

inSocialWork Podcast Series – Voting is Social Work

Speaker 1 [00:00:10] Hi, everybody, and welcome back to in social work, I'm Peter Sobota. Most would argue that social work is in the social change business with the empowerment of people and a special regard for folks who are marginalized and disenfranchised groups as it's core activity. Social change is not for the faint of heart, at least when I check the paper this morning we were still a representative democracy and politics and the exercise of power. We're still the playing field for putting our collective ideals and values into action. So is social work a political activity? Well, it's the social order is a human construction. That means it can also be changed. If we can agree on that, we deny the possibility of social change and pretty much deny the possibility that social work is a profession that can act for social change. Cue the apocalyptic music today our guests Madeline Perez de Jesus and Cindy Dubuque-Gallo will argue that voting is social work. They will tell us about their work with the National Social Work Voter Registration Campaign and the 2020 National Voter Registration Day project. I'll ask them to offer their insights as to why social work political activity should be an essential, not a so-called extra aspect of our professional focus and activity. Madeline Perez de Jesus, Ph.D., is associate professor of social work and equitable community practice at the University of St. Joseph in Connecticut, and Cindy Dubuque-Gallo, LMSW, who is a Ph.D. student at the UCONN School of Social Work and adjunct professor of Social Work at the University of St. Joseph in Connecticut. I'm Madeline. Hi, Cindy. Welcome to inSocialWork.

Speaker 2 [00:01:59] Thank you, Peter. Thank you.

Speaker 3 [00:02:01] So we

Speaker 1 [00:02:02] actually pursued you, as you well know, because we were interested in your work with the National Social Work Voter Mobilization

Speaker 3 [00:02:11] campaign.

Speaker 1 [00:02:12] And I guess it's also known as voting is social work. Could we just start with you telling us about

Speaker 3 [00:02:19] that campaign and

Speaker 1 [00:02:21] you know what you're up to? What drew you to that?

Speaker 2 [00:02:23] Yeah. So we're social work educators, social workers, and we've always been engaged in voter registration, education and mobilization work through our agencies.

Speaker 3 [00:02:34] But as we were

Speaker 2 [00:02:35] reflecting on what drew us to this, we realized that it wasn't just our professional commitments, but also personal commitments like we had

Speaker 3 [00:02:42] stories of when we first

Speaker 2 [00:02:44] voted for the first time and how that was acknowledged as really significant milestones, a rite of passage in our families,

Speaker 3 [00:02:50] right?

Speaker 2 [00:02:51] So that was a really important that it was personal commitments, braided with professional commitments. But the year 2020, as everybody knows, has been challenging and strange for a lot of reasons.

Speaker 3 [00:03:04] Yeah, I've heard about that. Yeah, yeah.

Speaker 2 [00:03:06] And some of the things that came up for me in terms of

Speaker 3 [00:03:11] voting was

Speaker 2 [00:03:13] really having a passion for all people to be able to vote, particularly in marginalized populations. But I had the

Speaker 3 [00:03:19] opportunity to support

Speaker 2 [00:03:21] two specific populations. One is first time voters, so folks who are just turning 18 and voting for

Speaker 3 [00:03:27] the first time, I think possibly because of our own families

Speaker 2 [00:03:31] kind of making that a big

Speaker 3 [00:03:32] deal, but also because

Speaker 2 [00:03:34] I work with a lot of 18 year olds through a first year seminar class at the University of St. Joseph. So there was a natural opportunity

Speaker 3 [00:03:41] there to partner with us

Speaker 2 [00:03:42] in the event supporting young people

Speaker 3 [00:03:44] with voting, but

Speaker 2 [00:03:45] also as a Puerto Rican woman, right? In 2017, Hurricane Maria impacted what the people gosh. Over 45000

Speaker 3 [00:03:54] people died

Speaker 2 [00:03:56] as a result of

Speaker 3 [00:03:57] the hurricane, and many

Speaker 2 [00:03:59] thousands of people moved to the United States. And I'm not sure of all the listeners are aware of this. But because Puerto Rico is a commonwealth to the United States, they're not eligible to vote for president nor to have representatives in the House of Congress.

Speaker 3 [00:04:12] So here we had

Speaker 2 [00:04:13] 130000 Puerto Ricans who left the island to go to Florida. New York City. Our state of Connecticut were eligible to vote for the

Speaker 3 [00:04:20] first time after having

Speaker 2 [00:04:21] survived the trauma of a hurricane. So that was certainly another inspiration for me to to get involved in a national scope.

Speaker 4 [00:04:29] I've been doing kind of political

Speaker 3 [00:04:30] advocacy, voting

Speaker 4 [00:04:32] and civic engagement

Speaker 3 [00:04:33] work since I was about 12 first started

Speaker 4 [00:04:36] working on my first campaign. Then my father took me out of school in third grade to go to a Dukakis rally.

Speaker 3 [00:04:42] But it's

Speaker 4 [00:04:43] an honor to be part

Speaker 3 [00:04:44] of National

Speaker 4 [00:04:45] Social Worker Voter Mobilization campaign, which started in 2016. Its goal is really to work on nonpartisan voter engagement among social workers to get them more involved in that realm,

Speaker 3 [00:04:56] and we get to work with a

Speaker 4 [00:04:57] great leadership

Speaker 3 [00:04:58] team. Terry Moran. Maybe a raw

Speaker 4 [00:05:00] image. Uh-Huh. Tony Smith,

Speaker 3 [00:05:03] Jagmohan. I don't want to leave anybody out.

Speaker 2 [00:05:06] Yeah, we'll get everybody, you

Speaker 4 [00:05:08] know, is a great crew.

Speaker 1 [00:05:11] So a couple of folks who have been around the block a little bit certainly don't want

Speaker 2 [00:05:14] anybody out there, especially because, you know, Terry Ryan, Mimi Abramowitz where my professors back in the 90s at Hunter. So that definitely the opportunity

Speaker 3 [00:05:24] to be side

Speaker 2 [00:05:25] by side with them and a leadership team after having them be my mentors for so many years is really attractive and to work with you.

Speaker 4 [00:05:32] Yeah. And so I got brought in. I work with the Nancy Humphries Institute for Political

Speaker 3 [00:05:36] Social Work, and

Speaker 4 [00:05:38] I was first approached

Speaker 3 [00:05:39] by Tanya to provide some

Speaker 4 [00:05:41] assistance on our voting and social work website, which is a great tool for people to use. If you haven't gone to

Speaker 3 [00:05:46] that website and really focused

Speaker 4 [00:05:48] on helping with content and format and finding ways to connect with people so that they would have the resources that they need to be more accessible to voting?

Speaker 1 [00:05:58] Yeah, thanks. So one of the things that piqued our interest about the two of you was a short article that I think might have appeared

Speaker 3 [00:06:07] in New Social Worker. Yes. Is that right? Yeah. And so

Speaker 1 [00:06:11] you wrote a brief article

Speaker 3 [00:06:13] about national voter registration

Speaker 1 [00:06:16] day and

Speaker 3 [00:06:16] a project that you

Speaker 1 [00:06:18] were involved

Speaker 3 [00:06:19] with. Could you give

Speaker 1 [00:06:19] us like a brief

Speaker 3 [00:06:21] take on what

Speaker 1 [00:06:22] you were up to there and what that was all about?

Speaker 4 [00:06:25] Yeah. So, you know, we always try to give students an opportunity to

Speaker 3 [00:06:29] exercise community organizing

Speaker 4 [00:06:30] skills and to learn about civic engagement on

Speaker 3 [00:06:33] the ground.

Speaker 4 [00:06:34] So this project really involved inviting social work students

Speaker 3 [00:06:38] to go out and actively

Speaker 4 [00:06:40] register their peers, their colleagues, their friends, their neighbors, their

Speaker 3 [00:06:44] waiter, their lawn

Speaker 4 [00:06:45] or their hairstylists

Speaker 3 [00:06:47] to vote.

Speaker 4 [00:06:47] And on this

Speaker 3 [00:06:48] particular day, we

Speaker 4 [00:06:50] had set up a voter registration drive on campus, and we gathered a number of students who were helping us out and stationing around campus. And we had seen a flier that read it was National Voter Registration Day and were like, Great, the school's already on board. This is so

Speaker 3 [00:07:06] exciting. And so

Speaker 4 [00:07:07] we set up shop and we sent the students out into classrooms and to the student center and the

Speaker 3 [00:07:13] library, and they had a mix of reactions,

Speaker 4 [00:07:16] as one would expect.

Speaker 2 [00:07:18] Yeah, absolutely. We prepared them to do that on

Speaker 3 [00:07:21] campus and then also at

Speaker 2 [00:07:22] their

Speaker 3 [00:07:23] agencies, and

Speaker 2 [00:07:24] it was fascinating. Here we are engaging

Speaker 3 [00:07:27] people to register

Speaker 2 [00:07:29] to vote.

Speaker 3 [00:07:29] That involves going up to

Speaker 2 [00:07:31] people you don't

Speaker 3 [00:07:31] know in close

Speaker 2 [00:07:32] proximity and talking to them. Everybody's masked and it was last year.

Speaker 3 [00:07:36] So I think the COVID aspects of that

Speaker 2 [00:07:38] we understood, I think some of the other things that came up is we would have

Speaker 3 [00:07:44] colleagues

Speaker 2 [00:07:45] who really questioned the relevance of voter registration.

Speaker 3 [00:07:50] So the work, this is the juicy part.

Speaker 2 [00:07:52] Yeah, yeah. Yeah, there was also some apathy, but I don't think fully surprised us. You know, it was a tough year. There was a lot going on and people were not feeling

Speaker 3 [00:08:01] like they had a

Speaker 2 [00:08:02] lot of power in their

Speaker 3 [00:08:04] voice.

Speaker 2 [00:08:04] So that was happening as well.

Speaker 3 [00:08:06] There were other groups

Speaker 2 [00:08:08] on campus doing voter registration work, which is wonderful, but there was a lack of coordination around

Speaker 3 [00:08:13] that. So there was some

Speaker 2 [00:08:15] regret around that because it could have been some shared labor under the umbrella of everybody doing voter registration work, and instead there was a little bit of arm wrestling around who gets the credit for doing it, which which was too bad. So that was a lesson learned there as well.

Speaker 3 [00:08:30] That can

Speaker 4 [00:08:30] add to that is a really interesting situation because when you're

Speaker 3 [00:08:33] registering people to vote and you're from a

Speaker 4 [00:08:35] particular organization, they actually

Speaker 3 [00:08:37] track the number of people that they're registering and whether

Speaker 4 [00:08:41] it's for grant purposes or what

Speaker 3 [00:08:43] have you. And so that's

Speaker 4 [00:08:45] when this kind of strange conflict comes

Speaker 3 [00:08:47] in and you're like,

Speaker 4 [00:08:48] Wait, we're all trying to get people registered

Speaker 3 [00:08:50] to vote here. So there were

Speaker 2 [00:08:51] definitely some, some lessons in there.

Speaker 1 [00:08:53] You know, I have some question about the lessons, but you know, I don't want to just focus on that. Were there positive outcomes? I'm assuming there were.

Speaker 2 [00:09:02] Yeah. So in terms of some positive outcomes, it did give us one of the few on the ground real life opportunities to support our students with the important social skills of

Speaker 3 [00:09:11] engagement during a

Speaker 2 [00:09:13] time when,

Speaker 3 [00:09:14] in order to honor

Speaker 2 [00:09:15] health and safety, we had to keep a distance and we were getting really creative with how to engage people in the social work practice with individuals. I think the other thing it really allowed us the opportunity to reframe voting.

Speaker 3 [00:09:28] It allowed us to reframe

Speaker 2 [00:09:29] voter registration were from this kind of irrelevant add on that a lot of people assumed that it was to really at the core of social work. And the way that we did that was by reminding people of our

Speaker 3 [00:09:44] country's troubled

Speaker 2 [00:09:46] history with voter disenfranchisement and

Speaker 3 [00:09:48] how women

Speaker 2 [00:09:49] didn't get the right to vote until the 1920s. And even then it was white. Women and women of color came later when men of color got to vote. They were given incorrect polling places and.

Speaker 3 [00:09:59] What poll taxes and people had

Speaker 2 [00:10:01] seemed to have forgotten

Speaker 3 [00:10:02] that history or didn't

Speaker 2 [00:10:03] really view voting

Speaker 3 [00:10:05] now as an

Speaker 2 [00:10:06] opportunity to reclaim and disrupt really what is intergenerational trauma around voter disenfranchisement so that that was definitely a take away and a positive to inspire people around that legacy and disrupting that.

Speaker 4 [00:10:21] I think there are other positives that I saw. Yeah. First, we got to role model for students that community engagement and walking right up to folks,

Speaker 3 [00:10:29] having them practice those skills and for

Speaker 4 [00:10:31] them to kind of go through that struggle and

Speaker 3 [00:10:33] reflect. So I thought

Speaker 4 [00:10:34] that was a really positive

Speaker 3 [00:10:35] aspect of it.

Speaker 4 [00:10:36] Another positive aspect is that we registered people to vote. I mean, that was the mission and it was accomplished. That is at the core

Speaker 3 [00:10:44] for me, the most positive

Speaker 4 [00:10:46] thing that you can have followed up with the action of

Speaker 3 [00:10:48] voting. And then

Speaker 4 [00:10:50] the other positive thing there was this really positive incident that happened at the library where a student was coming in with a tour guide, a young woman who was looking at the school and she came in

Speaker 3 [00:11:01] with her mother.

Speaker 4 [00:11:02] And so I stepped forward and I said, Hi, we're doing voter registration today. Are you registered to vote? And the tour guide is looking at me horrified. And I'm like, This is a perfect opportunity. Right? Yeah, no. What I want to see if the tour

Speaker 3 [00:11:16] guides registered,

Speaker 4 [00:11:17] what happened to other people

Speaker 3 [00:11:19] register. And so

Speaker 4 [00:11:21] ultimately,

Speaker 3 [00:11:22] the mother

Speaker 4 [00:11:23] turns to me and

Speaker 3 [00:11:23] says, Well, she's

Speaker 4 [00:11:25] 17.

Speaker 3 [00:11:25] She's not old enough. And I very

Speaker 4 [00:11:27] quickly said back to the student or the prospective student. When's your

Speaker 3 [00:11:31] birthday? She said, My birthday's

Speaker 4 [00:11:32] on Election Day, I said, you can register

Speaker 3 [00:11:34] to vote because as long as

Speaker 4 [00:11:36] you will be 18 by Election Day, you can

Speaker 3 [00:11:38] register to vote. That really

Speaker 4 [00:11:39] bright spot it for me is that

Speaker 3 [00:11:41] this parent could have

Speaker 4 [00:11:43] inadvertently disenfranchised

Speaker 3 [00:11:44] her daughter, and that

Speaker 4 [00:11:45] was a lesson

Speaker 3 [00:11:46] learned for her because she had

Speaker 4 [00:11:47] no idea.

Speaker 1 [00:11:48] So I would chalk that up as a really good campus to her. Yes, ma'am. Now, you know, we're kind of the quiet here, at least the three of us when it comes to the things that we're talking about,

Speaker 3 [00:12:02] I would bet. But I

Speaker 1 [00:12:03] mean, obviously, we're all

Speaker 3 [00:12:04] academics and we

Speaker 1 [00:12:06] probably all know that when it comes to schools of

Speaker 3 [00:12:09] social work, many, many

Speaker 1 [00:12:11] students, you know, over at our place here in Buffalo, I would say it's probably in the neighborhood of at least 50 percent come to an MSW program, at least with a strong beginning inclination to do clinical social work. And so we like the micro level is kind of where they want to live now. That changes sometimes what they hear, but sometimes it doesn't.

Speaker 3 [00:12:32] We could do a podcast

Speaker 1 [00:12:33] about whether or not that's a good

Speaker 3 [00:12:34] thing. Obviously, however, when I read

Speaker 1 [00:12:37] your

Speaker 3 [00:12:37] article and I

Speaker 1 [00:12:38] saw some of the comments related to some of the reluctance and the hesitancy from both social work students and social work educators about the whole notion of even doing this, that kind of piqued my

Speaker 3 [00:12:51] interest. So I believe

Speaker 1 [00:12:53] our researcher, Kate got a hold of some quotes from your

Speaker 3 [00:12:56] participants. So what I'd like

Speaker 1 [00:12:58] to do is read some of the quotes that you received and then just give the two of you a chance to respond to those in any way that you'd like. Are you up for it?

Speaker 3 [00:13:09] It sounds great. You're like a game show.

Speaker 1 [00:13:12] Yeah, yeah. Yeah, this

Speaker 3 [00:13:13] would be fun. So the first quote

Speaker 1 [00:13:15] is from a school of social work faculty member, and the quote is voting rights is not my area of

Speaker 3 [00:13:21] expertise, and I don't

Speaker 1 [00:13:23] see how this would really fit into my coursework.

Speaker 4 [00:13:26] Essentially, my response to that is our code of ethics is grounded in social justice and voting, and civic engagement is at the core of all of practice, whether it's micro or macro. And for my hardcore micro friends

Speaker 3 [00:13:43] out there, I would say, you know, just

Speaker 4 [00:13:45] look at Bandura and self advocacy. Voting is a way that people feel empowered and exercised their self efficacy,

Speaker 2 [00:13:51] and it's part of systems theory, right? Social work is all about supporting people and navigating complex systems and supporting them with ensuring that they know their rights and enact their rights. It's an extension of that.

Speaker 1 [00:14:05] I have another you ready? Yeah, I'm pretty sure that this one came from somebody who you were talking to. I don't know enough about the candidates to make an informed

Speaker 3 [00:14:14] decision, and I'm way too

Speaker 1 [00:14:16] busy to do that. Extra research now.

Speaker 4 [00:14:18] Yeah, this one I like because my response to this

Speaker 3 [00:14:22] generally is

Speaker 4 [00:14:24] getting registered to vote is being equipped to go play

Speaker 3 [00:14:26] in the game, right? If you're not

Speaker 4 [00:14:28] registered to vote, you can't even go to the ballot box. And so registering to vote, whether or not you know who the candidates are.

Speaker 3 [00:14:35] There are two very

Speaker 4 [00:14:35] separate

Speaker 3 [00:14:36] activities. Once you get

Speaker 4 [00:14:37] registered, you have the opportunity to participate. But if you're not even registered to

Speaker 3 [00:14:42] vote, then participation

Speaker 4 [00:14:43] is not going to happen. After that, you can start looking into candidates in many different ways.

Speaker 2 [00:14:48] And I think from a strength perspective, we're going to really honor that. That person already knows that the research needs to happen

Speaker 3 [00:14:54] there already knowing

Speaker 2 [00:14:56] that there are critical thinker and that they have to assess that information that's going to. And you're right, that does take time. But registering actually doesn't take that much time, and it's, as Cindy said, just kind of entering the game so that your voice is valid.

Speaker 3 [00:15:08] Mm hmm. OK, and here's the last one.

Speaker 1 [00:15:10] My county always votes the same way, so my vote doesn't really make a difference anyway.

Speaker 3 [00:15:15] Oh gosh. Well, we were

Speaker 2 [00:15:16] discussing about how there have been so many elections that have been won just marginally right there

Speaker 4 [00:15:23] with 200 some odd

Speaker 3 [00:15:25] votes. There was an

Speaker 4 [00:15:26] election down in the shoreline in Connecticut that there was a multiple recount and the state rep ended up winning by seven votes. So if that doesn't tell you your vote matters, I don't know what does.

Speaker 1 [00:15:36] Yeah, yeah. We have had school board elections that I would argue are a very big deal determined by one or two votes here in western New York.

Speaker 4 [00:15:45] Yeah. Yeah.

Speaker 1 [00:15:46] Scary thought. Yeah. All right. Well, thank you too for being game. So I really feel we have the opportunity to. I mean, clearly your passion for this is very evident.

Speaker 3 [00:15:57] So I would

Speaker 1 [00:15:57] like to use the opportunity to maybe kind of pick both

Speaker 3 [00:16:01] of your brains around

Speaker 1 [00:16:02] what this means in the context of

Speaker 3 [00:16:04] our profession and social

Speaker 1 [00:16:06] work, education and the larger environment, you know, the macro environment. So if I could, you would think, I think that social workers of all people would kind of be hip to the

Speaker 3 [00:16:17] relationship of voting to social

Speaker 1 [00:16:20] and political action and the exercise of power and authority. You know, just to name a few. Certainly, I think our Code of Ethics and the CCW, we call very clearly for this kind of social justice action. Yet social workers, many of them remain hesitant, might even say apathetic to this issue. What gives there? What's that all about, in your opinion?

Speaker 2 [00:16:48] We are so fortunate that over the past year we've had the opportunity to do a number of informational webinars, two different chapters of NSW

Speaker 3 [00:16:56] at

Speaker 2 [00:16:56] different states and have gotten to hear from colleagues all

Speaker 3 [00:16:59] over the country. And I know Cindy

Speaker 2 [00:17:01] and I are really appreciative

Speaker 3 [00:17:03] that people were

Speaker 2 [00:17:03] really forthcoming with us about their reservation because it

Speaker 3 [00:17:07] helps us have

Speaker 2 [00:17:08] responses to that and plan our work and really hear them and exercise not judging that. And a lot of the things that we heard is that our colleagues have felt really stretched for a time, particularly because of the medical model on this kind of pressure to bill and see clients one after the other. So they view this as very time consuming thing. Well, one of the things that we realized is that the commitment to viewing voter registration at the

Speaker 3 [00:17:34] core of social work

Speaker 2 [00:17:36] needs to be tied with authority. It has to be connected to agency heads in terms of how they frame job descriptions, how they

Speaker 3 [00:17:44] evaluate the staff.

Speaker 2 [00:17:46] You know, if it's on your staff evaluation, that certainly sends a message that it's a priority in your

Speaker 3 [00:17:51] work, part of a check

Speaker 2 [00:17:52] in during supervision, even if supervision is an hour and whether it's a team supervision, individual supervision.

Speaker 3 [00:17:58] And there's all this, you know, individual

Speaker 2 [00:18:00] client case consultations

Speaker 3 [00:18:02] for the

Speaker 2 [00:18:02] supervisor to take 30 seconds to say, How do folks do with voter registration? What are our numbers in that area that communicates from the

Speaker 3 [00:18:09] top down that it's a

Speaker 2 [00:18:11] priority and part of the mission of the organization?

Speaker 4 [00:18:14] Yeah, I think there's some myths out there, too, that you are not allowed to conduct voter registration. And now in Kansas, you

Speaker 3 [00:18:24] can't because you

Speaker 4 [00:18:25] have at risk of getting arrested for impersonating an election official. And that would be interesting to see what court challenges arise out of that and what those outcomes are. But essentially, you know, I think people think

Speaker 3 [00:18:37] if I conduct

Speaker 4 [00:18:39] voter

Speaker 3 [00:18:39] registration, then somehow

Speaker 4 [00:18:41] I'm going to be seen as being partisan. I'm going

Speaker 3 [00:18:43] to be seen as

Speaker 4 [00:18:44] violating my funding source. So there's those

Speaker 3 [00:18:48] concerns. And what I would just note

Speaker 4 [00:18:51] about that is nonpartisan. Voter registration is 100 percent OK under the Voter Registration Act of

Speaker 3 [00:18:59] 1993 in agencies

Speaker 4 [00:19:01] that have federal dollars that assist people with disabilities and other entitlements is actually

Speaker 3 [00:19:05] required. So that's

Speaker 4 [00:19:07] the

Speaker 3 [00:19:08] motor

Speaker 4 [00:19:08] voter law for those

Speaker 3 [00:19:10] with it.

Speaker 4 [00:19:10] And so I think there's that challenge and then it

Speaker 3 [00:19:13] might be people's own

Speaker 4 [00:19:14] family culture. Right. They grew up in a family that wasn't political, and now they're in a field that is and maybe they're trying to reconcile what that looks like.

Speaker 1 [00:19:22] Yeah, you both of you alluded to this earlier, this whole notion that doing voter registration or even doing anything remotely political as a social worker is kind of like extra to the job

Speaker 3 [00:19:35] you do rather than

Speaker 1 [00:19:37] an essential part of your practice. I wonder how it became that.

Speaker 4 [00:19:42] I would say insurance companies. That's my gut response. You know, I think funding sources really has a lot to do with it and bureaucratized.

Speaker 2 [00:19:51] Yeah. And what's interesting is social work is so

Speaker 3 [00:19:54] broad and I wish

Speaker 2 [00:19:56] I wish we could

Speaker 3 [00:19:57] say that within

Speaker 2 [00:19:58] social work that there was a shared a grounding ideology and that everybody shared the

Speaker 3 [00:20:02] same values. But the fact is, we don't.

Speaker 2 [00:20:04] There are some of us that enter the profession because we want to help people individually, which is

Speaker 3 [00:20:09] fine and as clinicians

Speaker 2 [00:20:11] and don't connect to our

Speaker 3 [00:20:12] macro roots, there are

Speaker 2 [00:20:13] folks that are more connected to the ideology of choice and individual decisions as opposed to the collective good, even though we're in a profession that's rooted in the collective good. Speaking to those ideologies is really important too, and it connects to voting,

Speaker 1 [00:20:29] and sometimes our diversity is kind of what makes it complicated. But, you know, I think complicated situations are served well by diversity, but they are not easy answers per se.

Speaker 3 [00:20:42] I just had a thought. I'm going to send

Speaker 1 [00:20:44] it your way. You ready? In your opinion, is social work a political activity?

Speaker 2 [00:20:49] Yes. Yes. 100 percent a thousand. Yes. Absolutely. I mean, we live in we live in a country that creates a lot of opportunity, but is also has a very troubled history that still pops up today, maybe and not as obvious ways, but we still have voter disenfranchisement today. It's just not a poll tax and might be requiring an ID in poor states where even getting an

Speaker 3 [00:21:15] ID could be a big chunk

Speaker 2 [00:21:16] of change for all sorts of things

Speaker 3 [00:21:18] related to paperwork and

Speaker 2 [00:21:20] legitimizing and all of that. It's about helping people navigate an uneven playing field

Speaker 3 [00:21:25] and dismantling oppressive

Speaker 4 [00:21:27] systems. And you can't do that unless you're part

Speaker 3 [00:21:31] of the activity of voting. It's very challenging to make those

Speaker 4 [00:21:35] changes in elite power

Speaker 3 [00:21:37] structures. If you are

Speaker 4 [00:21:39] not part

Speaker 3 [00:21:40] of choosing who's

Speaker 4 [00:21:41] participating or participating

Speaker 3 [00:21:43] yourself by running for office,

Speaker 4 [00:21:45] right? Getting on to those local school boards. Getting on to

Speaker 3 [00:21:48] those town

Speaker 4 [00:21:49] councils or zoning

Speaker 3 [00:21:50] boards, so much of where racism

Speaker 4 [00:21:53] and

Speaker 3 [00:21:54] structural oppression happens is right on

Speaker 4 [00:21:56] our local town, zoning boards and our boards of education. And so you don't

Speaker 1 [00:22:01] have to go far. Yeah, you

Speaker 4 [00:22:03] don't have to go. Yeah, it's very close to home.

Speaker 3 [00:22:05] And so

Speaker 4 [00:22:06] where social work intersects with that is helping people

Speaker 3 [00:22:09] to understand

Speaker 4 [00:22:10] that their empowerment is involved at not only showing up at these meetings and learning about these

Speaker 3 [00:22:16] issues, but then

Speaker 4 [00:22:17] becoming the decision makers themselves.

Speaker 1 [00:22:20] Yes, I am very encouraged and I'll just share this with the two

Speaker 3 [00:22:24] of you that one of our

Speaker 1 [00:22:26] recent graduates here

Speaker 3 [00:22:27] in Buffalo is

Speaker 1 [00:22:29] running for town

Speaker 3 [00:22:31] councilman in her suburban town, and

Speaker 1 [00:22:34] she has a real good chance

Speaker 3 [00:22:36] of prevailing. And you

Speaker 1 [00:22:38] know, all I need, quite frankly, is one of those stories now and

Speaker 3 [00:22:41] then where you know, it's the

Speaker 1 [00:22:43] skill set for social work is so congruent with a good foundation for being a pretty terrific public servant at the table. Like you said, the room where it happens, if you will. It makes me wonder what can we do

Speaker 3 [00:23:00] better in terms of

Speaker 1 [00:23:01] social work, education and

Speaker 3 [00:23:03] curriculums where

Speaker 1 [00:23:05] students would just be

Speaker 3 [00:23:06] frothing at the mouth

Speaker 1 [00:23:09] for these opportunities, rather than, for example, go into a human service agency and follow the ladder? You know, you take on a caseload with 7000 clients,

Speaker 3 [00:23:19] and if you do that

Speaker 1 [00:23:20] well, you might be a supervisor someday. And I don't I mean, I followed that path as a practitioner, so I'm not disparaging it.

Speaker 3 [00:23:27] But I don't

Speaker 1 [00:23:28] think a lot of our students yet realize or maybe it's something that we're not doing that the skill set they have when they're fresh out of an MSW is probably a pretty good foundation for working in the political arena. I don't know if you agree with that. I'm just kind of thinking out loud.

Speaker 2 [00:23:46] Yeah, I mean, when I think about one of the main anchors of our profession is to support the dignity and worth of all people. And I remember 25 years ago I was an intern and then was hired to work at a very small, community based organization in Brooklyn, New York Cypresses Local Development Corporation.

Speaker 3 [00:24:04] And one of

Speaker 2 [00:24:04] my first assignments was to prepare a presentation about voting for the local residents. And it was really having them identify what do they wish was different

Speaker 3 [00:24:14] about their community? Was it the

Speaker 2 [00:24:16] potholes in the street that they always had to drive

Speaker 3 [00:24:19] by? Was it the

Speaker 2 [00:24:20] fact that it was hard for them to have dignity in their neighborhood because there was no monitoring of cleaning up after your

Speaker 3 [00:24:26] dog or when

Speaker 2 [00:24:27] we got snow? We were the last neighborhood to get plowed and it would take four people would go to work late and be scared that they were going to lose their

Speaker 3 [00:24:37] income because

Speaker 2 [00:24:38] there was the public services were not supporting them with that, and it was having them articulate that and how that might

Speaker 3 [00:24:44] be different.

Speaker 2 [00:24:45] That really made a difference.

Speaker 3 [00:24:48] And I think we need

Speaker 2 [00:24:49] to be sensitive that there could be a retraumatizing of that. I think that's why sometimes it helps to be a little unconscious of it. It's so

Speaker 3 [00:24:55] hard to recognize, Wow, I'm not

Speaker 2 [00:24:58] living in the most dignified

Speaker 3 [00:24:59] way.

Speaker 2 [00:25:00] But once you own that, you realize that collectively you can change that and that's the healing part of it.

Speaker 3 [00:25:06] So while there's trauma

Speaker 2 [00:25:07] connected to it, there's also healing in the voice and in the action. And I think we forget that sometimes sometimes we get a little too stuck in in the trauma part.

Speaker 4 [00:25:17] Yeah, I think it's demystifying what it really means to be political and what that looks like. So I teach social welfare policy. I've been a lobbyist. And we're lucky to be in Hartford where our capital is. And so we'll take

Speaker 3 [00:25:32] students to the

Speaker 4 [00:25:33] capital problem and

Speaker 3 [00:25:35] I'll line up meetings

Speaker 4 [00:25:37] and then we will logit. We don't chase people down and do face-to-face advocacy. And I've had a number of students say to me,

Speaker 3 [00:25:45] I didn't expect

Speaker 4 [00:25:47] this at all. I was so scared. I didn't know what to

Speaker 3 [00:25:50] expect and they

Speaker 4 [00:25:51] loved it, and they realized that that house is the people's house. And I think these elite policy

Speaker 3 [00:25:57] structures make

Speaker 4 [00:25:58] people think that they don't have the

Speaker 3 [00:26:00] power. But when you bring

Speaker 4 [00:26:01] them right into the house and you show them what they can

Speaker 3 [00:26:04] do, it

Speaker 4 [00:26:05] really energizes

Speaker 3 [00:26:06] them. And so I think we

Speaker 4 [00:26:08] need more of those experiences for our students to demystify

Speaker 3 [00:26:12] and get them on the ground.

Speaker 2 [00:26:14] Yeah. For our students and for folks in marginalized communities, this idea that public officials work for them is not always fully integrated and that they're flipping the table of saying, No, you do work for me is really important and that there could be a healthy sense of entitlement, not an obnoxious. I only care about myself and my kids school entitlement, but an entitlement that supports people collectively with getting the resources and the dignity and worth that we want them to have. But that's where

Speaker 4 [00:26:48] voting

Speaker 3 [00:26:48] comes in, because

Speaker 4 [00:26:50] in our communities, these communities often don't vote in the way that they need to, which is probably tied to the sense of they don't realize that they have the power in a situation and that these people work for them. Right. And so they don't vote, which then reinforces that cycle of these people. Don't listen to them and ask, Well, why should I say anything? No one's going to listen to me anyway. And this is dangerous

Speaker 3 [00:27:10] cycle, right?

Speaker 4 [00:27:11] So I had them voting

Speaker 3 [00:27:12] more than

Speaker 4 [00:27:13] they would feel that

Speaker 3 [00:27:14] ownership and that sense of, yeah, these

Speaker 2 [00:27:17] people do work together. And Cindy, you just reminded me of something with your story on this past

Speaker 3 [00:27:22] summer, I talked policy

Speaker 2 [00:27:23] at Smith College and one of my colleagues as a state senator, and she said to me, I wish more of my constituents realize that I need them to start

Speaker 3 [00:27:35] trouble so that I have that as

Speaker 2 [00:27:36] the backup that I need to get stuff done for them. So the elected officials are not always, you know, afraid they're kind of waiting for you to come because you're then their anchor and they're back up to do what they need to do for you. And those conversations hardly ever happened.

Speaker 4 [00:27:54] I had one state rep actually tell me that if he gets three genuine emails that he knows are not stock emails from an advocacy

Speaker 3 [00:28:02] organization, he realizes

Speaker 4 [00:28:03] that there's an issue and he starts paying attention. Three.

Speaker 3 [00:28:06] Yeah.

Speaker 4 [00:28:07] Three from his district. Yeah, yeah.

Speaker 1 [00:28:09] Yeah, this is just really exciting. Your passion is really infectious. And so this is a gas. What I want to make sure that we don't run out of

Speaker 3 [00:28:18] time for is

Speaker 1 [00:28:20] to give

Speaker 3 [00:28:21] both of you an opportunity

Speaker 1 [00:28:23] from your

Speaker 3 [00:28:23] perspectives to get just super

Speaker 1 [00:28:25] practical in your opinion. What can social workers, social work students, social workers, practitioners and social workers of all kind? What can we do in the most practical ways to empower the rights and voices

Speaker 3 [00:28:40] of all people who are going to

Speaker 1 [00:28:41] be voting?

Speaker 3 [00:28:42] And of course, especially disenfranchised

Speaker 1 [00:28:44] folks as well?

Speaker 2 [00:28:46] I think a big part of it is education.

Speaker 3 [00:28:49] And before we

Speaker 2 [00:28:50] even get into the why vote and this is the process for voting again,

Speaker 3 [00:28:55] having that clear

Speaker 2 [00:28:56] history

Speaker 3 [00:28:57] of if this

Speaker 2 [00:28:58] really wasn't important, why would our country spend so much energy actively trying to get people to not do it? Obviously, if there is a lot of energy put into

Speaker 3 [00:29:08] blocking it, it's

Speaker 2 [00:29:09] because that's a source of power that you have. So really

Speaker 3 [00:29:13] kind of anchoring it with

Speaker 2 [00:29:15] our historical

Speaker 3 [00:29:15] foundation and

Speaker 2 [00:29:17] helping people make the connections with the historical foundation to more subtle things that are

Speaker 3 [00:29:21] happening today because people act when they're pissed, when they're really

Speaker 2 [00:29:26] angry, that's the energy that gets you to act, when you're

Speaker 3 [00:29:29] kind of like or whatever. You know,

Speaker 2 [00:29:31] it's not energetic enough.

Speaker 3 [00:29:34] We're pissed all the time.

Speaker 2 [00:29:36] And when it's you know this, this really helps us,

Speaker 1 [00:29:41] I don't know to congratulate you or feel sorry for you. I'm not sure, but I like it.

Speaker 2 [00:29:45] But it does become like a fuel and we actually

Speaker 3 [00:29:48] see you see the light

Speaker 2 [00:29:50] bulb go

Speaker 3 [00:29:50] off in terms of that,

Speaker 2 [00:29:52] again, not to have people feel sad about it, a disillusioned about it, but kind of a consciousness awakening around their people, actively trying to stop us

Speaker 3 [00:30:02] from doing that, which means

Speaker 2 [00:30:04] you have power in that and then getting into the voter registration work. And that's a discovery.

Speaker 3 [00:30:10] We made the summer together. Some concrete

Speaker 4 [00:30:13] steps, listeners, when you were doing intakes, throw in a voter registration

Speaker 3 [00:30:18] form. I will say

Speaker 4 [00:30:19] that Vote E R has a great little QR

Speaker 3 [00:30:21] code, as do other organizations are easily getting

Speaker 4 [00:30:25] people registered to vote and also checking your voter registration

Speaker 3 [00:30:28] status. And the other thing is, if you're

Speaker 4 [00:30:31] able to take the time on Election Day, I know that I was a poll

Speaker 3 [00:30:35] monitor and actually

Speaker 4 [00:30:37] discovered that the wait at

Speaker 3 [00:30:39] a polling place was so long that

Speaker 4 [00:30:40] I called

Speaker 3 [00:30:41] the state election enforcement and

Speaker 4 [00:30:44] that propelled more election years to get

Speaker 3 [00:30:46] to the site

Speaker 4 [00:30:47] to make sure that more ballots were being processed more

Speaker 3 [00:30:50] quickly.

Speaker 4 [00:30:50] So paying attention right to what kind of voter suppression might be taking place in your own backyard? I would say

Speaker 3 [00:30:57] also inviting

Speaker 4 [00:30:59] your college and your students to participate in voter registration.

Speaker 3 [00:31:04] But then voter registration

Speaker 4 [00:31:05] is just one

Speaker 3 [00:31:05] piece, right? You got to get people

Speaker 4 [00:31:07] to the polls, and so ain't no thing to put

Speaker 3 [00:31:10] up a sign on the front

Speaker 4 [00:31:11] door of the agency saying, Do you need a ride to the poll? Here's the

Speaker 3 [00:31:14] number to the Republican town

Speaker 4 [00:31:15] committee, and here's a number to the Democratic Town

Speaker 3 [00:31:17] Committee and whichever

Speaker 4 [00:31:19] party you want to roll

Speaker 3 [00:31:20] with to the polls. Here's the number to

Speaker 4 [00:31:21] call to get your ride to get there, right?

Speaker 3 [00:31:23] Because we have to be nonpartisan and

Speaker 4 [00:31:26] truthfully to the core, I want everybody to exercise their

Speaker 3 [00:31:29] right to vote regardless of

Speaker 4 [00:31:30] their position, because there's that level of

Speaker 3 [00:31:33] empowerment. And if

Speaker 4 [00:31:35] we happen to

Speaker 3 [00:31:35] share the same values

Speaker 4 [00:31:37] and beliefs, great. I think there's also concrete things that we can do.

Speaker 3 [00:31:42] So Madeline's point is just keep

Speaker 4 [00:31:43] having these conversations right? We're very good about having these conversations in September and. Close to

Speaker 3 [00:31:47] election time.

Speaker 4 [00:31:48] But all year round, there's active voter

Speaker 3 [00:31:51] suppression, there's matters that

Speaker 4 [00:31:54] are happening in your town council, your Board of Education, your zoning

Speaker 3 [00:31:57] committee. So stay

Speaker 4 [00:31:58] in tuned with those things and think

Speaker 3 [00:32:00] about how matters being

Speaker 4 [00:32:01] decided. They're impacting your clients.

Speaker 2 [00:32:04] And another a concrete thing is we really need agency leaders and also social work school leaders. We did this whole campaign and reaching out to the deans with

Speaker 3 [00:32:13] voting and social work. We need

Speaker 2 [00:32:15] folks who are the decision makers and schools of social works and

Speaker 3 [00:32:18] agencies to communicate

Speaker 2 [00:32:19] the importance of voting. Otherwise, your line

Speaker 3 [00:32:21] worker, social

Speaker 2 [00:32:22] workers won't know won't always know that it's an expectation, right? So have to be part of the evaluation, the orientation,

Speaker 3 [00:32:30] part of the orientation

Speaker 2 [00:32:32] to the mission of the organization and why it's all connected?

Speaker 1 [00:32:36] Yeah. Well, thanks again. This has been an incredibly timely and engaging conversation. Obviously, we have some interesting things going on in Texas related to voting rights. We have the political and voting season is right around the corner, mostly at the local level, which presents unique challenges, I think.

Speaker 3 [00:32:58] And just for

Speaker 1 [00:32:59] anybody else who's interested in this kind of stuff. Charles Blow, the New York Times opinion writer, his I can't remember the name of his

Speaker 3 [00:33:07] latest book, but his his

Speaker 1 [00:33:08] narrative and thesis in the

Speaker 3 [00:33:10] book is he wants

Speaker 1 [00:33:11] a re

Speaker 3 [00:33:11] migration. He is advocating for African-Americans literally to migrate

Speaker 1 [00:33:17] back to the south in numbers and then filling the polls

Speaker 3 [00:33:23] to influence an agenda that would speak to

Speaker 1 [00:33:26] their needs. So there's just a lot going on. Madeline Cindy, thank you so much for your time.

Speaker 3 [00:33:32] Before we wave goodbye, is there anything

Speaker 1 [00:33:34] that we didn't talk about today that you would like to slip in here at the end?

Speaker 2 [00:33:38] Sure. So data is very important. So we, along with our colleagues and voting and social work, helped design a survey

Speaker 3 [00:33:45] to understand the

Speaker 2 [00:33:47] attitudes and the actions of social workers in the field and how they're engaged in this work and what supports they would need to be able to do it.

Speaker 4 [00:33:55] So it's a pretty short survey. So if there was a view out there, I have seen it's on the voting and social work website.

Speaker 3 [00:34:01] Feel free to check out the link and respond.

Speaker 4 [00:34:03] We're interested to hear what you have to say.

Speaker 1 [00:34:05] Thanks again to both of you. What a delight to meet you both. I just sincerely, it's contagious.

Speaker 2 [00:34:11] Thank you for coming. Thanks for having us. A pleasure. Yes.

Speaker 1 [00:34:19] Thanks for listening. The registered voters who bring you the inSocialWork podcast series. Steve Sturman, chair and over overlord of our podcast Cate Bearss, Graduate Production Assistant, Content Contributor and Guest Booker and Me Peter Sobota. We have a new website we're fond of, and I am imploring you to visit and especially to provide feedback and reviews of our podcasts and to tell us how we're doing and what you would like to hear more about on our show. See you next time, everybody.