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[00:00:03] **Speaker 1** Full name so that we can say it correctly.

[00:00:05] **Speaker 2** It's Anne, Egan, Waka.

[00:00:10] **Speaker 1** and Egenwaka, and what tribe are you?

[00:00:14] **Speaker 2** Menominee Indian Tribe of Wisconsin. I was born and raised there. Daughter of Edith and Hilary Sparkiwaka. My dad was an environmental activist leader. He's in the DNR Conservation Hall of Fame. I love it.

[00:00:29] **Speaker 1** Wow. Can you pronounce your last name again for me, please?

[00:00:32] **Speaker 2** Egan, Waka.

[00:00:34] **Speaker 1** Egan Waka.

[00:00:36] **Speaker 2** Waka, like wasa with a K. Waka. Wasa. Waha. Does that help?

[00:00:41] **Speaker 1** Yes, thank you.

[00:00:42] **Speaker 2** my name so fast that people call me Annie Egan, Annie Waka, so I say Annie Egen Waka and they're like hi Annie. I'm like well my friends call me Annie. It's cool, I'm okay, Waka's a good name so I'll keep that one.

[00:00:53] **Speaker 1** Nice. But you prefer Anne.

[00:00:56] **Speaker 2** You know what, whatever you want to call me is fine. You can call me Ann or Annie. I kind of feel I think Annie would be okay because I think it's kind of such a personal interview, you know.

[00:01:06] **Speaker 1** Mm-hmm, mm-hmm. But when we have our anchor Rita on the desk, would you prefer Anne at that point?

[00:01:13] **Speaker 2** Yeah, that probably would be better. And you know what you're talking about.

[00:01:20] **Speaker 1** I visited Menominee back in January.

[00:01:22] **Speaker 2** You did! What was going on?

[00:01:24] **Speaker 1** just some meet and greets to meet people ahead of going back for some reporting. So I met with Medicine Fish, the youth driven group that's focusing with the youth on revitalizing the land and learning natural techniques to preserve the environment. Oh, that's excellent. Yes, I also met with the language school. Yep. The language school is awesome as well.

[00:01:49] **Speaker 2** I have a lot of family up there.

[00:01:52] **Speaker 1** Nice, it's a beautiful place, absolutely beautiful. Thank you for saying that. Yeah, so let's get into it. Tell me, let's start with first, tell me about the work that you do with the Wisconsin Native Vote.

[00:02:06] **Speaker 2** Okay, first of all, I do want to say that we are a 501c3 non-profit, so we are non-partisan. So we make sure that when we go out that we don't talk political candidates. Our goal is to get our people, our Native people to the polls. So we work on combating historic voter disenfranchisement. Also, we work on contemporary barriers that people may face, educating our voters. and registering people to vote and improve policies that impact our native community access to the polls. And the key is that we do a lot of one-on-one and that's how I think we're successful.

[00:02:46] **Speaker 1** So tell me about historically some of the challenges of getting Wisconsin natives the messaging to vote and then actually out to vote.

[00:02:57] **Speaker 2** Well, that's kind of changed a little bit here and there. So we've had voter disenfranchisement where people are actually faced some challenges where maybe their tribal ID won't be accepted, or they're turned away, or the local election commission just gives them the incorrect information. And I can give you an example that I experienced about. It was in 2014. I actually moved to a Milwaukee suburb. And I went to vote and I was registering and had all my information. And she was, I was real excited. And, um, she was asking me all the questions, you know, name, date, uh, where you live now age. And then she wanted to know, um where I was born. And I told her I was on the Menominee reservation. And she said, you're Indian. And I said, yes, ma'am, I am. And she says, you can't vote. Indians aren't allowed to vote. And I just looked at her and I was having one of those days, you know, where it rained when I got out of my car, kind of every little thing. And I looked at, I said, ma'am, I can't vote. We are allowed to vote. I'm Native American. I was born in Wisconsin. I'm a nominee county, which is a reservation. I voted before. And she was a guest that I said I voted for. And I Just looked at it and I said ma'ame, I could vote. I voted it before. And she said, Indians can't, vote you're not allowed. And I think She was really confused. So she went to the head of the poll and I could see she got a little talking to and she came back and she was quite elderly. And she said, ma'am, I just want to tell you I was following policy procedure. This wasn't racist. And then I voted. She finally let me vote. I had the right ID and et cetera. But you know, that story I tell because people take voting for granted and we shouldn't. But also we have people that may face this and I want them to know, I don't care how old you are. If you're just turned 18 or if you're 90, if people treat you like that, you have the right to vote. You make sure you let people know that you're not gonna leave until you vote.

[00:04:59] **Speaker 1** Right, and she gave you misinformation. Yes, she did. She was misinformed.

[00:05:03] **Speaker 2** She was she was so elderly, I think she may have remembered when we didn't have the right to vote. So we got it 100 years ago, it was 101 years ago. And it took some states longer to get the tribes to vote like I think the last was in the 70s. And there was in, I want to say out east, it wasn't coming out east state out east. That was one of the last to give the native people the right vote. But she was misinformed. And then the happy story as I went back. I voted like three years ago, I voted every year, but I voted at the three years ago, when I went to vote, I had my tribal ID and she took it without question. And I was just using my license to vote at the first time. And she said, oh, that's acceptable. And then I told her my story real quick. And she says, can you come back? I said, sure. And I went and voted and I came back and she said I wanted to tell you that a high school kid was here. He just turned 18. He was so excited and he wanted to vote. And he said, how much does it cost to vote? I was like, are you kidding me? So that tells me we have to educate all people, our Native people, but all people about voting. And we actually have gone into some high schools on our reservations. And I've got some in Milwaukee area to tell our people about voting and encouraging them. And that's something we'll continue to do. We need to educate our people throughout the year. And actually, as they go through the school system, and I'll be working with another group in Milwaukee that works in the MPS that will work at getting people to vote.

[00:06:31] **Speaker 1** So there's many things that came up because of what you experienced and if we move it to you know some of the things that are happening now tell me about current challenges with IDs as it relates to voting and even that could come up next week with the Supreme Court vote.

[00:06:48] **Speaker 2** Yeah, well, you know, the lot of these are anecdotal, so personally experienced. So that's why I shared my experience. But what we've had in the past where people went to vote and they told them weren't registered and they were, and they insisted and they weren't, they were told they weren' t registered. This happened on my reservation a while back and she was adamant. Eventually they let her vote because she was so adamant and she said, I'm not re-registering because I've registered to vote and I know I'm on your list. They finally found it. But it depends, there's a lot of different ways that have oppressed our people in voting. So I'd have to say that the one thing I could speak to is my incident, because with that, I literally, it was horrible, but I know people have had that before.

[00:07:37] **Speaker 1** Are tribal IDs a valid form of ID for voting?

[00:07:40] **Speaker 2** Yes, they are. Isn't that great? I love it. Tribal IDs are valid form. And so when we're registering people, a lot of people want to use their tribal ID and that's just awesome. I love doing that. It's just also. I love that.

[00:07:53] **Speaker 1** when you're out in the community and you're telling people you can use your tribal ID, are people saying they have it already or is it now something that they're more eager to get?

[00:08:03] **Speaker 2** Most people have it. They get it from their respective enrollment offices, so they have to go to their enrollment office to get it. But also it's used for IDs for certain services as well. So like health services or community events or something. So it's really important to have that tribal ID. But you know it's kind of wild that we are the only culture that have to prove who we are through a piece of plastic. But it's accepted which is really awesome. That's great.

[00:08:33] **Speaker 1** And bring it also out in the community on the flip side, are people when they're going to vote, it's that they know that they have that tribal ID. When the counters, the elderly woman that you had an unfortunate experience with, do they know you can use this? This is a valid ID.

[00:08:50] **Speaker 2** They do know, we work with the tribes to get this the word out. So it's kind of a common knowledge it seems like when you turn 18, but we have to educate people too. We are in the community 365 days a year, well except holidays, but um we are out. We want to make sure people are educated, have received the proper education, that they're aware that they can use their tribal ID, what other forms are available. So, it's up to us and the tribes to educate our people and I think everyone's doing a pretty good job because I get to encounter someone who has a tribal ID who doesn't know they can't use it. They know they could use that to vote.

[00:09:29] **Speaker 1** I also want to ask you this about tribal IDs in terms of accessing them. I've heard somewhere that having an address or not having an address on the reservation can be a challenge to getting the tribal ID or any ID if you've been going to your Can you speak to that a little bit?

[00:09:46] **Speaker 2** Well, I that I really can tell you that I know the tribes work with the people to get their tribal ID. There's various ways they can do it by like, for example, if someone wanted to go to the tribe can send out a letter to someone using the tribal address and the tribal office address to them at that address, and then they can use that as their address for voting. So other and other times, it just. We just keep working towards getting the people the right to vote with them who have PO boxes. Problematic and it's something we're working on. We need better policies for that.

[00:10:25] **Speaker 1** Do you have an estimate of the current number of how many registered Native voters we have in Wisconsin?

[00:10:32] **Speaker 2** I do know that the voter count is usually, we say about 70,000 possible Native votes. That's a number that it's hard to calculate, but that's pretty much what we use. The U.S. census is how that number is based on it, but the census isn't exactly correct either. I can give you an example of why. For example, in Milwaukee, I talked to someone who worked on the census, she's in Milwaukee for 20 some years. And when she sees the number come out, she said, we're higher, you know, they say we're about 8,000, etc. But she said a director also from an organization said it's more around 15 to 20,000. Everyone pretty much goes with 20,00 Native Americans in the Milwaukee area. So that vote.

[00:11:17] **Speaker 1** that vote, that are registered to vote.

[00:11:19] **Speaker 2** vote. That could vote. We can't track all the registered voters. It's something, it's hard to do that with current systems. So we use it by going to the tribes and finding out, but we'd have to go to the election commission, then we have to, it involves a lot that I really don't, I'm

[00:11:43] **Speaker 1** Right, that there's, if we said that there is an estimate of 70,000 possible voters, that would sound, that would

[00:11:52] **Speaker 2** That's actually accurate. Yes, 70,000 possible voters in the state of Wisconsin. And that's about 1% of the population, which can really have an impact on some, some votes, some races.

[00:12:04] **Speaker 1** And we have reservations throughout the state, and we also have Native voters everywhere also off reservations. Where are you seeing where people are really coming out to vote, whether it's local elections or on the federal level?

[00:12:21] **Speaker 2** Well, I could give you an example for the 2023 spring race, spring election, compared to 2019 spring election. On the Red Cliff Band of the Lake Superior Chippewa, the voter turnout was increased by 130%. And that's where we're working hard. My reservation, I was on the reservation working on increasing voter turnout during that 2019 in the 2023 span. and we increased voter turnout by 75% on the Menominee Reservation. I'm really proud of that because we put a lot of work into it.

[00:12:58] **Speaker 1** So let me bring it back to we have an important collection election coming up next week. What are some issues that are pertinent to that you feel when you're out in the community that are pertinant to Wisconsin natives that would make them want to come out for this very unique Wisconsin Supreme Court election?

[00:13:17] **Speaker 2** Exactly, I think one of the key is the protecting our environment is one, protecting the water quality from Lake Superior to, for example, the Wolf River, the pristine Wolf River on my reservation. That's one issue. Sovereignty, tribal sovereignty, protecting our rights to govern ourselves, protecting your culture. And what goes with the water protection is our wild rice beds. Our sturgeon and walleye, ancient spawning, fishing areas. That's also up, that it's a big concern for our people. I think that the Wisconsin Indian Child Welfare Act is another issue where native children are placed with fit and willing indigenous relatives to help them preserve their culture stability in preventing trauma, because before they were normally placed with non-native families. So again, one of the key is the that we keep hearing is Mother Earth is ill and we need to take care of her. We need to sustain our wild rice beds. We need to sustain their ancient wildlife spawning grounds. We need you protect our waterways. We need clean and drink drinking water. And we've had people that I've had people tell me that Mother Earth is sick. She's throwing up. An elder came up and told me that she said we have to vote to protect her. And then I had another person tell me Mother Earth is ill. She has a fever. She doesn't know what she's doing. And then another elder told me in Milwaukee, Mother Earth isn't menopause. She doesn' know what he wants to do. So we use humor a lot to get our message across.

[00:15:12] **Speaker 1** Right, right. Whatever it takes and then to come out and actually vote. Now when we talk about tribal sovereignty, sovereignty in the government to government relationship, do you think that there's sometimes confusion on that government to government relationship if it's between the tribes and the state or tribes at the federal level, in the federal level.

[00:15:36] **Speaker 2** Well, I can't speak to the tribal federal level because that's not what we're talking about now, but with the state, I don't think there's confusion. I think that we have fought for our rights, hard to have our sovereignty on our reservations and it's respected. And we have our governor is very respective of our tribal sovereignty. And like I said, it's not something that was just given to us. We fought hard for it.

[00:16:00] **Speaker 1** Right, right, absolutely. How's the youth vote when you go out and speak to the community?

[00:16:06] **Speaker 2** You know, that's interesting because we are going out now and going to the community and talking to the youth and I think that's something that we're going to have to make sure we keep working on because. As they grow, as they become 18, some aren't aware of how to vote yet, and so I've had people say, what do I do? How do I register? So we help them register, but we go into like the tribal schools. I know they've done that. They've gone into the high schools near the reservations. I've gone in to MPS and talked to several groups about the importance of voting and registering, and we had quite a bit of success with that. So I think it's not only the Native people who need to educate our kids, but all people because Our children aren't all on the reservation either. Some are in like the urban Milwaukee areas. But I had hope, especially because that kid wanted to pay the vote, you know? It was sad that he thought that, but you know, yeah.

[00:17:05] **Speaker 1** And with next week, between now and then, what are you and your organization going to be doing to get out the vote?

[00:17:14] **Speaker 2** What we're doing is we are actually going to be doing a lot of visits throughout our communities, doing a lot on one-on-ones, which is the best way to get our people to talk to us and understand the importance of voting if they don't know it. But now we're having people come to us when we're out tabling at events, say like at a powwow or at a community event where they're like, you know, scavote them, that was a slang we use, let's go vote, scavate them. and they said I'm registered or you know one person I went to a powwow and he said I''m not going to vote it doesn't matter talk for 20 minutes and I told him why it's important and you know again we are in 501c3 so we're very careful we maintain that which actually makes it easier because we talk about issues and we had an event on March 11th in Milwaukee which was part of a food for thought type event we had in Milwaukee Bad River Band of Lake Superior Chippewa and the Menominee Indian Tribal, Wisconsin. I can speak to my event and I know the other two are successful, but we all had Native American Rights Fund Attorney, Alison Ness would come in and speak. We had over 50 people in my event in Milwaukee and it was at the Indian Council of the Elderly who's co-sponsored with us. And we had people from 10 different organizations from Milwaukee, Native organizations, attend the event, listen to what the message was. and they in turn pass it on to their people. And I work with as many organizations in Milwaukee as I can, and then I visit these. I've been revisiting them as well throughout the year. So it just doesn't stop. It's not just right before the election. It's all year long, and it's enjoyable. I feel like I've be preparing for this job since I left my reservation in 1978. Went to Marquette, worked for the teachers union. I worked at an Indian health center for a while, which I'm now on the board, you know, question of the board at the Gerald L. Indian Ignex Health Center. But I've developed a lot of contacts. And through that, I've also developed a lotta skills and know the culture well enough that it was brought up with on my reservation by my father particularly, and how to speak to people and make sure we maintain respect and pride for our culture. And I'm so honored that I have this position. I'm extremely honored that I'm allowed to do something that I truly love and I feel very purposeful.

[00:19:40] **Speaker 1** That's wonderful. Before we wrap up, I want to say two things. One, congratulations on your feature in Madison. That's exciting. That is exciting to be featured. So congratulations. That's a good thing. And yeah, you're welcome. And I want to end with going back to that gentleman that you said he wasn't going to vote. And then when you reminded him. the mission of your organization, nonpartisan, and he reverted the conversation back to issues. What do you think changed for him?

[00:20:15] **Speaker 2** I think it was the protecting Mother Earth, which is really strong, and also tribal sovereignty. And he actually filled out a pledge to vote card and said he would vote. So then we put them in our system and then we do emails to people and then send voting reminders out. And we had a tailgate last summer, which was pretty successful. We had a donation of a thousand tickets to the rural games. We had a big tailgate and we had a color guard with all the tribes represented and a drum. And I had people, my one cousin came up, she said, Annie, I registered to vote. I'm going to vote and on, on last Friday, I met a woman who said she wanted me to help her register and I was helping her and she didn't have her ID or anything like that. So she said I could tell she was nervous. I said, I'll pick you up and I'll take you to the poll, bring your elect, bring a bill and we'll go to the pole and you can register and I'll make sure I'll, make sure you're okay. I'm not going to tell her what to do, but I think she was a little nervous. So if I can help one person out, I'll do it. If I can have about 30, great. If I could help out more, awesome.

[00:21:19] **Speaker 1** And it seems to be working as positive strides. I've saw the website of voting numbers going up. So the message seems to resonating with people.

[00:21:30] **Speaker 2** It does. And you know, it's it's just amazing that we can make such a difference now for the next seven generations, you know, that's our one of our main lines of work for the seventh generations. What we do now, we think about what's what we're doing now, how will that affect the next 7 generations. And the key is to voting and maintaining all our cultural identities and sovereignty and protecting Mother Earth. And it's just a blessing to be able to do this work. The creators blessed me.

[00:22:03] **Speaker 1** Great, I'm glad, I am glad that you're living in your passion.

[00:22:06] **Speaker 2** Thank you.

[00:22:06] **Speaker 1** You're welcome. All right. I think we will end there and I will continue doing our journalism work on this side and then I'll keep you posted and this will air. It will be edited. I'll be working on that in the next two days and then the first time it will air will be Friday evening 7.30, PBS Wisconsin, the new show is called Hearing.