

## Democratic Spaces: Disability, Access, and Advocacy

February 23, 2021

[This meeting is being recorded].

STEPHEN RUCKMAN: Welcome to the SNF Agora webcast. We're giving people just a minute to join us.

Thank you, all, for joining us. We'll get started in just a second.

Okay. We're going to get started. Good evening, everybody. Thank you for joining us for Disability, Access, and Advocacy. I'm Stephen Ruckman. I use "he/him" pronouns and I'm a white man, sitting against a green background. I work at the SNF Agora Institute.

I want to thank Dr. Bonnie Swenor and the Johns Hopkins Disability Health Research Center for partnering with us and the co-founders of #CripTheVote.

Democratic Spaces is discussions about how we can cultivate conversations, a healthy democracy requires that we all have a role. We'll explore how we can build the spaces that invite all voices, especially the voices of those who currently face barriers into those conversations.

Today, we'll talk about how people with disabilities have full access to participate in our democratic institutions. Just a little bit of housekeeping before I introduce our guests, this is a panel discussion. The panel portion will last for about 40 minutes and then we'll be taking questions from the audience. You can submit questions using the Q&A function and the moderator will be choosing questions.

The chat function has been turned off for comments so that we can use it to share relevant information among the panelists.

So, now I'm excited to introduce today's guests. I'll be introducing our moderator and she'll introduce our guests from #CripTheVote.

Dr. Bonnie Swenor is associate professor, where she focuses on identifying and addressing inequities for people with disabilities. Welcome, Bonnie, and it's over to you.

BONNIE SWENOR: Thank you so much. I'm really grateful for this opportunity to partner with the SNF Agora Institute and for this session, today.

So, I am Bonnielin Swenor. I am a white woman with blond hair. I'm sitting in front of yellow walls. For those of us joining, who are new to disability inclusive spaces, we are describing ourselves on this virtual call so that individuals with vision impairment -- or who are blind -- can also understand who's speaking.

I would like to warmly welcome our guests, the co-founders and the co-organizers of #CripTheVote. Alice Wong is a disabled activist, media-making and consultant. She is the founder of the Disability Visibility Project, dedicated to creating, sharing and amplifying disability media. And she's the editor of "Disability Visibility," which is first-person stories of the 21st centuries.

And, welcome Andrew Pulrang, a disability activist and former director for a Center for Disability Rights. Andrew is a disability-focused freelance writer and a contributor to Forbes.

Gregg Beratan is the director for advocacy at the Center for Disability Rights and has more than two decades of advocacy experience.

Thank you, all, so much for being here with us this evening.

So, I'm going to just dive right into it and ask the three of you a question that I'm guessing you've been asked a number of times, over the past few years. Can you start by telling us -- the audience -- a little bit about what #CripTheVote is and how it originated?

GREGG BERATAN: This usually falls to me, I guess. Gregg Beratan. I'm sitting behind a black background -- in front of a black background with the #CripTheVote background. It's a ballot box with different accessibility symbols and #CripTheVote below it, in rainbow colors.

Where do start? I guess I'll start with where we started and then I'll let Alice and Andrew talk about -- a bit more about the hashtag and the campaign is. But, we were all -- we knew each other through Twitter, in 2015-2016. And we were watching as they had -- I'm guessing about 25 different primary debates. And, by about the 12th, it started to become evident to -- to those of us, in the disability community, that there was just no sense that any of these people even recognized that our community existed. And we all sort of tweeted about the same thing, at the same time. I reached out to both Andrew and Alice to say, "can we start a campaign to bring disability into the mainstream because without our community, this isn't going to happen." And, Alice came up with the hashtag, which is -- I think -- probably about 90% of our success.

[Laughter].

60% -- I'll give the other had 40% to the disability community. And we thought we'd live-tweet the debates, have a few discussions and see what happened. And, within days of even announcing the hashtag -- and what we were planning on doing -- the community just took it over and was tweeting on it 24/7. They were tweeted at candidates and having discussions about issues. They were asking questions of people, you know, who were running for office, talking about policy, sharing news stories. And it just sort of took off, to the point where, in the past election, we organized two chats with Presidential candidates, who actively engaged with our community and we saw -- I mean, I don't know that this is all us, because there were lots of people engaging with candidates. But we saw much more engagement, in this last election, in the community, for people running at all levels of office.

I guess I'll leave the rest to Alice and Andrew.

ALICE WONG: Andrew, do you want to go next?

ANDREW PULRANG: Sure. That's the way it all happened. And, you know, I would just emphasize two things. For me, the most gratifying thing has been the everyday conversations. It just took off. And have never stopped. I mean, I check every day. I try to contribute something every day. And there's been a day when there wasn't something happening, when people weren't talking about the issues.

And for those who may not be 100% sure how this actually works, you know, in Twitter, when you use a hashtag, that -- the way it works is it ties the conversation together, at least that's how we use it. There's many uses for a hashtag. In one sense, it's a slogan to say something and it works that way, too. You know, #CripTheVote -- "crip" is a reclaimed slur against disabled people, that has been repurposed for some. It had a lot to do with the initial interest because people saw it and was like, "what is that? It sounds like it might be interesting." And then looked into it.

But anything that you say -- and you add the hashtag thing to it -- means that anybody can look up that hashtag and see everything that everybody said about it. So, this -- one of the big things this does

is -- this campaign does tie conversations together. So, any time anyone wants to say anything about disability issues or politics and they want to add it to that conversation, they just add #CripTheVote to the thing that they're saying.

So, the everyday conversations were amazing and then the other thing is, we started doing scheduled chats, not connected with debates, or particular candidates, but topics. We started doing them -- I don't remember exactly when -- but within a few months of starting the whole campaign. And that has been a core activity, too. Maybe Alice could talk about some of the topics we did and how that's worked out.

ALICE WONG: Yeah. Hey, everyone. To describe myself, I'm an Asian-American woman. I have a mask on my nose, attached to a ventilator. I'm wearing a fluffy fleece jacket. My background is dark. Delighted to be with you all today. I want to emphasize, we are just three individuals. This is not our full-time job. We are not digital organizers. This is not something we were trained to do, professional careers in. But I think that's kind of exciting, too, is that we're just three people, pretty passionate about politics, pretty passionate about disability issues and wanted to create something that we haven't seen yet, that we feel like is needed and I think one of the reasons why #CripTheVote [Indiscernible] there has been a voice. There has been this overall [Indiscernible] of disabled people, even though I think, for decades, right, there have been always been advocates doing a lot of the grassroots work and paving the way. We just happened to use this digital space and, you know, even though [Indiscernible] this is a tool that we have. This is a tool that we have, as individuals, to use together and because we don't need to build any other infrastructure around this, it's been pretty remarkable that we can do this, as a community.

So, I think that's [Indiscernible] should have had this idea that we're -- this is our career or life's work. We do this on our own time and we do this out of love and out of a real, kind of -- I guess commitment to kind of -- to what we believe is possible and I think that's the overall thing that I just want to share about this -- this collaboration. And it's really been a collaboration. And we don't have any sort of grand plan or some sort of timeline. We've always been responsive to what's happening [Indiscernible] and the way we schedule activities, such as -- for example live tweets or our scheduled Twitter chats, you know, we always try to just do it at our own pace, you know. [Indiscernible] each other all the time. How do we feel about this, should we invite this co-host for our Twitter chat? We just really try to not feel too burdened in terms of expectations, but always doing it, you know, in collaboration, in partnership with each other, as three people, but also with the broader community.

And I'm just going to drop and [Indiscernible] right now, to a book about hashtag activism is a real thing and it has potential and power, especially for marginalized communities and I think this is where people [Indiscernible] activism, but it's definitely real and I think it's one of the examples.

BONNIE SWENOR: Thank you. So, I'm just going to say to the three of you, we had some planned questions. I'm going to go a little bit off-script, based off of your responses. I've heard you talk about that the idea of online activism isn't perceived as real -- or having an impact. As a member of the disability community, what you all are doing -- and have done -- absolutely has had an impact. Maybe you could talk a little bit about -- from your perspective, what that impact has had, first of all. Or what barriers, in having an impact, this

opportunity for online activism removes or addresses for the disability community. Or even other communities, if you're willing to respond to that, I think.

ANDREW PULRANG: If I could start -- first, I apologize. I'm a white man with glasses. And, I've got a blue shirt and an ordinary apartment background. So, yeah, I think -- you know, one of the things that I think has made us successful -- or has made this fun -- and workable -- is that I think we tried to limit goals and I don't mean "limit" in a bad way. I mean, we never have had grand ideas about -- that we're going to change the disability community or change politics.

And we didn't -- we have never had statistical goals or, like, we have to accomplish "a, b and c." And partly, again, that's because it's just three people. We don't have a board of directors that's telling us that we have to do stuff. We don't have funders, who are breathing down our neck, saying we have to accomplish our objectives and all that kind of stuff. So, that's allowed us to be flexible, to be -- to again, have limited goals, pursue -- I guess the only goal that we've always had is to have a discussion and to keep it available for people, keep it relevant, keep it provocative, when necessary. There of those things are things three people are able to do with Twitter and Facebook. You don't have to have a lot of in-person activity to do that.

One of the answers to your question is what we set out to do is shaped by the medium that we're using. Right. So, we didn't say, "well, we want to do this to the disability community. What shall we use?" We actually started out with a medium and said, "well, we use Twitter. We're talking on Twitter, right now. What can we do, with Twitter, to make a difference?" So I think that's part of it.

GREGG BERATAN: I think it's interesting now, this particular moment, you're seeing all these mainstream organizations, who have relied on the in-person visits, legislative visits, et cetera, who are adapting and adopting the techniques the disability community has been using for years, and trying to learn from what we've been doing, what other people in our community have been doing, to get at politicians. Calling into legislative meetings is nothing new to disabled people.

It's helped people come along and see the value of this type of activism and what it can -- what it can actually do.

ALICE WONG: Yeah. And I think this is an awfully -- it's also helped people feel like they're not alone. You know, we're still -- here we are at the 21st century and there's still a lot of disabled people who just feel like, you know, they're not connected with their community for lots of different reasons. That is structural and social. They feel like, "oh, my gosh. Who cares about this? Or thinks about this?" And this is a way for people to realize that, "oh, my gosh, there's people all over the country, and really internationally, too, that our struggles are similar." Learning to do things for people all the time and I think that's the really exciting thing, too, that there's so much out there and I think the [Indiscernible] is one way to kind of explore that. And of course, there are lots of other hashtags out there, too, so this is not, like, a singular thing, but it could be a gateway, right. This is a really exciting thing that it's very [Indiscernible] and I think that's what nice about social media is the fact that you can grow and learn and follow new people that you would probably never encounter in your real, everyday interactions.

That, to me, is really exciting. I use the tag a lot for lots of things that are happening abroad, you know, outside of the United States, not just about [Indiscernible]. People know that even though the

tag says "vote," it's much more about voter participation and I think that's really exciting, too, that they also wanted and needed in terms of getting involved and people can get involved in lots of different ways, right. This is, like -- so the most basic ways that they kind of politicize and be an activist is just sharing information, telling your story. That's really effective advocacy [Indiscernible]. I think that, to me, is hopefully something that people take away from it. You don't have to be, you know, organizing a rally. You don't have to be doing all kinds of things.

Especially with this last election, people organizing and doing the door-to-door stuff, but also digital organizing. That's been really awesome to see, especially with this pandemic and technology, there are more opportunities now. And we see campaigns also -- presidential campaigns also hire disabled folks and these disabled folks are using all kinds of tools, such as Twitter, to really -- you know -- communicate and do outreach with the disability community, very explicit, visible ways and that, to me, is really, really heartening.

ANDREW PULRANG: I think another way that -- another thing that addresses this question of how useful online advocacy or social media advocacy is, is that we made it pretty clear, from the start, for instance, that more traditional disability organizations -- and those that do more traditional activism and policy development -- were welcome to use the hashtag to get messages they had and news out to the community. One of the gaps that we've always perceived is there's actually a lot of really high-level, sophisticated activism going on, but so many actual disabled people don't know about it because the networks really aren't there.

Now they're forming much more quickly, partly because of social media. So, you know, everything from adapt to policy development shops, you know, campaign organizers, candidates running for state legislatures or town councils can all use the hashtag and say, hey, here's what's going on. And, kind of give out action alerts at times. When something important is happening, people have used the hashtag to say, "get on this now. This is super-important. You need to know." And, with it being a live medium, you know, we know about it right away. And so, I think there's value in that, too.

And as Alice eluded to, it's not just our hashtag. We overlap, a lot, with some others. A lot of times, we'll put other ones on, too. The pandemic has produced high-risk COVID as a hashtag and variations on that. No Body is Disposable is a hashtag. It works in an amazing way and part of the [Indiscernible] to me is watching it happening, from my perspective. I'm just trying to keep up. It's like, I'm not even -- you know, I'm doing it but I'm -- I didn't come up with the idea. It's like, okay, this is the way things are happening, let's use that. Let's see how it goes. So part of my motivation is almost curiosity. Like, what's going to happen next? How is it going to morph into something else?

BONNIE SWENOR: Thank you. It is so interesting. I agree. And, seeing how, you know, as the series is called Democratic Spaces, how this virtual democratic space, with #CripTheVote, has really -- as you all described -- evolved beyond voting. Right. And, the hashtag, #CripTheVote, is used in so many ways and has a meaning now that's bigger than that and it does feel like, in this moment, there is a lot of traction to use these virtual spaces to importantly advocate for the disability community.

And so, you know, COVID-19 has been an interesting layer on top of that, right. And so, I'm curious, you know, with this past voting

season, which was a really interesting one, because of the pandemic, you know, what your perspective was in if this virtual democratic space -- or this shift in the connection between the disability community -- how that impacted the opportunity to vote -- or access to voting -- during this COVID. I guess I'm really interested to know if this was -- how this impacted, at this exact moment in time, in COVID, if that makes sense.

ALICE WONG: I guess I'll just jump in real quick and say, you know, things have improved in terms of disability and disability rights. But here we are, over 30 years after the ADA, there's still really very significant barriers to voting. It is still kind of so bananas that across various states, like disability rights organizations still have to file lawsuits and say, your buildings and your polling places or inaccessible, your websites about elections are still inaccessible or that, you know, you're still not offering accessible ballots. This is so sort of kind of depressing. It shows how much work there is [Indiscernible]. I think this pandemic has shown that access is different for everyone. And we still have to absolutely, you know, demand and expect that every person, regardless of their disability, votes independently and privately. And I think that -- I think this past election -- I just read a blog post by Eve Hill, from the Harvard Law Review, that said there were 10 lawsuits, across different states, that had been filed because with this pandemic and usage of absentee voting, there was a lot of access issues and there are lawsuits for people to try to do the right thing.

These lawsuits -- it was too late by the time it was November. [Indiscernible] just my random thoughts.

GREGG BERATAN: Yeah, I mean, I think it's nice to say that things have improved -- and I'm sure that there is evidence that some things have improved. But there's still so much further to go and we still see so much resistance from places using disability access to suppress votes of Black and Brown voters, to -- I mean, just recently, the -- what's it called? The Election Assistance Commission, issued their voluntary voting guidelines and they ignored all the recommendations of the disability community. So they didn't ensure accessible remote voting. They didn't prohibit, um, segregated in-person voting. And they didn't set any schedule for states to update their voting equipment. So, if an organization's supposed to be focused on making elections accessible is ignoring the disability community, there's still a lot of work to do.

ALICE WONG: Go ahead, Andrew.

ANDREW PULRANG: Along these lines, one of the things I'm worried about is, you know, looking at the mess that we had, right after election day. You know, my sense is that some of what motivated that -- or provided frameworks for that -- was some peoples' discomfort with a lot of new systems being added, kind of on an ad hoc bases, because of the pandemic, which was tremendous for the disability community and was tremendous, probably, for overall voter participation.

But -- and it happened kind of quickly because of the pandemic. I mean, compared to the slow pace of any change in electoral processes, it was kind of remarkable. I see that as a positive. But, I fear a backlash and we already -- have started to see that with states kind of saying, "okay. We did that. Now, let's take a breath and go back and be restrictive again." And I think that's something that we're probably going to have to deal with over the next several months, maybe the next several years, is a step back and, you know, I'm hopeful, but I'm worried that that progress, you know, might not last if we don't -- if we don't stay on it.

ALICE WONG: Yeah, to add to what Andrew was saying, I think there was [Indiscernible] there's just a lot of kind of mixed messages for certain states requiring people to vote in-person, which put a lot of high-risk people having to make this decision of, oh, do I exercise my right to vote and put myself at-risk by waiting in line? Or, other states were [Indiscernible] absentee ballots and that also [Indiscernible] disabled people who just need a way, that's accessible, that's also absentee. There's a lot of "even" "ors" which is really unfortunate. [Indiscernible] last year was a hot mess in terms of just how states were able to adopt and just adjust to this pandemic and, you know, hopefully the lessons they learned will be carried forward because I don't want to jump back.

I don't think that just even if it's like this, where I think [Indiscernible] sometimes organizations or [Indiscernible] and sometimes, you know, for somebody like me, I don't travel. So, you know, I don't go to a lot of things and sometimes [Indiscernible] request to say, hey, can we do it online? [Indiscernible] well, you know, we feel like it's much more, you know, engaging when people are in the same space. And I get that, too. [Indiscernible] but hopefully people will realize, like, we can have hybrid, kind of approaches, we want to bring everybody in as many creative ways as possible.

BONNIE SWENOR: So, building off of exactly what you were just saying, Alice, what do you all hope and are looking for, in the future, I guess -- trying to formulate this thought as I'm listening to y'all talk. What is the pressing issue, right now, that #CripTheVote is being attached to? What is your hope that it will be used in continuation for? You know, do you hope it will expand or how do you see it being used, moving forward?

GREGG BERATAN: I mean -- sorry.

ANDREW PULRANG: Go ahead, Gregg.

GREGG BERATAN: I can't speak for all of us. One thing that has consistently emerged from the discussions on the hashtag that I hope more and more people realize -- and this is something we're really heartened to see some out of some of the mouths of the politicians this last election cycle, is all issues for disability issues. And, I mean, I'd love to see that understanding spread. I don't think we have any ambitions for the hashtag beyond continuing to support and work with the disability community, that means so much to each of us. But, I mean, I think that's certainly something we'd all agree on and like to see continue.

I'm sure there are other things, however, though.

ANDREW PULRANG: I agree with Gregg. I would say the more immediate -- probably the most immediate issue, right now, is vaccination -- access to vaccines for COVID. That's -- you know -- probably going to be the short-term most active issue. When that sort of is passed, however that ends up, at some point, relatively soon, it probably will be kind of over-ish. Yeah, beyond that, I'm not sure. But I would agree with Gregg. Our point is to just -- as long as people want to keep using the hashtag, to communicate on these issues, we'll try our best to keep it going.

I think probably we want to get back to some periodic monthly chats where we set up a specific topic, we tell people, in advance, the questions we're going to ask. We get a guest host to come on with us, who's an expert in that subject, and have a scheduled chat on something, on an actual issue. We haven't really done that in a while because of the election and before that even, because of COVID. And, how that took over everybody's time and imagination.

Yeah. And, I -- finally, I would say -- you know -- for the long-term, you know, before the pandemic, the way things were shaping up was that 2020 was the most exciting year yet for disability policy because tons of candidates put out really sophisticated disability policies. Not just, like, five issues mentioned. But, like, 10 issues really flushed out. And then the pandemic hit and everybody kind of forgot about that, sort of, or it became less of an exciting thing. I hope that going forward, that future candidates will remember to do that and that will become the normal thing to do, that candidates feel that they have to do, that they have to have a well-researched crowd -- you know -- with more than one person having input, slate of full range of disability issues. Because that gives disabled people something to vote for, which frankly they often feel that they don't have and that's a big barrier, too.

ALICE WONG: [Indiscernible] you know, I think that [Indiscernible] people [Indiscernible] part of it is [Indiscernible] holding people accountable, holding institutions accountable is, for me, one of the purposes of being, you know, politicized and being involved. You know, this last -- this past week, you know, the whole blackout, Texas and various states, this is a major disability issue we see and we see leaders completely fail their people, who are often the ones who are most impacted, the most [Indiscernible] and are harmed, [Indiscernible] people and disabled people are part of that. And I think, again, it just reminds us of our relationship with the state and how to use whatever we have [Indiscernible] to really push back and to demand accountability, to demand transparency, and to demand action.

So, I think that's always kind of my personal [Indiscernible] of this hashtag.

BONNIE SWENOR: Thank you. I'm really grateful for that perspective and to understand what -- how you view this and the work and the amazing accomplishments, I think, of the hashtag lives on.

So, now I'm going to turn to some questions from the audience, which I'll read to you. We have about 15 minutes left for that portion. So, the first question, from an audience member is, do you all think that disability advocacy and virtual community-building will get harder after the pandemic recedes? When the country returns to a less online-embracing style of politics?

ANDREW PULRANG: I'm going to make a wild guess and say I don't think it will get too much harder. I am actually optimistic that people will have learned at least a few advantages of doing things online, more than they used to. I'm not optimistic that it will become viewed as a fundamental accessibility issue -- issue of fundamental rights and access. That would be too much to ask. I hope that they would, but I'm not optimistic that it'll be embraced in that way, but I think that people will at least begin to think, you know, why spend millions of dollars -- or thousands of dollars, a person, to have a conference in a location when we could all just hop online and have a conference, like, tomorrow.

I mean, if people don't embrace that, to some extent, it'll be amazing to me. [Indiscernible].

ALICE WONG: Just to jump in, I think to me, when I saw the Democratic National Convention all online, I actually thought it was -- that was so well put together that any multi-million-dollar [Indiscernible] and the way it was so much more tighter and focused and well-produced and well-organized. I would love to see that happen again in the next four years. So, who knows.

GREGG BERATAN: Yeah, I mean, I -- in terms of organizing, I

don't think it'll have any impact. I think our community's been organizing this way for eons and we're very good at it and we -- we -- you know. The disability community sees some of the most sophisticated organizing techniques I've seen in any political movement. So that will continue.

Now, will some of the access that we've seen, over the past year, retract as people feel more entitled to demand in-person? Possibly. And that would be a shame, as Andrew said. But I think our community is less likely to accept that, for the simple reason that we've now seen them accommodate us and it's hard to withdraw rights once they've been given, so, hopefully people will push back, if that retraction does start to take place.

BONNIE SWENOR: Thank you. So, I -- there's a question, here, on a topic that I think we had discussed before this session, but never made it to our discussion. And the question is, can you talk about the importance of representation and having members of the disabled community as legislators?

ANDREW PULRANG: Well, the one thing that I always bring up is that -- one of the things we've done, with #CripTheVote, is periodically do an online survey of, like, what people care about because we want to get a sense of, you know, which issues are more important to our participants and what they'd like us to do, what their priorities are, that sort of thing. We've done, I think, three of them, and in all of them -- we would always list a bunch of pretty specific goals, like, you know, more employment or better home care, that type of thing. And, we always put in -- as a goal to choose from -- having more people with disabilities run for office, get elected and get appointed to, you know, like, political positions. And that always come out on top as the top priority.

So, for whatever that's worth, you know, it's our -- it's the people that participate, that are voting. It's not a scientific survey, but it's interesting that always comes out at the top priority. I think people with disabilities, who are involved in politics, kind of instinctively feel that that is super-important, alongside the more substantive policy issues. I think they feel it's important.

On the other hand [coughing] sometimes, people with disabilities get elected to things and are super-disappointing. I won't go any further with that. But, you know, when you open the door -- and it's totally fair. I mean, you open the door to politics, you open the door to politics. And everybody's going to come through. Everybody finds this out. Every liberation movement has this, discovers this.

Probably long-term, a healthy sign. Doesn't make it any easier to deal with, but, you know, it's also a reminder that simple representation is not everything. Just being disabled does not make you, like, the best choice. But, for the community, it's good to see that it's possible.

ALICE WONG: Yeah. I think it's much more of -- over the last few years, if not the last decade, we've seen more candidates be very open about their identity and all the different identities that they hold and that, to me, has been really just wonderful because it's no longer a thing that have to hide or just kind of skip over. So, you know, there's a lot of politicians who are [Indiscernible] talking about disability issues, disability rights, you know, there's one person [Indiscernible] she's really example of somebody so engaged on Twitter, has a representative of her district who's constantly organizing and really talking with the public and engaging with the public through Twitter. And she's very open

about -- she's proud to be Asian-American. She's proud to be autistic. She's proud to be a woman. This is hopefully what the future -- this should be the future of what we want and what we deserve.

GREGG BERATAN: Yeah. I was going to say the same thing. And I'm really glad Alice shared [Indiscernible] links because she's fantastic, having done some work with her office.

There's some great people out there. We're starting to see. Yes, there are the few people our community would like to disown, but we've also seen -- we've seen other politicians in Pennsylvania and California, it's been wonderful to see people start to run and be out and proud and -- and own their disabled identity because that can only help our community.

ANDREW PULRANG: I think it's good to try to shout-out an effort, from the National Council on Independent Living. Spearheaded by Sarah, who has been running a training program called Elevate for people with disabilities interested in running for office or learning about how they might do that, which I hope will continue and expand because that's an important part of representation, is not just taking it by chance, hoping that disabled people run for office and kind of giving the tools and more than just a generic "how-to" can do for disabled people who want to run for office, so that's a really important thing, too.

ALICE WONG: I dropped the link into the chat box to the Elevate program. Part of the infrastructure is systemic barriers having clearly campaign financing, but a lot of things [Indiscernible] people running for office and it turns people off. It's a very [Indiscernible] very difficult process to, like, raise the money, raise, you know, get the staffing and everything you need and, you know, a person with a disability is on SSI. What if they have -- what if they are a brilliant candidate and wants to run for office? What are the ways that not only the community, but what resources are available for people to run and I think that's also, you know, part of the [Indiscernible] really want political representation by us and for us, how do we support people that [Indiscernible] but also, you know, just running for anything. So, I think that's also a challenge and a call to action for disability communities everywhere.

BONNIE SWENOR: Thank you. Yeah. I -- fantastic outline of -- I think -- the work ahead for our community.

So, we just have a few more minutes and I'm going to ask just one last question for you all, which is a take home point, if you're willing to share, for those in the audience, of what they can do today -- the people in attendance -- to support your work, disability advocacy, today, tonight, tomorrow [Indiscernible].

ANDREW PULRANG: I think the first thing, you know, if you have a disability and you're already involved in advocacy, keep doing it. If you are disabled and you're not, or if you know somebody who's disabled, ask them about it. You know, show some interest. It's not -- you know, not all disabled people are involved in disability advocacy. I would -- I think probably most are not, on a day-to-day basis. And there's a lot of reasons for that. But, bringing it up, as a thing to talk about, as a thing to be curious about, I think helps make it less stigmatized.

Oddly enough, disability advocacy -- and activism -- can be very stigmatizing. People think it's boring. They don't like politics. They're afraid you're going to be [Indiscernible] them all the time. They roll their eyes. You know. It's not universally admired to be an activist so I think to serve the overall cause, I think destigmatizing it as much as you can is something that anybody can do, when somebody brings

it up, to have a positive response, to be curious, to be open to it.

ALICE WONG: Yeah. I'm going to quickly drop in this topic about [Indiscernible] equity. I think whichever state you're located in, take a look at your state's [Indiscernible] plan. Who are the people that are prioritized? And if you don't see people with disabilities [Indiscernible] people who are compromised. If they're not part of the tiered prioritization, ask your governor why. Ask your local representatives why. And, you know, just -- you know -- ask these questions and I think that, to me, is one of the biggest issues right now is that anybody can do that and I think that's the real, kind of [Indiscernible] is that so many people are left out and have to spend so much energy just for the basic equity. So, I think when we think about equity, when we think about disability -- when we think about equity and we think about diversity, you've got to also think about disability. That's my take away.

GREGG BERATAN: I'm going to go a little more basic. I think if you're a disabled person, tell your story. There's nothing more powerful than our stories. We've seen political change based on the chance encounter where somebody shared their story. I'm thinking, here in New York, for example, politician was doing, you know -- knocking on doors to say "vote for me." And came to a door and heard the story about someone who couldn't hire a family member for -- as a personal assistant. And, that politician then introduced the change to the law that allowed family members to serve as PAs. Your stories have power. And, share them as widely as you can.

If you're a non-disabled person who wants to be an ally, make sure you listen to our community. Go out of your way, whether it's a family member. Find out what's going on in their lives, what's important to them. If not, come on to Twitter, come to Facebook, go to the hashtag, go to some of the other hashtags, whether it's RevUp or Disabled and Cute. There's so many hashtags out there, with our community. Listen to what disabled people have to say. I can't think of anything more important.

BONNIE SWENOR: With that, no better way to end this discussion. Alice, Andrew and Gregg, thank you so much. Really grateful for your time.

ALICE WONG: Thank you for having us.

ANDREW PULRANG: Thank you for having us and doing this topic.

STEPHEN RUCKMAN: All issues are disability issues and it's important to remember that perspective. I'm thankful to all of you, tonight, for thinking about these questions. Thank you to the Johns Hopkins Disability Health Research Center and thanks, everybody, for asking good questions.

Before you go, I want to invite you for our next Democratic Spaces discussion on March 17, from 7:00 to 8:00 about dissent and disagreement. We'll be joined by [Indiscernible] Martha Jones.

They will discuss the importance of fostering places for speech, as a means to advance democracy, ensure that all voices can be heard.

You can visit [snfagora.jhu.edu](http://snfagora.jhu.edu) and sign up for our bimonthly e-newsletter.

Thanks, again, and I hope you enjoy the rest of your evening.  
[The recording has stopped].