. But there were poll taxes, literacy tests and other measures just meant to discourage voting. And 1920, which, not that long ago,

women were allowed to vote, you would think that all these things are so far in the past, but I mean, that is, that is not that long. No, my my grandmother was, was alive at that time. So that's just crazy for me to think about. And in 1964, the poll tax was eliminated. So that did open it up for for a few more voters. 65 the Voting Rights Act was there and then 71, the voting age was lowered to 18

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Ally Thomlinson 05:55

You know, 1971, that didn't stop the oppression of voters, especially here in Arkansas, the Arkansas General Assembly actually passed a law in 2001. That stated, if you are someone that has guardianship taken over you, you are not allowed to vote any longer, you actually have to go back to the judge, go through court again, and have your voting rights actually given back to you. So, you know, you you listed off a lot of individuals who were stopped from voting, the had to really fight for their rights to be able to go through to go through their civic duty to really have their power be heard that they had all the time, but people were trying to hold them down. And it's still actually happening today on so many different levels, especially here in Arkansas.

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Rebecca Zimmerman 06:43

I think one other historical voting suppression issue that you didn't mention, but still in play today is actually a Jim Crow era law that a lot of states have adopted and still impacts a lot of people that day is blocking people with felony convictions from voting. And that really disproportionately impacts black Americans, particularly by a huge margin and keeps them from voting. And in some states, they might not be usable at all in states like Arkansas, they can go through a process where they can apply to get their voting rights back, they have to make sure all their fines and fees are paid for and some people consider that and instead, that is a modern form of poll tax there. So that's one important issue I think impacts a lot of people that we don't hear as much about.

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Senator Joyce Elliott 07:41

And I wanted to add to that, Rebecca to be at the the the notion that you know, taxes were just in your face when they when you actually had to go and buy this little piece of paper. I remember hearing older people when I was growing up talking about payroll taxes, and I had no idea of what they were talking about. But I knew it was something frightening, and they whispered and all that. And I was always snake and along the front porch trying to figure out what they were talking about, because they were obviously afraid. But the other thing that happens with folks today, they will get out of prison. And some people have a probationary period so long, they will not live to even satisfy that probationary period. And so that means, of course, they will never get to vote, although they have they have paid their dues. And I think that's that's a sad commentary how history is still intersects into reality today. And another one quick thing and 1920 up was when women got the right to vote. I could think about 1920. And then when the Civil Rights Act was passed, that meant all that time period, if you are black woman, you probably were not voting because the suppression was there to make sure you did not vote. And there was a lot of consternation between black and white women because so many white women that the whole notion of this includes everybody was not there in the way

we tend to think so when we say we got women got the right to vote in 1920. I'm always so reminded of that very, the crushing caveat that well, kinda that women black women generally had to wait till the Voting Rights Act was passed, because some of the costs they were buying before there was some any kind of enforcement, but we're voting Yeah, we're the biggest one. And we were the most dependable voting bloc there is, the most dependable don't turn us loose.

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Lani Jennings-Hall 09:36

Well, okay, we're talking about, you know, some different inabilities to be able to vote. Let's, let's, let's keep on this vein, you know, why aren't people voting? I know specifically people with disabilities. There's a lot of accessibility issues still today and a lot of the polling places, one of our staff members that goes around and monitor and continuously they find accessibility issues. I know just recently the the ID requirements, that the law that was passed the voter ID law that was just passed, what barriers can that cause an individual and actually going to the ballot box?

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Senator Joyce Elliott 10:15

Well, it doesn't for many people who come from a legacy of folks voting, and not even thinking about that was any issue for for for them. And people who are you've been used to having an ID, you know, all their lives. The things that was good about Arkansas, that the thing that was good about Arkansas law is that it was really such a communal thing. And you showed up at the polls, there were people there that, you know, they knew where you were, and that's still the case, now we can get people to work at the polls, which is getting harder. But most people think it would not create a problem for folks. But one, it's just one more step to make it something else somebody has to do to be prepared to vote. That is the out that to me, that is the most outstanding thing. And people will say, well, it's not a problem. You can get a free ID Well, yeah, maybe you can, if you have transportation to go somewhere to get a free ID. And for for some people, because they have not, they have just not kept up what's going on. And they don't even know they're supposed to have an ID. And somebody might think well, how do they not know that because perhaps maybe the last time they voted, they didn't have to have an ID, because there are people there years between the last time they voted here and now Arkansas does a really good job of making it difficult to vote. So when this law was passed, I was I was in the Senate when the law was passed about the voter ID and it was referred you know, as a as a to be mended into the Constitution. I kept asking, why is this even a problem? What problem are resolving because in the legislature, you should at least be trying to solve a problem. I just I just think that the purpose of government should be to make it easier for people to vote, not throw up one other roadblock, and the voter ID thing was simply a roadblock. There was no indication that we had any problems, it was just not a problem. But I think it's pretty clear that people who advanced that Bill knew exactly what it was going to do. And I don't pretend there were some kind of laudable motivation behind this. It was not, it was a tactic that you knew would work.

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Ally Thomlinson 10:25

And I agree with you on so many things. They're obviously all of them, especially trying to aid individuals in the disability community and getting registered and being able to get to the

ballot box. So power, it just adds another layer of logistical barriers to go and get that you know, that ID to meet those requirements, whether it be transportation, whether it be the cost-effective getting that ID, whatever it is, and then having to make it to the actual polls. And we know how hard it is for individuals with disabilities to be able to do it in the first place. We know that there's actual data showing that and then to add another layer of logistical requirements, it there it is troublesome, to know that we're making it harder for people to actually use their power.

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Rebecca Zimmerman 13:18

and I think with a lot of these laws, if you look at them individually, like Senator Elliott was saying, like, people think it's not that big a deal. But intent matters. And results matter what the impact of the law has matters. And the voter ID laws are relatively new. And in our democracy, these only happened in the past couple of decades. And last session, they pass a law where you can sign a sworn affidavit to your to prove your identity you had to have that ID and that did add an additional barrier obviously, for a lot of people and it is harder to get around to the county offices, that if you live in rural areas, there's not public transportation for people with disability and like you mentioned, that's even harder that elderly it and others but they made it also harder to vote absentee. Because not only do you have to show a copy of your your driver's license or your identification card, they also added a signature matching requirements to and your signature on your voter absentee ballot publication you have to match the signature that you provided for your voter registration. And over time people's signatures can change my first year to vote when I was 18. I probably put a heart over and then but you know, elderly people people with disabilities, particularly their their signature can look different at their rare times. And if you're just basing it on that and throwing away someone's ballot, that's totally, especially if you're already requiring that they share their photo ID, why do we have this law? I think you need to ask that when you're considering these sorts of things.

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Senator Joyce Elliott 15:15

People are very hesitant, hesitant to send copies of their photo ID. And I get it because you know, they're thinking this could be opened open for us so much abuse. But I'll just say real quickly, the same thing happened to a legislator with this law, where at your signatures are supposed to match and that kind of thing. We talked about, well, who is going to be making that determination, we don't have handwriting experts. So you know, at the end of that line to say, you know, to determine whether or not this is the same thing as your, and is it the same signature, but it might look very different. And this will happen, I will set the capital work. And you know, later than I should have been one night and I came out, it was start, but I stepped on something and I fell so hard, because you know, when you have a totally unexpected fall, and I was going backward. And but so my my whole thing came to be I just gotta make I've got to make myself fall forward. And I did, I was like a bird flying my arms flapping just so I can go forward. But when I did, I fell full force. First time I've ever had a pancake fall, because I stepped on something that rolled, my hand was injured, my signature will never be the same because of that one thing. And that's not anything unique to me. People have issues all the time, in addition to their handwriting just changing. But my signature is different. I shared that I said, I can't fix that. I've had surgery on this hand, it's still different. Why should we do this to people, and basically it boiled down because you know, they are the votes to do it. And it's just totally unfair.

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Lani Jennings-Hall 16:46

That's such a good point. I mean, I developed rheumatoid arthritis over the last few years. And just in the last few years, my handwriting has, I mean, it looks like chicken scratch at this point. But it absolutely has changed since I was 18.

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Ally Thomlinson 17:01

Right, we had the opportunity to meet with three blind individuals at our last advocacy takes action long vote, and they really did a great job educating us on the fact that they've never seen their signature, they don't know, it looks like there's absolutely no way for them to try to match it the first time that they registered. And so that's something that not a lot of individuals think about, it was just a robust amount of information from meal, American voting and what those signature fall on brought to the table for them.

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Lani Jennings-Hall 17:40

So it's when you say it just as clear cut as you did like trying to match your signature, you almost hear how we're kind of crazy it sounds.

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Senator Joyce Elliott 17:51

I tell you, a lot of people now one of the reasons people don't bother with the process, we have a lot of people in our state, who are literate, but not literate enough to engage in the process of registration and, and getting that done and going to the polls and doing all the things they need to do. And, and there are several of them are not old people, there are younger people. And people have learned how to, you know, know how to make it by being good verbal communicators, and then watchful beyond anything I would ever imagine to know what to do. And you know, and certain times, you know, like, and you come back to now, even with the GPS, you've got to know how to, you've got to know how to put the destination into the thing. And that's and that's not even anything remotely as important to me as voting, but they they suffer that anxiety and nobody wants to be embarrassed. And we should should we just should think about accommodating for things that are just not our experience. And that's where the problem is not seeing ourselves and other people when we make these laws and these rules and regulations. I am for the life of me. I don't understand why we aren't doing everything the opposite of everything we can to make voting easy. But I know suppression, you know is that that is the trademark thing that's going on right now. And we know what that's about as well. Certain people shouldn't vote in some people's minds.

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Rebecca Zimmerman 19:25

I was thinking about that Senator Eliot, when I got emails about this conversation was the pass the law, the General Assembly last session that you can't give water bottles and things like that to people standing in line. And I was thinking about Australia and then voting their their people are required to vote in Australia. They can pay just a small fine not to vote but basically

everyone chooses to vote even though the fine is so small, but Everyone gets like hot dogs when they're standing in line and like a big. Yeah, like, when you get a vote, you're waiting in line, you get a hot dog. And that's like, that's just normal there. And so we can't even have people water bottles. When they're voting. It's so very different culture. Like Senator Elliott was saying, we put so many restrictions on voting in this country. And in this state, I was watching the Daily Show, they had someone from Australia speaking about this, and it, our concept of democracy, she said was very far from what she considered democracy, In terms of voting rights.

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Senator Joyce Elliott 20:38

I happen to have a really good friend, I'm going to be on a zoom with him this afternoon, in fact, who is from Australia, and he was here in the States, we serve on an international board together. He was here in the States when it was time for a vote in, in Australia. And it was, I think, a week or two out or something like that. And he just panicked, because he was not going to be getting back home to vote. And it was, it was trying to figure out a way to be sure his ballot got there in time, because he knew he was going to have a fine, he wanted to vote. But the thing that he kept talking about, there is a fine if I don't vote, and he's saying I want to vote but and I won't get this done. And he I think he did get it done. But he said that the fine was substantial enough that people paid attention to it, because they just didn't want to pay because they had not done their civic duty. I just thought it's so opposite here, we spend a great deal of money to make sure you don't, this is really quite opposite.

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Ally Thomlinson 21:39

We've really gone over a lot of things that have changed here, a lot of depth barriers to voting. And I just really want to ask about the different types of elections, and why it's important and being involved in all of them. So and 2020 and 62% of Americans with disabilities, the data that came in from the Bureau, and they test in the presidential election, it was 52% of Americans with disabilities. And that's compared to the 2016. So those numbers are big. Why should we be seeing those numbers? If not more in our local elections? In our state of legend? Can we just talk about that and the importance of all the elections?

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Senator Joyce Elliott 22:21

Well, I have, I always talk to people about the thing that affects you on a daily basis more than anything else, are those decisions that are made right where you live, call the local elections, right where you live on a daily basis. When you think about for example, I've just say start with the school board. Everybody goes to everybody goes to school somewhere. If you go to a public school, and are in almost every hamlet or nearby Hamlet in the state, there is a public school. And there are children going to those schools that's as bad as local as it can get. And people paid no very little or no attention to school boards, to school board elections. And we really should, because we're at a very pivotal time. Now, for example, in public education, we have you know, all the issues of people talking about critical race theory being taught in schools where it's not, but we will put people on a school board with that kind of thinking, who's not bothered to understand you know, you are you are running on a false premise here, this is not even true. And we just simply need good people on the school board who really care enough

about doing the right thing, but all of our kids that matters, the quality of your your community matters. I don't care how real you are, I don't care how urban you are, it still matters starting there. And then when people don't even don't think about or don't know. And one of the things and get let Arkansas we were trying to be sure we educate people about these local races. Everybody lives in a county all over the state. And we have we have what amounts to a county legislature is called the quorum court. But that's exactly what it is. It's a county legislature. They they deal with budgets, they make decisions about all kinds of things, they don't happen in the county. And that's something we really should be paying attention to as well as a thing as much as anything else. In most places. If you're in some kind of town of a certain size. You're going to have a board of directors, City Board of Directors, or you might call them something else. But there are folks who are determining on a day to day basis. And you vote for those directors, you vote for the mayor, or you vote for on the on the quorum court, the county legislature that I was talking about, you vote somebody called justices justice of the peace and these things. When you vote, you should think about your life as you don't stay in one age all the time you keep moving up or down that spectrum or however you want to think about it maybe say up because you get getting older and older and older. The same thing is true about all the elections that matter, they move from smaller. And the smaller they are, the more they're going to affect you on a daily basis. They move from smaller all the way up to voting for the President of the United States. And we do it backwards, we tend to pay attention to the President of the United States, who is going to be governor who's going to be a US senators and Congress persons and so forth. That's important. But the things that happen to on a daily basis aren't really a big deal, but that we talk about a lot and try to get people to understand. And I think some of this is just the focus, all of us need to do a better job of focusing focusing on all of the elections. And particularly, particularly in the media, where we those tend to talk about those top level things, it's like talking about that, you know, the top of the tree is if it doesn't have a trunk, all of these smaller elections are the ones that hold up and lead to these big elections, we pay attention to, you don't climb the tree to try to see what it's like you look at it from the bottom up. And the same thing should be true about voting in all of our elections and understanding what they're about.

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Rebecca Zimmerman 26:07

I can't think I wonder about this a lot. It seems like, we don't do a very good job in our education system to teach people what the government really does. And at all the different levels are in our civics education. And I think that you can kind of see the impact of that when people do choose or not, to vote or not to vote. In focusing only on presidential elections, and not thinking about the important decisions that are made at different levels of government, I was talking to one justice to the piece in Garland County, and she was talking about a big vote that they had to do in terms of working with the city, they're a city there to make sure that the health department was funded because the health department funds in their county came in part from the county itself. And if the county didn't put in their money in the city didn't put in their money, their health department office in the area might close. And that's a huge, been a huge devastating issue. But a lot of people don't know about all of these. And for me, Arkansas advocates, the biggest part of my job as communication director is trying to get people to reach out to their legislators about different issues impacting kids. And I hear a lot from people saying, I know how my legislators going to vote. So there's no point of me reaching out, I know, to support what I want them to support, or I know they're going to oppose what I want them to support. So there's no reason. But I tell them, it's never a waste of time to speak up for kids. And I think that goes for the ballot box to all of these levels of government make really important decisions and the well being of our children. And it's never a waste of time to put on

a Tuesday morning to go to your local voting place. And vote for the kids of your choice and considering how those decisions will impact children. Because, you know, maybe you don't think the government impacts you as much, but it really impacts you and really impacts children. And those decisions can really have an impact one way or the other for the well being of our kids.

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Senator Joyce Elliott 28:27

When people say a lot to me, you know, well, I just don't do politics. Well, and I just say to them, well, then politics will do you. Because this goes it's going to happen, you're going to be affected, you just ought to have something to say about it. And I you know, one of the other things, I think that is such a local thing when it comes to voting, considering you know, everybody because you know with people who aren't. So traditionally ones out of voting like anybody with some kind of you know, with some issue of access or disability. Just think about what it means the quorum court will make this decision led by the judge in the county, how many places you will have to vote early, for example, and how many places you're going to have to vote on Election Day. That is not decided at the Secretary of State's office that is not decided by the legislature that is decided at the county level. So if you are in a very rural county for something or for some reason, or if you don't have transportation, and the smaller the population is and it's also true of larger populations, the less access you're going to have if you need some kind of accommodation. And so what many counties will do and they say is to save money. I don't doubt about that, but money is not more important than your vote. There is one place and many counties counties where you vote early one place, and then on vote election date, several counties have reduced the number of places to vote that are easier to access is because it's not so far away in place and replace it with something called voting centers. Those voting centers tend not to be right on top of each other, they are wide apart. So the place that you might have, you might have voted that St. Mark church for, I don't know, the last 15 years, you might have voted at St Mark, or you might have voted at the school that was, you know, right behind your house or whatever. But these places that you've gotten used to, and now collapse into one larger place, that may be even further away for you to go. And when you didn't have transportation in the first place. That's a county level decisions, you know, just for an example. And everybody knows the example about the mayor's because it's kind of a cliché thing of whether or not your trash gets picked up. That's and people call me as a, as a state legislature about that. And I get to engage with people so many times because they don't know the proper place to call. So we have a lot of work to do there. That's that's a great question.

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Ally Thomlinson 31:01

I think that goes right into some of the information that we're wanting to share today. You know, we want to make sure that individuals know exactly who they need to call when they are struggling with something. So if they are having trouble with accessibility of sidewalks and their town or in their city, or what they call it up with, it's not the state legislator, is it?

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Senator Joyce Elliott 31:25

No, it depends if it's if it's to a state office, for example, in that county, you know, then the legislature couldn't be and they we can be held accountable that from that for state, but in

most cases is going to be is going to be somebody at that local level, that needs to be the contact, because no matter who is going to address it, you should go to that local level first, because it can be a mixture of things like who's building it, you know, that kind of thing. If I choose to rent my my office, for example, to the state, and the state says here's where you have to go to learn about Social Security or whatever, then the state and that local area of the state will be responsible for if you put this here, it must be accessible, and you're responsible for making sure so because you shouldn't place an office somewhere where people don't have access. And when it comes to voting, that is something that should be that the Secretary of State should make sure clerks are making sure. And then therefore, the Quorum court, there's this local legislator, all those people should play a part in making sure that there is access. And so it is just a matter of when it comes to voting, I would say always start with your county clerk and this and the Secretary of State, because I just don't understand how we keep getting by without without making for voting, especially making these places accessible, but it continues to happen. And we all know it is not it is not supposed to be that way.

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Rebecca Zimmerman 32:56

Arkansas Advocates for Children Families puts out a voters guide every election year and we started putting numbers in there that people can call if they're turned away from their polling place. In one of them is Disability Rights Arkansas, we include the number in there because I know in terms of accessibility, but also people with disabilities have gone to vote in our kids on been turned away by polling. The ACLU also has a voter protection hotline, their number is a 775-232-7920. Another numbers, Election Protection Coalition helpline that's run by a few national groups including the NAACP, their number is 866-687-8683. And then if you need help, or someone you know needs help in Spanish, Arkansas, United locally, you can call their number it's 479-763-2822.

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Senator Joyce Elliott 34:13

To and for everybody who who anticipates that you might have a problem. It would be a really good idea if you possibly can vote early or at least try to vote early because that gives us some gypsum time for for there to be a proper response to be interned away or unable to vote. Give some time for us to help you make sure you get your voice heard. So if it's possible do that. You go anyway, on November the eighth that that's what it is at the eighth. I have so much stuff in my head, November the eighth and vote. If you don't get to vote early.

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Ally Thomlinson 34:48

What would you say to a first time voter or someone that's nervous about voting or even thinking that they're one vote isn't going to matter?

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Senator Joyce Elliott 34:57

Well, one of the things I like to share with people is that Because I have examples, you know, from the legislature when they say the one vote won't matter. And we have I don't know, like, probably five, I think so people now who are sitting serving in that capitol, who won by, I don't

know, I think fewer than 32 votes there, like five or six people like that. But there is one person who was absolutely serving in the legislature, who was there by virtue of a single vote. And that's a fact that person is alive and well. And you might have been the person who did not go to vote. But you really rather have had the, the, you know, the opponent. Or you might be the person who wrote to you who did go vote, because you wanted to make sure your voice was heard. And that one vote mattered. Everybody who voted for that person can claim my it could have been it was my vote. And this was after a lot of evil, we had to literally wait for a vote to come in from overseas, where there was a military person or military family who sent him that one vote that made a difference. So it really does make make a difference. And the thing I want people to always remember, it is an easy thing to say. But the result of your doing of your of your not voting can be it can be pretty catastrophic. I don't want I don't want to overstate it. But the things that matter to you, every single things that you think that you'd like to see changed, I guarantee, if you have a conversation with me about it, I can show you how it goes back to a vote. If you want better housing that goes back to a vote, if you want an opportunity to have a better job, or a job at all that goes back to a vote, if you would like if you get down to that local level, if you'd like your street paved if you've liked your your country road, like I you know, lived on for so long. If you want your your road paved, that's a county judge that's covered on these kinds of things. So all the things that matter to you tend to go back to a vote. And if you don't speak up and say with your vote, this is what I like, I guarantee you, somebody else will step into this space. But for me the biggest triggering thing for me to vote, I pay taxes, everybody pays taxes, I don't go around just you know, except for somebody who was on house or whatever it needs, you know, a sandwich, I might say, here's \$5 to go buy a sandwich. But you don't go around just handing your money to legislators or people who are in office no matter where they are. I don't go around just given them write a check and give them my tax money. But I do give them my tax money in the form of taxation almost every time I buy something, you should not be content to keep handing your money over to people who are going to make all these decisions. And you have nothing to say about. If I jerked money out of your back pocket, I guarantee you, you would have something to say about it. Why is it in a different that you hand your money over to somebody who's making decisions with your money. And your way of telling them how you want them to use your money is through your vote. You know, don't let somebody pick your pocket, and you have nothing to say about it. Because that's what's happening to you.

L

Lani Jennings-Hall 38:20

Historically, for those some of those local elections with this lower turnout, each vote is even more significant. So I think you hit on some of those, you know, your local roads paved, like some of those very small day to day stuff that you were talking about? I mean, thosethat hit those local elections. That is that's a big deal. Every single vote, I mean, it matters in every election, but those locals with the with the less turnout.

R

Rebecca Zimmerman 38:47

I think another way to look at it is Senator Elliott works for her constituents, their employee, she's there to represent them and make sure that she's doing what she needs to do to improve the lives of the people she represents. And so if you don't want to, as she say, like, do politics, you can consider who you want to hire to you at the Capitol and invest, invest your tax dollars for state and something else. Senator Elliott was talking about that, you know, one vote one

way or the other can make all the difference. I mean, the end of the day decisions are made by the people who show up. And if you're not showing up for yourself, you probably won't like some of the decisions that are getting made at different levels of government. And so you have to show up for yourself. You have to show up for your children show up for your community.

S Senator Joyce Elliott 39:46

I want it to be something you said earlier Rebecca was about folks who will say well, there's no point in my call they my legislate or this that's not going to matter. And I always say to people, that's exactly Wait where you go wrong, because you assume it's not going to matter. And guess what you are assuring that person, you are assuring that person know, you really don't matter. Because what they will forever get to say, I never heard from any. And this happens a lot. I never heard from anybody in my district whatsoever. My folks in my district don't want that. And you really whatever that is. And I have had the experience many, many times, people who will know that whatever the issue is, I'm on their side, and I am for this, and I get all these letters asking me to do what I'm already going to do. And the person who's not my constituent, and elected folks should expect to hear from you, when they don't hear from you. That's just assuring them. It doesn't matter whether you do what I want you to do or not. And the same folks who are sending me an email about something they know I already agree and they have another senator, I usually write back whenever I have the time to do it. Thank you for being in touch. But please call your or whatever your state senator, because that matters. That that's an easy way for people to get off being responsible to you, and you keep on paying taxes, and they keep on using your money away they want to use your money, then that's just something you can do something about by just showing up and being consistent.

L Lani Jennings-Hall 41:28

You know, so there, there's been a lot of hype over the last couple of weeks, September 11, through the 17th was National Disability voting rights week. So a lot of push for that as well as national voter registration day on September 20. So there has been a lot of social hype, how else can we get involved to get people to register to get active in in voting? What are other ways we can get involved?

S Senator Joyce Elliott 41:57

I know one way you can get involved with us and Get Loud Arkansas, because we're always looking for volunteers. And you can go to our website. And it's not up yet, but it's going to be soon. So I want you to be looking for we've created a simplified way, just a whole, it's not it's not a lot of stuff. But it's a it's a full packet on if you wanted to write at your church or write in your community, or whatever it is, if you wanted to set up a registration opportunity for people, it tells you step by step, every single thing you do to get prepared and what you do at the end of it. So we're gonna have that up on our website. I think maybe sometime next week at Get Loud Arkansas, you don't have to wait for somebody and you should not wait for somebody you know that thing about, I've been waiting for somebody and I figured out that somebody's me, it will give you a step by step. And if something you don't understand you have a phone number you can call to make sure you're not waiting for everybody else. But when Get Loud Arkansas, and there are other groups out there doing the same thing, you know, going different places

around the state and holding, you know, these events, to encourage you to bring people out to vote, go to events that you know, are regular events that are happening in a place where there's a lot of traffic, you can take registration forms, get out there, and you have to just have the courage to ask people about it be nice, and don't preach to people about it. Don't say things to people like well, I just can't believe you are not registered, well. If they're not registered, that's not going to make them do it. Because as we said earlier, there's no need and we should not embarrass people or you know, make them feel as if somehow they are just, you know, poor citizens because they did not and and so I mean, those are some of the things that you can connect to. But those are the kinds of things that I would suggest. And we've tried to be very intentional about putting together something that people that was user friendly.

R

Rebecca Zimmerman 44:07

I just added you know if you can get to an event or host a session yourself to register people to vote, read, just text your friends, reach out to your friends and family and see if they're registered to vote, let them know that the deadline is coming at see if you can help them. They may not have envelopes or stamps and we can provide those because we're finally Arkansas one of only a few states that don't have online voter registration. But if you can't, you know, go to these community events. Just reach out to your own personal community or your own friends and family and see if you can help them register to vote.

S

Senator Joyce Elliott 44:47

Yeah, that's a good idea.

A

Ally Thomlinson 44:48

Arkansas Alliance for Disability Advocacy has been having Mock Votes around the state of Arkansas and partnering with a lot of great organizations nice and long boats have heard from the local county clerk to the senator or the representative from that district teaching you exactly how to register to vote, how to change your registration, if you're living in a new area familiar with the individuals that can help you how to contact the individuals who are actually representing you, all the way down to the point of actually practicing placing your ballot on an accessible polling machine, we all started somewhere, right, we were all unregistered. At one point, we all walked up to a ballot box and didn't know how to use it. So what we want to do is we want to break down all insecurity, we want people from being frightened, you know, and really tell them that it's okay to not know what you don't know. And it's uncomfortable and make them feel empowered, we let them practice as many times as they need to, so they can leave and get excited about voting. So we can register individuals there, we tell them exactly what they need to know about the actual actually participating and voting, and whether it's how to make sure that it's and if it's not accessible, who they need to cool. Um, you know, if they need to actually change that registration, and that county clerk is the person that's going to help them out and kind of make a personal relationship with them. Your county clerk wants to help you. That's what they're there for. Having Advocacy Takes Action Mock Votes around the state of Arkansas. And so we're always excited to have new voters excited about this. And even you know, our seasoned voters who can actually help others work down all those insecurities about getting to the ballot box.

S

Senator Joyce Elliott 46:42

That's, that's great. And one of the things that we are dealing with is making sure if there is a, let's just say, for some Marshalese population to try to make sure we we have materials or whatever, we have that reflected in their language. And if you can get somebody to work with, you know, volunteer, that's been belts of volunteers, we really need a great deal. And we've been lucky to get to find people for sure, you know, who are Spanish speakers. And, but I always think about that, because that to me is like the people who cannot read it no matter what language is, and, or those who just need it in their language. Those are just things we need to talk about if somebody, you know, doesn't see very well, and they just need you to read something to them. And whatever it is, I always just sort of think about folks, okay, well, what about this? What about this, and the more I interact with people, the more I learn about the inaccessibility, you don't learn it less you get out there and let yourself be uncomfortable. Because imagine how uncomfortable other people are, we have to just do it as well.

R

Rebecca Zimmerman 47:47

And I don't mean to talk about all the laws that I wish there was around this, last General Assembly session that would have required that voting materials be available in plain language. Because some of it can be very technical. And things like that would be an easy fix, that would make it a lot easier for people to vote to register to vote and be part of the process.

S

Senator Joyce Elliott 48:21

And there was also a bill to allow to, you know, to make things speak and making things easier to allow people to be able to register, you know, online. And we got into all this talk once again, kind of like we did with a voter ID or there was not really a problem, but we're going to make up one to to justify what we're doing. And everybody kept talking about, you know how Oh, that's going to affect the integrity of the vote or just leave it open for all kinds of, you know, misbehaving, because it's online. And it was just so absurd, because it's I think it's every state except, I mean, maybe a handful, something like eight states. And I think there were states who other states in the country who added themselves, you know, to the whole who added online voter registration during last session. But it's just a small number of states not doing so. And everybody's sitting there. Every single one of us is sitting there with a computer in front of us provided by the state that we put all kinds of information on. But we can't let people register by mail. Every one of us rips out that credit card and buy something online. I mean, that you're not as worried about your pocketbook as you are about somebody is going to cheat us out of a vote or something or somebody is going to register in a way that they're they're going to pretend they're somebody they're not but there are measures to get at all of that. There's just no good reason other than we once again, we just didn't do it. But yeah, put your money online, but I can't even vote. I can't register online. And we're not even When asked about voting, it's just let me sign up, dude. I mean, there's no way. Yeah, and that's a real problem. Kinda think about what that could mean to people who have challenges in challenges and get, you know, and just simply registering the vote what that could mean to people?

L

Iani Ienninos-Hall 50:17

Ed Jennings from 50:17

Yes, absolutely. And I do just want to just for our listeners size, a reminder, you can always register to vote, but you must be registered to vote at least 30 days before your election, you can find those forms on the Secretary of State's website, I know at DRA, we have a link to it as well in different languages. And there are so many different places that have the link available to you, but just Yes, get registered.

S

Senator Joyce Elliott 50:44

yeah, that's a good reminder. Because you know, when sometimes people would, we're doing it by hand, we can miss something or whatever, we highlight all the things you absolutely should not miss. But we also have that kind of link on getting out Arkansas. But it's, when you're filling out the form, you can fill it out online. But it's like, you know, when you're trying to do something, and you miss us, you miss a space, and it says, Nope, you can't go any further until you until you do this. So we have something that you can't mess up. You cannot mess up on that form, because it will make you do what you're supposed to do before you can print it. And I love that. But you print it out. And then all you have to do is sign it and get it into the Secretary of State or your or your local clerk. But there's things like that should be easy to vote. I live in Minnesota one year. And when they told me that I didn't have to bother with registering before the election, I didn't believe them. They say oh, you can just why don't you don't have to do that. Just register when you go to vote. I go like no, I'm from Arkansas. I know. I'm thinking No, no, it's 30 days or something, how it was the number of days that I have to be registered. And like and the person kept repeating it to me. I just did not believe it. I didn't I thought it was some trick to keep this arkansan from voting. And I said, Well, okay, it was a person that I trusted. And I went to the polls that day, I can imagine about person going for the first time for the first time, I had such anxiety about going because I was so afraid I was going to be turned away. And somebody were going to say Oh, my God, your school teacher, you didn't have enough sense to know that you were supposed to register. That's just what I felt. And I got there. And I was I was gone probably in 10 minutes, I mean, registered and gone in about 10 minutes, because there was not a long line. So I was just amazed that oh, why don't we have this one. But that's another one of those things.

A

Ally Thomlinson 52:38

I think that's a very productive conversation for our listeners not only to remind them to get registered, but to really understand the impact of voting every single time they get a chance. And we want to throw out a couple of fastball questions for you a little rapid fire with my Lani and Ally. So Joyce, I want to ask you about voter purging. What that is why people need to be aware of that and what we need to know to make sure that we can stay on the registration list.

S

Senator Joyce Elliott 53:08

If you don't vote like in two major election cycles like foreign lead to major life cycles hazard like for the President, there is a federal law that requires maintenance the voter rolls and maintenance means that for some counties, it's done differently. Say in my county, maybe my clerk sensitive says you haven't voted and whatever the amount of time and I will get a white card in my case I know in the mail saying that you haven't voted you'll be removed from the rolls. And what that means is you could show up thinking you're registered to vote and you're

not. So number one I suggest everybody check especially if you've not voted in some time and you don't know when's the last time when's the last time you voted. You need to check to see if you are on the roll and I know there's there's a place that private separate websites but there isn't get loud Arkansas you can put your information in it'll tell you whether or not you are official some some people never know that they've been been purged from the rolls. Get Loud Arkansas with purging we've identified 104,000 People have been removed from the roll. We had a press release out about it yesterday. And it's it's an it's out there and people are now learning about you may be purged, go check. And the other thing people need to really look at if you have changed your name. For example. We've done a lot of work with the LGBTQIA community because some people may be transitioning, they might have changed their names or whatever. It's not just because you got married or you got a divorce. If you have changed anything about your registration, your name, your address or whatever. There is a place on the registration form where you just fill out that part. Not the whole re registering. But if you've changed your address any of that you need to be sure you you pay attention to that, because that will have the same effect of having been removed because she won't be able to vote.

A

Ally Thomlinson 55:04

Thank you so much for sharing that with us. I know that's very important go to Get Loud Arkansas's webpage to check on that and go to voterview.com Or even call your county clerk, make sure you are ready to vote, make sure that you're still registered, make sure that you have everything that you need before you go that valuable.

L

Lani Jennings-Hall 55:21

So we talked about the impact of some of the local elections, you know, voting and each one is important. What about say the justice of the peace? What does your vote for the justice of the peace impact? Like? What decisions are they making that impact your daily life?

S

Senator Joyce Elliott 55:34

Remember, when we talked about these local races, and there was something called a quorum court that's like your county legislature. It's just called a quorum court, like I served at the Capitol, I'm called a senator, the person who serves your area, and everybody has a justice of the peace. So the key impact of that, that justice of the peace, everybody tend lot of people tend to think, Oh, I just married people. Well, they can but that's not their major function, where you get to vote on Election Day, will be determined. And how many voting places do you have will be determined by your your quorum court, whether or not that road that goes that gravel, road, something, a road, that should be gravel, but it's really just mud that goes by your church, and every Sunday, your car's a mess, because you had to drive on that same road, whether or not school buses have access to good roads, to take kids to school and not get stuck in the mud. These are literal things that happen, because the that your justices of the peace will have will have to make decisions about those county roads, not the state roads so much, but the county roads, whether or not you're justices of the peace paired up with the legislature or somebody else. So you can have a good drinking water, all these things matters. Whether whether or not your your county has access to some of the funds that come from the state. That depends on because there are things that form courts have to do with the state in

order to get money coming back to the county. If they're not doing that things just pass you by whether or not your library is going to be open, whether or not we're at the house, that's generally that's a county function. How many hours is going to be open? Are we going to pay people in that library to so that you can get good services? And whether or not we are going to allow our libraries to be used for so much of what's going on right now where people are trying to ban books and everything. I mean, it's all those things that are really important to eat locally. That is what's your county legislature call the quorum court. And the people who serve you call the justices of the peace. That's part of what they're all about. And I probably just touched the surface. And the biggest one of all I left out when I talked about taxes earlier, you pay taxes, or your your county every time you know every time you pay those taxes or that money is decided how it's going to be spent. Even money they get from the state. How it's going to be spent depends on who you put in those seats.

A

Ally Thomlinson 58:20

Oh, Rebecca, what do you guys have going on that can really educate individuals on what's going on. I know you've all usually have a guide that everyone can refer back to.

R

Rebecca Zimmerman 58:32

Yeah, so I think it's really important for people to educate themselves as much as they can before they go to vote about the issues and candidates that are running for office. Arkansas advocates for children, families, we don't endorse or oppose any candidates or political parties. But we do put out a voters guide every election year that gives overviews of important issues impacting kids and families and gives them sample questions for the candidates to get their views on issues impacting children. And I really encourage people to go to if they can to events that have candidates speaking on different issues, ask them questions to get their point of views. You can view our voters guide at aradvocates.org. And then under the advocacy tab, you can link to our voters guide. And that also has those hotline numbers that you can call if you're turned away from the polls, but are also one good piece of legislation that passed last year required that everyone Arkansas should be able to view their sample ballot online. So you can go on Arkansas voter view and see your ballot ahead of time and see all the different candidate races.

A

Ally Thomlinson 59:59

the I do want to make sure that our listeners know the first thing that they have to do is speak up for themselves, they have to use their voice, they run into a problem, we need to make sure that they own their power, and they say something about it right then don't miss out on a chance to cast your ballot, don't miss out on a chance to register, whatever, wherever you're at in your process. If you don't speak up about the issues that you're facing the barriers that you're facing, then no one is going to know about that. We want you to practice self determination. I want you to practice your self advocacy. I want you to take a stand and say this is the barrier. I'm not able to do this because this is causing me this issue. And then talk to a poll worker, whether you then call your county clerk whether you in call Disability route to

Arkansas, whatever your next step is, in that process, you first have to use your power, you've practiced that self advocacy, because no one is going to be there to help you but at the same time, you're actually facing the barrier.



Lani Jennings-Hall 1:01:03

Thank you so much for joining us today. This radio broadcast will also be published on our website alongside the show notes with any links or resources mentioned in today's show. Make sure you check it out. Thank you for listening and remember to Speak Up Arkansas