

Transcription

This Is What Democracy Sounds Like

Alyssa Rodriguez: Welcome to Built By US, a podcast created by Democracy North Carolina, a nonpartisan nonprofit organization dedicated to building a political system that works for all. My name is Alyssa Rodriguez, I'm your host, and what you're about to hear is our first episode ever. And I can't wait for you to see what we're all about. So in this episode, I'll be joined by Taylor Moss, communications associate for Democracy NC and local fashionista, where we had a great time talking the organization as a whole and what we're trying to do. Now, to my conversation with the Fashionista herself. I hope you all enjoy it!

Alyssa Rodriguez: It'll be great. It's going to be great. It's gonna be great. So Taylor, thank you so much for joining me for the first episode ever of Built By Us. So before we start, let's talk a little bit about you and how you got here and your journey with Democracy North Carolina. So how did you get here?

Taylor Moss: Wow, thanks for being so interested. Um, so I was an organizer before I came to Democracy North Carolina. I had just left college and was just pumped to keep working with people my own age about these political issues that mattered most to me. And we worked on a few things, but definitely I was most excited about making sure that young people were getting out to vote because unfortunately voting isn't easy and I wanted to make sure that I was helping or basically doing everything I could to make sure that young people were increasing their numbers in the electorate. So, uh, Democracy North Carolina was a coalition partner of my old organization. So working with them was so exciting. They had all these great resources and the staff was really cool and just knowing that they were the top when it comes to democracy organizations in the state. So when I decided to leave my old organization, I knew I wanted to come work here, but luckily they had a position open. It was only temporary, but it was for running the election protection program, which if y'all don't know, that's where we send out volunteers in their bright yellow tee shirts. Super Stylish. To stand out in front of polls and make sure that if people had problems voting that we were there to help and you know, give them the confidence to go back inside and say, actually yes I am allowed to vote. So I ran that program last year. It was the biggest midterm program we'd ever had, which was incredible. And so I was excited to be given the opportunity to stay here. Now I've moved into the communications department, which is really cool cause I've never done anything like this before. So I'm now in charge of innovating our communications techniques, which is why we're doing these multimedia projects like this podcast. So I'm really pumped for what we're going to be doing.

Alyssa Rodriguez: I'm really pumped too! And Taylor's actually the entire reason I'm here right now because she hired me and I'm a North Carolina native and I attend Appalachian State University, which is where I learned about the opportunity to get involved with Democracy North Carolina. I'm a communications fellow currently and I'm so excited to be here. I've been learning

so much more about it these past few weeks working with Taylor and I've just, I'm really passionate about what they're doing and what they're trying to do for us, North Carolina voters.

Taylor Moss: And we love her. So glad to have her.

Alyssa Rodriguez: Aw. My heart. And so Democracy North Carolina is an organization that works to protect democracy in our state, North Carolina, and promote citizen ownership of our government. A large part of our mission is helping North Carolinians achieve meaningful pro democracy reform. And it's also important to know we are a nonpartisan organization, which means we focus on policies and not politicians. We don't endorse candidates and we can, will and do call out anyone who harms voters.

Taylor Moss: Please!

Alyssa Rodriguez: But we also work with state lawmakers a lot to make sure that every eligible North Carolina voter can vote.

Taylor Moss: Yeah. And we definitely do this in three different ways. We're a big organization that's here to put up the research, so we've got amazing staff members crunching the data and analyzing it to make sure that we understand what is happening and then we can come up with better solutions for it. Then we also have staff that are out in various parts of the state doing organizing. So those are our people who are, you know, getting there in the communities, talking with just regular everyday people and bringing them into the fold so that people are actively volunteering and actively working for the things that we need. And it's not just us, you know, the staff telling people what makes the most sense. It's we're getting, we're getting input from just citizens. And then the last thing we do is training. We want to make sure that people can do this work on their own as well. So we're out there giving trainings on how the political system works. We just want to make sure people understand what it is that our elected officials do everyday and why it's important to vote and what it is that you're voting on when you go and do that as for specific activities that we're doing. So like I mentioned earlier, our poll monitors, we do a bunch of training for that so that people feel well equipped to go out there and, and help people when they're trying to vote. So, for example, uh, a campaign that we worked on in the early two thousands, so that was a huge success. It's about same day registration. Um, I dunno, Alyssa, have you, have you used that before ever?

Alyssa Rodriguez: Definitely. It makes everything so much easier.

Taylor Moss: Yeah, definitely. Um, I have used it as well and that's the thing where during early voting period you can register rather than having to have done it ahead of time and we had to fight for that. It took us five years. It was from 2003 to 2008. It was a really big fight. Both Republicans and Democrats didn't understand why it was necessary. So it was kind of an uphill battle for us. It took a long time, but it was all worth it because in that first year about 103,000 people got added to the voter roles just in that first--

Alyssa Rodriguez: Oh my gosh.

Taylor Moss: Yeah, just in that first year. And just for an example of like how important that is, the 2008 election was only won in North Carolina by 14,000 votes. So you know, that's pretty small and we were able to add over a hundred thousand people. So it's important for us to keep same day registration and make sure that everyone knows why it's so helpful.

Alyssa Rodriguez: That example just really shows how important the work that Democracy North Carolina does for any voter in North Carolina. Because if you are a voter in North Carolina, democracy NC is advocating for you and your right to vote. All of the policies that we advocate for and fight against are always fought with you in mind. We are fighting the power so we can give you the power.

Taylor Moss: That's right.

Alyssa Rodriguez: And that's really what this whole podcast is about, Built By Us is about illustrating Democracy North Carolina's of bringing power back to the voters. And we just really want this to help you understand the real effects of the negative policies that North Carolina lawmakers have pursued in the past and how they have a chance with the policies that we're advocating for to make things better and to make things right. This podcast is going to highlight not only what we're fighting for, but more importantly who were fighting for, the people we're fighting for, and the stories and experiences of North Carolina voters surrounding our For The People campaign.

Taylor Moss: Woo.

Alyssa Rodriguez: And so before we go into this campaign, I want you all to know that this campaign is not off the wall or random. This has been crafted carefully through research and outreach and we're so excited to roll it out and show you all who's for the people.

Taylor Moss: I'm really excited about this campaign. It's actually the first time we've been able to push a positive policy agenda pretty much in the last 10 years. So it's really exciting time for us to Democracy North Carolina and just everyone in North Carolina. So we, I've created this campaign that is, as Alyssa said, for the people, by the people. So together all of us will be pushing for legislation that is for everyone, for the people. Just a quick look at them. Melissa will be going into depth of all of these bills in the future. But just for a quick snapshot for everyone, we're going to be pushing for flexibility for every county on early voting. So that means, you know, we want to make sure that each county can make their own decisions so that they're not wasting money. It turns out that we've wasted way too much money last year trying to have a uniform schedule and it's just not worth it. We're going to push for the gold standard of redistricting. I'm sure. I don't need to tell y'all that redistricting in our state has been terrible for the past 10 years, so we want to make sure that citizens and the public are giving their input on

voting maps so that it makes sense and it helps voters. We're working to modernize voter registration, so get it online or automatic.

Alyssa Rodriguez: It just makes sense. These, these policies just make sense.

Taylor Moss: Like half of the state has a half of the nation has online voter registration. There's just no reason for us to not be there. And then the last two things would be rights restoration for folks on parole or probation and then making sure that digital communications for campaigning have their tagline of "paid for". And that's just to make sure that we all know what we're taking in when we're online. I think this is something that's important because of what's been happening with Russia and with fake news and unsure about where things are coming from. We need to be able to protect ourselves by just being able to read what is correct. So we're doing this in a lot of ways. As I said earlier, our staff is spread out across the state. So we're just going to be talking to y'all about what it is that we all want and we're gonna make sure that our local advocates are pushing really hard in their communities to get everyone involved. We just want everyone to agree on this good work. And then at the end of this month actually will be going to the general assembly in order to lobby for all of these things. So we hope to have you all with us, but I just want to make sure that people know that these policies that were pushing for and this better future that we can have in North Carolina is possible. Like these are not pie in the sky ideas. They're not too difficult. Legislation is written, it's in the house right now and we just need to make sure that these get pushed through and get voted on. So we just need everyone talking about it. That's the main thing, right? Like just making sure everyone is, is here saying, yes, we want these things.

Alyssa Rodriguez: Everyone needs to know!

Taylor Moss: Exactly. So we just wanna make sure y'all know that it's, we just have to fight for it.

Alyssa Rodriguez: And we just really want this campaign to draw the line between the lawmakers who are for the people and who are not from the people. Because historically a lot of our lawmakers have not been for the people. For nearly a decade, lawmakers in many states, but including ours, have led an all out attack on democracy. North Carolina alone has been home to some of the nation's worst gerrymandering. Unprecedented partisan power grabs and limits to voting access.

Taylor Moss: And if y'all remember back in 2013 we had this monster voting law which was awful. It's slashed early voting, it cut popular voters safety nets like same day registration that I mentioned earlier, and out of precinct voting, which is just confusing for voters. And then it implemented the strict photo ID requirement which was resurrected like a bad Zombie in the constitutional amendments last year.

Alyssa Rodriguez: I just don't understand why anyone would want to make voting more difficult like--

Taylor Moss: Yeah. The thing that's pretty clear is that people in power just want to stay in power and they know that if more people are getting out there, we just might want to shake things up and I think that that's--

Alyssa Rodriguez: Yeah.

Taylor Moss: You know we have the right to say that, right?

Alyssa Rodriguez: Yeah, I think so!

Taylor Moss: If we're not cool with what's going on, then we should be able to vote someone out, vote someone in who looks more like us, who agrees with us more. So we just need to make sure that if everyone is getting out, then we can have the representation that we deserve.

Alyssa Rodriguez: And that's why this campaign is so important because we want the power to be with the people. The people in power can only stay in power if we want them to stay in power. This campaign illustrates our mission to restore power and knowledge to the voters and the people of North Carolina. So we're fighting for the people, but we can't do it alone. We need our lawmakers to be fighting for the people too. And this for the people campaign is going to show us who is for the people and who is not for the people.

Taylor Moss: Exactly. So if you are interested in learning more, and getting involved, please go to our campaign hub on our website, demnc.co/forthepeople. So DEMNC.CO/forthepeople. Please read more about all these bills and sign up for events that are happening near you. We'd love to have you come out.

Alyssa Rodriguez: We're happy we had the opportunity to tell you a little bit more about us, what we're doing and what we want to do. We hope you tune in. If our next episode as well!

Taylor Moss: We really hope you'll join us in creating an North Carolina that is Built By Us.

Alyssa: Thanks for listening to this podcast made of, by, and for people.

Taylor Moss: Bye!

Alyssa Rodriguez: Bye!