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[00:00:01] **Speaker 1** I guess I'll just kind of start with what is your role as executive director for Wisconsin? What are your goals? What do you want to accomplish there?

[00:00:10] **Speaker 2** Right. So far, Wisconsin is Wisconsin's only statewide LGBTQ, plus civil rights and political advocacy organization, which means that our mission is to build a Wisconsin that is safe and inclusive for all LGBTQ plus people and where we can really all thrive. That means that our focus is at every level of government to try and make sure that we get pro-equality protections on the books. And as executive director, it's my purpose, obviously, to to drive that forward. And I'm a member of the LGBTQ Plus community. But specifically with this topic, I just want to make something clear. I identify as a queer woman, but I am not trans and I do think it is incredibly important that trans voices and trans leaders are at the forefront of this movement. I also think it is not fair to perpetually put people of marginalized and oppressed identities in the position of having to defend their own existence and their own lives. So as a member of this movement, as a leader in this movement, I am here to also be a strong voice in support of our trans and non-binary community members.

[00:01:16] **Speaker 1** Absolutely. And so how do organizations like Fair Wisconsin, what's their mission and their goal when it comes to uplifting LGBTQ and trans voices?

[00:01:27] **Speaker 2** Right. So part of uplifting the voices is making sure that the general public understands the challenges and frankly, the joys that are part of our identities and our experiences so that the general public can best support and elect leaders and then hold them accountable to making sure that the protections and the rights that really honor the humanity of our community are written into law. And frankly, to also stop the bad stuff from happening. Right? It's a both and we do a lot of proactive and also reactive work.

[00:01:58] **Speaker 1** Absolutely. And with that, after Election Day last year, there was a spike in 700% to calls in LGBTQ crisis hotlines. And even on Inauguration Day on Monday this week, there were over a thousand calls, which was a 33% increase just that afternoon, according to the Trevor Project. How are organizations like Fair Wisconsin preparing to support trans and queer voices under this new administration?

[00:02:26] **Speaker 2** So under this new administration, I think there are a few things to keep in mind. Number one, trans and non-binary people are here. They have always been here. They will always be here. And no president can change that with a line in a speech or the stroke of some sort of executive order. We also have to, as a community and as a general public, understand that we can't make it easier for this administration by assuming he's actually going to be successful at implementing these discriminatory policies. There is a lot of vagueness in some of the things he stated and even in the executive order that he signed on day one that was anti-trans. I wouldn't be surprised if there was litigation any moment about quite a bit of it. And some of this is going to take some time for us to see what it really, really means. But what is most important, I think, for the general public and for the LGBTQ community is to really hold true to that fact that our community is not going anywhere. And the LGBTQ plus community has faced hostile federal governments before and we are still here. And part of the movement and part of the fact that the LGBTQ movement is a movement is knowing that that movement sometimes gets more and more difficult and more and more challenging and can go in other directions. And it is really, really important that we continue to center those trans and non-binary voices in this movement and to follow their lead. And also the general public needs to make sure that we're understanding the experiences because as we have seen, the numbers are scary when it comes to mental health and emotional well-being, when it comes to suicidal ideation, when it comes to suicide attempts. It's also important to understand the joy and the affirmation that can be the flip side of that. And I think it's important that this movement lifts all of that up and that the general public really comes to understand that.

[00:04:18] **Speaker 1** What was your reaction? I'm not sure if you watched the inauguration, but after hearing that during it, he said there are only two genders, male and female. And what are the implications of saying something like that behind a presidential seal?

[00:04:31] **Speaker 2** Yeah, I think for a second. When I heard it in the speech, when the president said said the factually untrue statements about sex and gender and gender identity, it made me think about how he was attempting to follow through on what I would consider a campaign promise of his that we saw in the attack ads, in the anti-trans attack ads. And I find it incredibly disappointing, to say the least, that those attack ads ever happened. They were disgusting and they were hateful. And I think the most important thing to know about them, actually, is that they did not work. Those attack ads that were anti-trans did not drive voters. There is research that shows that. And some of the people who ran those attack ads won, but they did not win based on their ugly rejection of trans people. And to me, that's incredibly important to keep in mind because it shows what we as the general public need to know about holding our elected officials accountable. Because if those attack ads did not drive voters and those votes did not happen because of any kind of support of these anti-trans policies, we need to know that we can't let these people who think they have an anti-trans agenda govern as though they have a mandate because they don't. Some of them won, but they didn't win because they were anti-trans. And I think the rest of us need to be able to hold them accountable and say this is a cycle that needs to stop. And this ugliness has no place in our politics and definitely no place in our actual government.

[00:06:13] **Speaker 1** And what is holding them accountable?

[00:06:15] **Speaker 2** What can people do right? So now is definitely a time to mobilize and a time to organize. And that is a part of our work at for Wisconsin. But I think the most important thing for us to remember, at least as an LGBTQ community, it is also a time to care for ourselves and each other. And that's really going to look different for everybody. The mobilization, the organizing and the care, right? So when I think about it, I think about how we've all arrived to this moment at a really different level of comfort when it comes to safety, when it comes to levels of privilege. And and frankly, even when it comes to levels of comfort with uncertainty, because there is so much uncertainty right now. So when I think of what does mobilization or organization or care look like, I really think about how we as queer people living our lives is a necessary and beautiful thing. And for some of us like me, who, you know, it's literally my job to be a leader in the LGBTQ movement. For some of us, living our lives means showing up publicly for the fight. And for other people, it might mean doing what they need to do to get through. And that's okay. Not everybody needs to be in the fight. Not everybody has the capacity to be in the fight. And that needs to be okay. And I know I've heard amongst sort of my circles some some feelings of apprehension about safety and also some feelings of even like a little bit of guilt of not feeling ready to be in the fight. And so what I think about the long term sustainability of an LGBTQ plus movement, holding these people accountable for making sure that they do not take anti-trans votes and make anti-trans policy into law, it really comes back at its core about making sure our community is cared for and safe. And that's tough because these policies are unsafe. And frankly, I would say even talking about them becomes unsafe at a certain point. Those attack ads, they didn't work, but they created a more unsafe environment for trans and non-binary people, and they really impacted our LGBTQ plus community emotional well-being. And frankly, like, I don't know anyone who saw them and didn't find them incredibly misleading, to say the least. And and disturbing. I actually think the polling showed that like a majority of voters found them mean spirited, I think was the word that I saw in the survey. And if I'm remembering correctly, actually, a majority of Republicans found that mean spirited, which again, I think is really indicative of how ugly and disgusting they were and how they didn't work. But again, when I think about holding our politicians accountable and holding our elected leaders accountable, I kind of think of them as two different words for a reason. It means that this movement needs to be sustained and sustainable, and that means we need to care for ourselves, too. And so I think a lot of people think about holding elected leaders to account as being a very public thing, as being like standing outside of Capitol with a sign or showing up to a hearing. And I encourage you to do that. We do that in Fair, Wisconsin. I hope you join us. And taking care of yourself as a queer person. Is also holding these people accountable because you are still here. And one of the things that these kinds of laws and policies and even executive orders try and do is try and address us. And by still being here, we are still holding them to account. You know.

[00:09:58] **Speaker 1** So what was your response when Trump signed a new executive order stating that there are only two sexes, including on official documents and including in that cutting federal funding to gender?

[00:10:13] **Speaker 2** Right. My initial reaction to the executive order had a lot to do with feeling like the looming threat that we had sort of been preparing for for a long time was quite real. And. Not not all immediately impacting a lot of the things that were listed in the executive executive order are going to take time to implement, are going to take lots of steps that have to do with things far beyond a stroke of a patent like rulemaking, which includes a public comment period. We are members of the public. We should comment like trying to change agency regulations. And so the executive order was was a such a sweeping attempt to erase our trans and non-binary community that I think it shows a lot of overreach. And that's why I am absolutely certain there will be litigation about it, which is another reason it's going to move pretty slowly. In some areas there are other areas where it's not. There are other areas where it is immediately impacting people when it comes to documentation, when it comes to identifying documents at the federal level, like passports. There are already no longer links on websites to do any kind of changes that people would want to make. And then also, I worry quite a bit about what the executive order meant when it comes to the federal prison population. I am not a lawyer. I'm not an expert. But when I read it and when I think about where does the federal government have the most, has had the most immediate levers of change and power. That worries me a lot because we are talking about an incredibly vulnerable population that not enough people are paying attention to. So that's something that I'm learning more about and want to do more work in. I'll also say I think it's really, really important for people to understand that that executive order, again, it's going to take a long time. There will be litigation. I am sure. It also doesn't impact all documents. It doesn't impact things that are more state specific. And that's where for Wisconsin really comes in. An example would be the executive order made changes to things like passports. But Wisconsin, every state does driver's licenses, right? So, like not every identification document is affected in the same way. And I would encourage anyone who has any questions or thoughts about wanting to learn more about that, that difference, you know, reach out to for Wisconsin, reach out to some other amazing community centers in Wisconsin, and we're ready to try and direct you in the right direction. And then I also just keep coming back to this refrain in my own mind of this is an attempt by a man who does not understand trans identity to erase an entire population of people. And we know that our trans and non-binary friends and neighbors have have always been here and will always be here. And an executive order is not going to change that. It's definitely going to make life more difficult. And I am not, you know, making that any smaller. That is huge. But it doesn't change the fact that our community is here and not going anywhere. So it's just, to me, a helpful refrain to come back to because it's how I can affirm the humanity of the people I love in my life.

[00:13:45] **Speaker 1** And many people continue to prepare for these actions beforehand before they even happen. People rush to change their identity marker on their documents. What's what are the longer term impacts of those policies?

[00:14:01] **Speaker 2** This is actually a place where we've been preparing as equality organizations across the country for a while to. So when when when the election happened and the outcome happened the way it did, state and national equality leaders really convened and got together and we talked through what are some lessons learned and the states where there already are anti-trans policies on the books because there are quite a few states in this country that already have some of these anti-trans policies that are being attempted at the federal level, at the state level. Wisconsin is not one of them and we are. As for Wisconsin, we are very, very proud of to have been a part of the community that stopped some of those things. And we're also very thankful to have a governor who vetoes some of those things. But we've been we convened as a as national and state equality leaders to look at those lessons learned. What can we learn from the states where there are anti-trans laws on the books about how to care for and protect how we can our trans community? And flipside, what can we learn from the states where there are already protections about how to strengthen our own protections in our state, how to make those more robust at the state level, or if needed, at the more municipal, local, county, city school board level. Right. And that's where I think the preparation has been really key because we've been able to see these lessons learned. And like I said, the LGBTQ community has faced hostile governments before. And in many parts of this country already, we're facing hostile governments and we have a lot to learn from the incredible LGBTQ plus leaders in those in those states. I do not remember the rest of your question. I apologize. Please help me out.

[00:15:48] **Speaker 1** I guess I'll read a of a part of the executive order.

[00:15:52] **Speaker 2** Sure.

[00:15:52] **Speaker 1** You can let me know your reaction to it. Sure. It says gender identity reflects a fully internal and subjective sense of self disconnected from biological reality and sex, and existing on an infinite continuum that does not provide a meaningful basis for identification and cannot be recognized as a replacement for sex. What is your reaction to that?

[00:16:17] **Speaker 2** It strikes me that the general public and I would include actually the administration, because they are listening to such things as well, not to mention saying some of them. The general public is told a lot about trans people and very little of it is told by trans people. And that is striking to me because of the fact that that creates not only like an absence of knowledge, but an absolute misunderstanding of the reality of the lived experience of trans people. And I also think part of that is that I acknowledge that everyone is on a journey when it comes to understanding gender identity. I'm on the journey. Everyone is. I encourage everyone who's listening to learn more. I also do not think you need to know every detail of someone's identity to respect them as people. I think you can respect that someone knows who they are and you can respect that someone knows what they need. And to me, something like this executive order and a lot of the other anti-trans policies and rhetoric show a real ignoring, willfully ignoring of what trans people really need. And when I talk to my trans friends and other translators in the LGBTQ plus movement, it is they're very clear about what they need. They need protections for their health care. They need protections against discrimination for housing and employment. They need kids to be able to feel like they belong in a school. But because they are not in the conversation about defining themselves, there is such a disconnect there. And so I just think it's incredibly important that wherever we are on our journey of understanding, we can still respect the other people, know who they are. I know who I am, and I know everyone can have that. They have their own understanding of themselves. I think we can extend the grace that other people, when they say they know who they are, they know who they are.

[00:18:22] **Speaker 1** Yeah, absolutely. Some other policy that's been passed. The House passed a ban on trans students from participating in girls sports, earlier this month, which opens doors up to women to physical examinations. How are policies like this intrusive and dangerous against.

[00:18:46] **Speaker 2** So specifically the anti-trans athlete bills, the one at the federal level. And also there are quite a few at other other states. They really open the door to a lot of invasive questions, even examinations. And there's actually data that shows that in states that have anti-trans athlete bans, participation in sports goes down across the board for all girls. And and I think that's a part people don't realize that these anti-trans targeting bills impact everyone. So they impact trans people they impact girls that these bills are purported to be about protecting or supporting. They they impact people who are intersex, which is another part of our population that we do not acknowledge and definitely do not understand the implications of something as invasive as questions about your period or or examinations of your body would mean. And it's these it's this ripple effect of consequences that I do. I am not generous enough to say that that's not an that's an unintended. I think there are a lot of very intended consequences about these bills. So I worry because we've seen it in other states about decreased participation. I worry about these in this invasive sort of scrutiny of bodies. We're talking in many cases about young girls, about teen girls. As someone who was once a teen girl, that is horrifying and makes sense to me that participation does go down. These are not surprising outcomes, but they have not stopped people from choosing to do these anti-trans athlete bills. And that really worries me. It also to me as like a fundamental misunderstanding of why people play sports. I wasn't a big sports person as a kid, but I did play soccer and it was fun to be on a team. I loved being playing as a part of a team. It I was a horrible athlete, but it felt cool to belong to like a group of people who are trying to score a goal, right? Like, that's why people play sports to belong on a team. And so these politicians who are weaponizing the desire of a child or even a college athlete to belong, they're playing a really ugly game. And I think there's a lot of people who are caught as sort of collateral damage in that. And that's really, really worrisome to me. Do you think.

[00:21:22] **Speaker 1** This administration's future policies will end up going further, even going after gay marriage?

[00:21:30] **Speaker 2** I think everything's on the table and it's scary, right? I know what was in Project 20, 25, and there were parts of that roadmap that really attack all different aspects of the LGBTQ community, attack parenting rights, attack the the solidity of me believing that my marriage will be recognized tomorrow. Right. And those are those are really worrying things, obviously, because of the anti-trans attack ads and this this kind of executive order right out of the gate. Our trans community is really, really on the front lines of this. And I don't want to diminish that at all. That is so real and definitely where we need to be putting our focus. And I also know that as a queer woman in a queer relationship who is parenting a small child, that there are a lot of the potential realities to changes and policies that protect me that I'm also very aware of. So it's not my most immediate fear, but I am absolutely worried about everything that's also overwhelming, right? And that's why I think it's so important that we remember that when we are looking at these policies, whether they be specific to the trans community or potentially about the entire LGBTQ community, it can be overwhelming and that's exhausting. That's a lot of emotional labor and it's why it's important to mobilize and organize. It's also why it's so important to do community care, because we're going to have to really focus on the marathon, not a sprint here. And we don't know what's coming around the corner. But yes, I do worry about that. Yeah.

[00:23:15] **Speaker 1** How do you both personally and professionally take action that find power when these policies are coming out under this administration?

[00:23:25] **Speaker 2** Yeah, I think about that when I first I mean, when you said personally and professionally, I was like, wow, a lot. Or either no, I appreciate it. I appreciate it. I'm trying to think if there's anything I kind of said some things that I'm probably going to repeat here, so forgive me. Can you say it again so I can respond better?

[00:23:49] **Speaker 1** How do you either personally or professionally take action or find power when these new policies are coming?

[00:23:57] **Speaker 2** So there are elections coming up, and that is the one place that we can take power as a community and as a general public who cares about this LGBTQ community. 2025 is an election year. We have spring elections. There are state level and local level and school level elections happening. And with this federal administration, LGBTQ plus protections. Rubber really meets the road at the state and local and school board level right now. That is where we have power as as people. And a democracy is only as powerful as the people who show up to be a part of it. So spring 2025 elections are going to be really, really key for fair Wisconsin, for this organization, for our community in general, to really show up and elect some pro-equality candidates, to become elected officials who we would then be able to work with and create more robust protections at the not federal level. Right. There are certain avenues that are close to us right now because the federal level is hostile. But the local avenue, the school board Avenue, the state Avenue, those are open. And we will go down that road, Right. That's really, really important. There's also an upcoming legislative session. We had different maps this last election. There is a different makeup to our assembly and our Senate. We got more pro-equality candidates elected. I am hopeful that there is some proactive work we can do. I am also clear eyed and understanding that we will have to beat back bad stuff again and we will do it. We will do it as a community. For Wisconsin's going to be a part of that. We are part of a large coalition to stand up and stop anything bad from happening. And again, we have a governor who I firmly believe will continue to veto anti LGBTQ bills. So I think the the focus for at least my organization right now is really a twofold focus on the legislative session coming up and on the spring 2025 election, making sure that pro-equality candidates are getting elected. And there's also an ongoing professional, I think, duty to continue educating the general public about what matters to our community. So and to make sure that that so many different voices are a part of that education and really meeting people where they're at in their journey and moving them forward. And so that's a huge part of the work that my organization does does as well. I'll say on a personal level, you know, my work in my life are pretty circular Venn diagram right now. There's a lot of overlap there, and it's why I'm trying to also keep in mind that when I say we have to organize, we have to mobilize and we also have to care for ourselves. That's a message that when I say it, I need to listen to it too. And so I'm just going to say that out loud one more time to myself, just to make sure that other people realize that the leaders in this movement are also making sure that we're centering our own care as a hope that that gives everyone else permission to do the same.

[00:26:58] **Speaker 1** And our some of those ways that people can educate themselves, bridge those gaps between trans and non trans communities.

[00:27:07] **Speaker 2** How can people do that? Yeah, great question. Let me just think for a second because what I want to say is like, watch this show, but I'm not going to say that. Okay. So there's so much information out in the world about trans and non-binary people because they've we've been here forever as a community, as an LGBTQ plus community, and specifically as a trans and non-binary community. And that information is readily available and a lot of wonderful books and a lot of very impactful blogs and a lot of incredible videos. Of course, media literacy is a thing. So please, as people are learning and educating themselves, make sure that the source is and is a reputable one. And I would say most importantly and I say this as someone who is not trans, that the most important person to listen to right now is a trans person. That also means do not ask invasive questions, but listen to what they need you to know. And that is something that I, as someone who's on my own journey, learned earlier on. As someone who has a middle school, Gender and Sexuality Alliance advisor, I had many students who were trans. I had multiple students transition socially in my classroom, and it was really a a beautiful and heartening thing to see the way the rest of the classroom supported them by learning. And so and they learned in so many different ways. And so I'll give that as an example of ways that people could approach that. I distinctly remember one of my cisgender students whose very close friend had just socially transitioned, coming to me and saying, I need a book because like, I don't know what's going on and I want to stay this person's friend, but I'm not really comfortable asking the questions to them, which good for you, right? Good for you for exploring. Good for you. For knowing that maybe that's not the right person to ask the questions to when you're trying to learn. And so I. I handed over a great library book that I still go to young adult fiction. Yay! For young adult fiction. And it was one way for that student to learn. And then the actually the trans student picked up the same book and then they read it together, which was really beautiful. Right? It can be as simple as that and can really open up to people to a conversation that I really think we need to be having.

[00:29:45] **Speaker 1** What is your message to people who support these anti-trans. People who consider themselves to be anti-trans. What is your message?

[00:29:59] **Speaker 2** Who has a good wine. Okay. I'm going to need to think for a second. When I think about people who hold beliefs that are anti-trans in my most generous heart of hearts, I want to believe it's a lack of information. And so I don't. And I have people like this that I've that I've spoken to. Right. This isn't just a hypothetical. What I have found most impactful, partly to the person I was speaking to, but also to myself, because I think it's important to keep in mind that that's a tough conversation for people. I'm not trans and it's tough conversations, even tougher if you are right. And so when I think about how do I approach someone who has anti-trans beliefs. I try and approach it in a way that shares information but not data and not science. Those are important and they do support the trans people and non-binary people exist. But I don't think those are necessarily like the things that cut through the hate. Cutting through the hate. Saying that it's hate also is not necessarily really effective. So when I think about what message I would give, I would want it to be really effective. And so to me, appealing to empathy and one's own understanding of self is really important. So I think about how a lot of trans people are very misunderstood because it is something that people aren't familiar with, like the gender journey that people are on. And to me, as someone who has never been through a transition, but as someone who has learned a lot about myself and come to a deeper understanding of myself, that's something that I can appeal to. And someone else who is not trans, who might not be a member of the LGBTQ community or might be, who has these views of saying, You don't need to understand everything. You need to understand that someone who says they know who they are knows who they are. Because I would respect the same of you. And you don't need to necessarily understand every detail and nuance of someone's health care or of someone's, you know, intricate physical makeup to understand that when they say, I need this and that this is protections, they're speaking the truth. And so to me, when I think about how do I message to to an opposing viewpoint, I always try and think of how can I appeal to someone's empathy and frankly, how can I appeal to someone's own understanding of themselves? I as a queer woman, have gone through my own self-discovery. I've gone through my own coming out journey as any queer person knows, sort of am always coming out. And I've always said to myself that it's a huge gift because it means that I have such a deep understanding of who I am because I had to wrestle with it. Right? That is not everyone's experience, but I think it does rhyme with most people's experiences. Maybe it was something you had to come up with to figure out your own political beliefs, maybe their political beliefs. I do not agree with it all, but you had to wrestle with them to figure them out. That's a sense of self you have. I would try and appeal to look, you have gone through a journey. So as everyone else, just maybe on a different topic and from a different vantage point, I believe you when you say you have these political beliefs, I want you to believe someone else when they say they know who they're.

[00:33:53] **Speaker 1** On the other side of that, what is your message to trans people who are feeling or uncertain of the future?

[00:34:04] **Speaker 2** As an LGBTQ plus movement and as a leader in the movement. I want our trans and non-binary community members to know that we see you, we support you, and I'm never going to know everything about your challenges. I'm going to listen as much as humanly possible. And I'm very, very, very clear in my own belief that I want to honor someone else's humanity by not making them always have to defend their own existence. I think it's incredibly important for those of us who are not trans to be showing up for our trans and non-binary community because it is exhausting to always have to defend your own humanity. And no one should be put in that position. And specifically, trans kids should not be put in that position if they want to show up and fight. More power to them and also more power to the rest of us for not forcing that on anyone. And so when I think of my message to the trans and non-binary community, I want you to know you are not alone. You have strong support from LGBTQ, plus people from allied communities and a whole lot of people who just need to know you a little bit better. They'll love you. And so I'm here to help make sure that that education is an important part of the conversation going forward. Yeah.

[00:35:22] **Speaker 1** Those are all the questions I have. Is there anything else you wanted to add that.

[00:35:25] **Speaker 2** We didn't touch on? Thanks. I mean, we think we're like, I don't know, there's really good questions and very thorough. So probably not. But let me think for a second. No, I think yeah, I can't think of anything that I thought through beforehand that we didn't get to, So thank you for that. Yeah. Question you. Okay. Do.