**20220907JessaMichie.mp3**

[00:00:02] **Speaker 1** Actually begin. Okay. Ready. One, two, three.

[00:01:11] **Speaker 2** Question. Would you like me to turn my camera off as well?

[00:01:21] **Speaker 3** That. Oh, is it that that's up to you? It's not interfering with the call. We're only recording just as audio and camera, so it doesn't matter one way or the other. I can see facial expressions from you that way if you think someone's giving the wrong answer.

[00:01:40] **Speaker 1** You can have.

[00:01:41] **Speaker 3** That. Mm hmm. All right. So, Jessa, can you say your last name for me?

[00:01:48] **Speaker 1** Sure. It's Mickey.

[00:01:50] **Speaker 3** Mickey?

[00:01:51] **Speaker 1** Mickey Mouse.

[00:01:52] **Speaker 3** What is the worst mispronunciation you've ever had for your last name?

[00:01:56] **Speaker 1** Well, I just got married at the end of October last year, so I'm still working on that. But my least favorite one is Michi.

[00:02:05] **Speaker 3** Michi?

[00:02:06] **Speaker 1** Why? I think cause it sounds, like mushy. Like that's just a gross, gross word. Not a good word.

[00:02:12] **Speaker 3** Okay. All right. Well, thank you for making time for us. So this despite the zoom, we're used to these now, but hopefully you feel like the conversation we just have. I don't have this as my list of questions. I just kind of talk and so feel free to talk back. And don't worry overly if you make a mistake, unless it's a factual one you want to correct. But don't overthink. You know how you're saying what you're saying. I'm sure it'll all be wonderful. So if you want to start, give us a little bit of background of where where you are, first of all, and then how you became involved in this in this movement.

[00:02:46] **Speaker 1** Yeah, absolutely. I'm from Chicago originally. I currently live in Stevens Point here in central Wisconsin. I've been interested in reproductive freedom since I was in high school. I had some experiences with like supporting friends of mine as they went through getting abortion care. And that gave me a real passion for it. That kind of led me through my whole career to this point. So.

[00:03:15] **Speaker 3** And what? What is your title technically? What organization you were part of?

[00:03:19] **Speaker 1** Yeah, I'm a digital organizer with Planned Parenthood Advocates in Wisconsin.

[00:03:24] **Speaker 3** Okay. And so what does that entail? What is a digital organizer?

[00:03:29] **Speaker 1** Sure. My the main thrust of what I do is an effort to make being involved with our cause more accessible to people throughout the state. So we have we have on the ground organizers in major cities like Madison, Milwaukee. We have folks in La Crosse and Appleton. But in this whole sort of like Central and Northwest section, there aren't any organizers on the ground but are officially affiliated with PWI. So one of the main things that I'm working on right now is rolling out our ambassador program and that houses the three main branches of our digital efforts which are social sharing on social media, Facebook, things like that, peer to peer texting, which is like mass texting, large numbers of people from a database and then from banking, which is. Just like phone banking or text banking, but with people you already know. So we have people use contacts that are already in their immediate networks and share information with them and encourage them to vote and things like that.

[00:04:45] **Speaker 3** So so when it comes to the organizing and the outreach that you're doing, is it all targeted towards voting or are there other efforts that you're trying to do?

[00:04:56] **Speaker 1** Yeah. So right now, definitely we're very, very focused on voting. Getting out the vote is the most important thing that we can do at this point in Wisconsin. We really need to have people supporting pro-choice candidates. For example, Governor Tony Evers has already vetoed five anti-abortion bills. Supporting him is very, very important. That's going to be a huge deciding factor in access to abortion care. In Wisconsin, Attorney General Josh Kaul has filed a lawsuit seeking to block the 1849 criminal abortion ban. That abortion ban is from before the Civil War, predates the Civil War by 20 years. So it's very, very important that we're supporting him in that race, which is not a race that people think about. A lot of times the attorney general isn't usually at the forefront of people's mind. So those are definitely two really important ones. And then the state legislature has the ability to repeal the abortion ban. So supporting candidates for legislative office is going to be really important.

[00:06:06] **Speaker 3** So can you describe what what it was like to communicate with people or the reaction you were getting from people before God or maybe before Dobbs leaked versus afterwards? And where we are today, what is what has changed? What have you seen?

[00:06:22] **Speaker 1** Yeah, it was really interesting for me because I actually started in April just a couple of weeks before the leak happened and very quickly sort of like hit the ground running. We saw especially here in my area, my position was not originally intended to be doing in-person work, but we saw such a huge like swelling of grassroots efforts in this area that I ended up doing a lot of connecting with local organizers and folks who were just volunteering their time and didn't really know exactly what they were doing. So we had someone host a rally on a main road through Stevens Point. That was immediately after the week of the draft opinion. We collected 50 petitions. There are about 65 people there throughout the day and that was really incredible. I was very impressed and surprised by the turnout. There were there were folks across the gender spectrum. There were people across decades of age difference. Folks like young kids were there. There was an elderly woman in a wheelchair. It was just really, really impressive. The mayor, our mayor, Mike Wieser, he attended as well. It was very, very cool to see folks come out and be supportive in that moment as we were all kind of like, Oh, it's serious now. We also saw students at Stevens Point Area Senior High School staged a walkout that was over 150 students. So. I felt like that was just really it's such a good demonstration of how passionate young people are about this issue, especially. And in Warsaw as well. We saw immediately after the league there was a rally organized by a young woman who had never organized anything like that before that had over 100 attendees. And then over the summer, another rally was held that was even bigger. And that was right after the right after Roe was overturned. And the Facebook event had over 2000 recipes for that one. And the organizers, after the fact, estimated between five and 600 people attended. So just really, really impressive numbers for this area. Absolutely.

[00:09:05] **Speaker 3** And there were some people who were saying after the decision came out, especially sensitive league, you know, it might be it might lose some of its steam going into the fall, that people will have other issues that have taken precedence and rise above it. You know, on the today's news cycle, the issue of abortion was all new, so to speak. The people who are passionate about it would still be passionate. But some of the people that may have been activated before would would go back to their old voting habits. What are you seeing? Do you think that has any reality to it?

[00:09:37] **Speaker 1** I think that people have. Been pushing so hard and a lot of people who haven't done this before, this really activated a lot of folks who were brand new to it or who maybe hadn't engaged in a really, really long time. Like I remember speaking with someone at the rally in Stevens Point who told me about she grew up pre Roe. She experienced that nearly 50 years of freedom before seeing her rights, her daughter's rights, her granddaughter's rights stripped away and now lives in this post row America. And she was so angry. I think we all are. And people really want to do something with that energy, which has been really, really great to see. Every single person who volunteers with us really helps to build, build that movement and build our collective power. And folks really need to take care of themselves, though, like you can burn yourself out so quickly if you don't give yourself breaks. So we're kind of taking a little bit of a break right now after the primary elections. But we are just starting to kick off statewide, canvasing efforts and rolling out our ambassador program. And I think we're going to see people resuming. Putting that energy into getting out the vote. That's what we're hoping.

[00:11:08] **Speaker 3** What's interesting about this topic is that there's a lot of political experts who say, well, this is a suburban women's issue, this young women. And while Beto is the Milwaukee County suburbs, which is why it's fascinating to hear from you in a part of the state that people may not think has enough people to be activated or outraged over an issue like this and to do something about it.

[00:11:32] **Speaker 1** Yeah, absolutely. I mean, the reality is this is this is an area where. People were already dealing with huge barriers to access to abortion care, and they're now faced with even more hurdles because the overturning of Roe and the existence of the criminal abortion ban are just exacerbating those inequities that they were already dealing with. So, yeah, there are there I was very shocked by the just the sheer response that people had in this area. I think it is affected a little bit right near me because the UW Stevens Point is here. So we do have a lot of college students who are really energized and dedicated to this issue. But we had folks coming from all around. I had people come from like 2 hours away to come to the rally in Stevens Point. So it's been really, really impressive.

[00:12:33] **Speaker 3** So you don't have official organizers on the ground. But are you trying to turn some of these volunteers into people that are doing the door knocking and the leaflet or holding the rallies or the events? Is that what's what the translation is?

[00:12:49] **Speaker 1** Yeah. So our hope is that through the ambassador program especially, that we can kind of give people an onramp to learn what our volunteer efforts can look like and how they can be involved. We are hoping to find folks who are willing and excited to lead canvasses. We have the capacity to train people, to lead canvassers and train folks on how to knock doors. So that's that's a big goal of mine would be to. To really see some strong volunteer efforts in person in this area. For now, our our digital work is taking the forefront there. But I'm hoping that as we continue with the ambassador program and build membership in that, that we'll be able to connect with people who are excited to do stuff like knocking on doors.

[00:13:49] **Speaker 3** One of the things that that really stood out with in the immediate aftermath of the jobs decision was the number of women who started telling their personal stories, where in the past they'd say, Well, this is my private life. This doesn't need to be public. Or women who would feel some outside peer pressure shame that, you know, that story was didn't belong out to the public. It seems like that shifted a lot where more women are stepping forward and saying this story has to be told.

[00:14:15] **Speaker 1** Yeah, I think that's definitely true. I am not someone who is in charge of our storytelling efforts. That would actually be a really good question for Victoria in the future. But it has been just overwhelming to see. For example, in our peer to peer texting program, one of the first things that we did was to send out a message just asking people how they were doing. We didn't ask them to do anything. We didn't ask them if they were interested in volunteering. We just asked like, How are you coping with this? How are you feeling? And it was really incredible, the things that people were sharing, some really intense, really heavy things that people were were dealing with that was that we're all brought up by this issue and. Yeah. We're continuing to see that for sure. There's definitely people who are. Having the experience of realizing that. Talking about it themselves is also an incredibly important thing that they can do. Being open about their support, about it, even just on their social media, sharing something that we have posted or something like that triggers these conversations that they wouldn't have had otherwise. And I heard a lot of stories from people who who had experiences of seeing someone post a pro-choice article or something. And they had never realized that they that they agreed on that, but they had that in common. So that's been really interesting to see people kind of realize just how much support the issue does have. It's been really cool.

[00:16:01] **Speaker 3** Yeah, pulling in Wisconsin has always shown pretty dominant support for access to abortion. Yet that didn't always translate into how people voted when it came to the politicians who supported or did not support access to abortion. Do you think that this may have finally shifted that where some of the people who in the past supported abortion access but voted Republican may actually reconsider how they're voting because it is more real.

[00:16:29] **Speaker 1** That's what we hope. I think this is this is such an issue at the forefront for everyone at this point. And it really crosses the political spectrum. You know, there are people this is impacting people's lives regardless of whether you vote Democrat or vote Republican. So we do really hope to see that play out in the polls in the fall. That would be that would be awesome. It would be really just encouraging to see people prioritize this because it is really, really important. It's going to affect so many people. It already is.

[00:17:09] **Speaker 3** Some of the debate around abortion has shifted to in terms of the terms that we're using and the way it's being described. And it's it's interesting that, you know, for decades, the the anti-abortion, pro-life groups were attacking it. Well, it was now the role seemed to be reversed in speaking with someone from Right to life, Wisconsin. They're focused more on reproductive centers and, you know, other options besides the ban or the abortion bills and the questions that surround what rights people still have. They're trying to move the conversation along. Do you think that people are ready to move that conversation along or is there still more to be debated about the actual decision to repeal Roe?

[00:17:52] **Speaker 1** Oh, I definitely think that people still have more to say and a lot more feelings about losing that access to care. I don't think that folks are ready to move on at all. I think that they're they're more angry about this and more energized than they were before because. As I mentioned there, there are already barriers to care. The anti-choice movement has really been just chipping away at those rights and those protections afforded to us by Roe for decades. And now that they've achieved this, this goal, it makes it so much more so much more noticeable because it was such a slow sort of erosion of our ability to easily access abortion care. I definitely don't think people are ready to just move on to either a different framing of this topic or a different topic altogether.

[00:18:52] **Speaker 3** One of the most interesting reframing choices that the right to life groups are making is they're now saying that abortion is not health care, despite the bills that they passed in the in the framing that they've used in all the other language over the decades. The new notion is abortion is not health care. That's completely separate. This is a different thing. What is what is the response? And is it tricky to go, oh, wait a minute, I thought that was settled. We'd all agreed on what this was. And now you're trying to shift the definitions of the words that we're using?

[00:19:21] **Speaker 1** Yeah. I mean, I think that's a pretty typical tactic, to be honest. It's it's very easy to to manipulate the narrative if you're willing to just sort of redefine the terms whenever it serves you. I think that's something that we've seen for a long time on that end of the issue. And. It is frustrating because it's like. Exactly as you said, we agreed on this. These are we agreed that this is the language that we're using to discuss this issue and to change those terms. Now, it doesn't I don't think it serves anyone really. It's it's confusing and it's disingenuous, but that's the intention, I think, in a lot of cases is to just sort of muddle the issue and confuse people.

[00:20:20] **Speaker 3** So then if you would answer this for me definitively, is abortion, health care?

[00:20:25] **Speaker 1** Yes, 100%, yeah.

[00:20:28] **Speaker 3** All right. Anything else that you want to add along the lines that we've discussed? Victoria, if you want to pop up for a minute, if there's anything that you want to mention or throw to just so that we don't miss anything.

[00:20:42] **Speaker 2** I think we should definitely touch base on how like bodily autonomy was also a struggle in a Roe v Wade present society and how access to abortion care. Was already a struggle. I know you spoke about how there was limited access to abortion care in certain areas, but maybe touch on the fact that race, gender identity and socioeconomic class also played a role in bodily autonomy and continue to do so before and after Roe v Wade was repealed.

[00:21:17] **Speaker 1** Okay. Yeah. I'm I'm not sure what to say beyond that. The reality is that because of history around this issue, around reproductive health care and around health care and the health care system in general, marginalized people are massively more affected by this. Significantly, we're already seeing the impact that it's having on people of color, people across the gender spectrum, etc.. So it is definitely it's significant that. Those folks who were already at a disadvantage are even further, even further disadvantaged from accessing the care that they need. Life saving care.

[00:22:11] **Speaker 3** I mean, in your part of the state, it's overwhelmingly white to begin with. But are you seeing more people of color or more people of different classes, economic situations that are trying to come forward and take the time to assert their rights and their voice?

[00:22:27] **Speaker 1** Yeah, I would say that even I was surprised at the diversity, as I kind of mentioned earlier, even just at the event that we had in Stevens Point, where we had 65 people, exactly as you said, this is a predominantly white area. But there were there were different races represented at that event. And it was very, very nice to see people come out and be supportive. But there's a lot of mistrust. Right. People of color have been mistreated by the health care system for as long as health care has existed. And pretty much. So I would say that there are definitely more. Just whether because of that history and because of that trauma or just because of demographics where we live, it is a more a more predominantly white movement here.

[00:23:24] **Speaker 3** All right. That is all we've got for you. That was great. I really appreciate your time. So we will be in touch, Victoria, in the run up to the 17th to know who I'm going to be trying to make contact with at that event. And just so thank you so much for your time and good luck up in Stevens Point, I used to be in Warsaw covering notes, so it's an awesome part of the state.

[00:23:47] **Speaker 1** Oh, cool. Yeah, it is. I'm happy to be here. Moving from Chicago to here. I didn't really know what to expect, but. It's been pretty great. So.

[00:23:58] **Speaker 3** All right. Well, thank you very much to both of you. I really appreciate your time.

[00:24:02] **Speaker 1** Thank you. To have a good one.

[00:24:04] **Speaker 2** Thank you.

[00:24:05] **Speaker 1** Bye bye.

[00:24:19] **Speaker 3** Thank you much. Appreciate it.