

Emily Cherniack Transcript

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Mila Atmos: [00:00:41] Welcome to Future Hindsight, a podcast that takes big ideas about civic life and democracy and turns them into action items for you and me. I'm Mila Atmos. Before we get to the episode, we have a favor to ask. We're running a short survey during the month of April, and it's all about you. We want to learn more about what you think of the show. If there's anything you'd like to change, and by taking part in our survey, you could win the chance to be on the show! You can find the survey link and more details in our show notes or at futurehindsight.com.

Mila Atmos: [00:01:27] We are continuing our focus on voting this week. It's a theme that's going to run through a lot of our episodes this year. Voting rights are on the legislative agenda. Midterm elections loom later this year, and the foundation of our democracy, the peaceful transfer of power following free and fair elections is being called into question in deeply unsettling ways. So we've been looking to help you build up your civic action toolkits as voters. We've examined how we talk about our freedom to vote, looked at election reform, and we've been hearing from former candidates from outside the establishment to learn about their experiences, Which brings us to today's guest who's been working to broaden the pool of candidates and ultimately politicians. Emily Cherniack is the founder of New Politics. Her organization works with military veterans and alumni of civilian service programs like AmeriCorps, with a goal of encouraging more people with civil and military service experience to run for office all the way from school boards to Congress. New Politics also runs an academy that now operates in 23 cities, offering lessons that include how to get duty focused public servants to feel comfortable talking about themselves. Emily is an AmeriCorps alum herself, and she ultimately believes service minded politicians could change

government priorities. "Their frame is country and community first." Emily, thank you for joining us.

Emily Cherniack: [00:02:54] I'm so happy to be here. Thanks for having me.

Mila Atmos: [00:02:58] You're welcome. So what inspired you to found New Politics?

Emily Cherniack: [00:03:02] I was not political at all, growing up in and even throughout college. And I did AmeriCorps, so I was very much involved in my community, but just was not political in any way. And then my former boss, Alan Khazei, who co-founded City Year in 2009. Senator Ted Kennedy died and the seat was open in Massachusetts. So there's a special election. And Alan was like, you're going to come on the campaign. I'm running for the Senate and I need you. And I was like, I know nothing about campaigns or politics. I'm like, "I'll get coffee, I'll make copies. Like, whatever you need. But I want to be really clear. I do not know anything about campaigning." And so he kind of voluntold me that I needed to, like, be on this race with him. And it was really, you know, I talked about it like The Matrix when Keanu Reeves in the original Matrix. Now there's like the remake, but the original Matrix, when Keanu Reeves swallows the red pill and this whole world appears before him that he never knew existed. That's how I felt being on that campaign and realizing that it's such a counterintuitive, closed ecosystem, and that's really hard. There's just like significant barriers for people to figure out, and it's not easy. And so even someone like Alan, who co-founded City Year, became a model for AmeriCorps. You know, City Year is \$100 million a year organization, like Alan is incredibly successful. Despite all of his brilliance and knowledge, it was really hard for him to figure out how to be a candidate. After that experience, I really sort of started to look at and ask the question, which I never thought about before, who runs for office and how do they do that? And I realized that it's a rigged system and it really prevents transformative servant leaders from entering and being set up for success. So that's sort of what inspired me.

Mila Atmos: [00:04:37] Oh, awesome. So what in your mind is the biggest barrier to running in this insular system?

Emily Cherniack: [00:04:43] You know, it's interesting. I think a lot of people just think money like they're like, "oh, the money is a problem." And yes, it is a barrier for sure, but

actually it's a knowledge barrier. There's two, I think, equally biggest barriers. One is people's belief that they belong in the political space, that they should do it. I think there's a lot of self selection out of politics. And the second barrier equally as important is knowledge. How do I start a campaign? Who do I hire? What does that look like? What kind of consultants do I need, right? All these things that are really difficult to figure out on your own and counterintuitive. And I think that's why people are set up for failure if they even decide to run.

Mila Atmos: [00:05:20] So then why is a service background good for political office?

Emily Cherniack: [00:05:25] We're not blindly supporting all service people, but I think a lot of the experiences people have in service, the experience that these young people have between the ages of 18 and 25, they learn to work on diverse teams. They are with people from different ideologies. They are bringing people together, leading them towards a mission greater than themselves, and they have boots on the ground, problem solving experience. And so they're used to being dropped in somewhere and having to figure it out. So I just think that sort of entrepreneurial mindset and that country first, community first mindset is invaluable in political life. And I think that we make this assumption that a lot of political leaders have that experience, but they actually don't. I actually would think if you polled congressional members if they've ever led teams before, I don't think a lot of them would say yes. A lot of elected officials don't actually have those skill sets. And I think those are really invaluable and necessary in order to sort of get things done in politics.

Mila Atmos: [00:06:18] I want to drill down on this idea of servant leadership that you just described. Tell me more about what that looks like in ways that is different today in political leadership.

Emily Cherniack: [00:06:29] You know, in political leadership, if you're a servant leader, you know, the expectation is you're making decisions not for your political career. You're making decisions based on what is best for the community, what's best for your constituency. You know, Seth Moulton, who I recruited to run for Congress in 2014, always says this and it sticks with me. He said, There are a lot of smart people in Congress. My colleagues are smart. My colleagues work hard, but many of them lack courage. And I think that that is what is lacking in Congress is servant leaders are about

having the courage to tell the truth. Having the courage to do what's right. And having the courage to do it, even if it's not popular. So I think that's really important. And I think servant leadership is ultimately about doing something that's greater than yourself. And so I think if we have more people like that in Congress or in state legislatures or in city councils, our democracy would be fundamentally different. And so I think that's what servant leadership to me means and why we need more of them in political life.

Mila Atmos: [00:07:26] I have a question about Seth Moulton. How has he fared in the long run? I mean, it's been I think he was elected in 2014, so it's been eight years. How has he fared in Congress, in your opinion, and how does it match up with your theory about servant leadership?

Emily Cherniack: [00:07:42] I mean, Seth is, you know, the ultimate servant leader. I think politics is always gives you tough lessons. And I think he's learned a lot of lessons along the way. I won't speak for him. I do know that he really loves serving. I think despite the fact that Congress is hard and there's a lot of gridlock and the climate we're in. I mean, he got elected before Trump was president. So it's been a really tough four years, I think, for everybody. But for Seth, for him, what he says is that he hasn't felt this way since he has been a marine. And I think when he was a marine, it was about serving the country and being in Congress for him is is another way to serve the country. So he really loves it.

Mila Atmos: [00:08:16] I'm curious. I know his race was your first race. And what did you learn from that experience in running his campaign and then subsequently helping others run their campaigns?

Emily Cherniack: [00:08:26] I think the two greatest lessons were, one, it's really important to stay authentic to who you are and who the candidate is. Like, you really should run the campaign that the candidate wants to run. A lot of people told us, "well, a, they were like, don't run. You know, your career is going to be over if you challenges incumbent." I mean, it was a whole bullying situation and I think really sticking to what was true about this narrative and who he was and that it's really powerful to talk about service and service to others. And I think the other thing is, no matter what, whether you run and win or run and lose, it's still an incredible leadership experience. And anyone who gets into the political arena is forever changed for the better. And they continue to

be political leaders, whether they're elected or not. And so the act of just running in general helps people with their political journey and become powerful in the political space.

Mila Atmos: [00:09:15] Mm hmm. Yeah. Candidates that we've spoken to in the past who haven't won, they all tell us how much they love running, actually, how much they enjoy the one-on-one interaction with the voters, and how rewarding that whole experience is. You know, full stop. Running for office. So I'm interested in how you recruit candidates. Is it a tough sell or is it more that people are just looking for support and guidance?

Emily Cherniack: [00:09:40] It's a tough sell like. Well, there's two things. One is the people that come our way, you know, the percentage of those that are transformational servant leaders are fewer. It's sort of like when you're trying to hire for a job and the resumes that come your way or maybe not the resumes you are going to interview, but you really recruit the person that's, you know, has another job and you're trying to get them into your organization. It's this the same thing. Really the ones we want are the ones we have to recruit. And that is a hard sell. I mean, even with Seth, I had to call him and talk to him for a long time before he said yes. And especially women and people of color. You know, that is a harder sell. And so it takes a lot of work and it's a long journey. I don't think people understand. It takes years to get people to a place where they're saying yes and when they're actually filing to run for office. It could be a four year project for us.

Mila Atmos: [00:10:29] Oh, wow. So tell us a little bit about that four year process. Like what is your opening gambit? What do you say?

Emily Cherniack: [00:10:37] I always say you should run, because I think when you say to somebody, Have you ever thought about running? It's a really different dynamic. And people with service backgrounds are often like, "No, that feels really narcissistic to like do that." So it's always about asking someone to serve -- again. You know, I think you should run. Your country needs you. It's really important for our politics. And in this time. Right. And then it's a lot of them being like, I don't have a lot of - they have a lot of questions. It's a lot of worrying about finances, not only raising money, but a lot of times you can't have a job while you're running, right? So how am I going to afford my life if

I'm running for office full time and all these things? And so it's unpacking this sort of and demystifying the process for people, and that takes time. And then it's really about geography and opportunity. So part of it's just, where do I live or where am I going to live if I'm transitioning from wherever? And then what are the opportunities available to me and what do I want to run for? So that takes time for people to process and to really think about and and to really prepare. You know, the thing we always say is running for office is like the day you file is like the first day of school and the first day of school the teachers are hired. The principal's there. The supplies are in the classroom. The curriculum set. The first day of school is not starting out to get everything organized. All that prep work is really important for a candidate, and so it takes a while to sort of get there before they're actually publicly a candidate.

Mila Atmos: [00:11:58] So then once you persuade them to run and they have signed on and they've filed, what are some of the nuts and bolts in this? How do you train and support the people who agree to run?

Emily Cherniack: [00:12:11] Yeah. So the first thing that we do before they're a candidate is really get them to articulate and connect to their core values. What I saw when I was in the political space with my former boss was, I talk about it, you know, it's like the dark side, right? And there's a lot of Sith lords around. And so to stay a Jedi, you have to really be clear about who you are. And it's easy to get swayed one side to the other if you're not clear about your core values. And so getting people to really kind of be clear about that is a first step to stay centered in a really challenging political space. And then what we do is we have campaign advisors on our team, which are kind of like political sherpas, and we really help them navigate the process. And it really was clear for me when Seth, when I recruited him and he was like, okay, I'm going to do this. He went to Harvard Business School, which is like arguably one of the best business schools in the country. And he was like, I don't know how to hire a campaign manager. Like, what does that even look like? What kind of skills do I need for that person? Right. And so there's this whole ecosystem and structure and infrastructure that needs to be set up that if you don't know, you don't know. And so we really help them with that process. Hiring staff, right. What are the best consultants for you? What does it mean to hire a direct mail firm? What does it mean to hire a media firm? Right. And what are the kind of people that you want on your team? And so really helping them build that, creating fundraising systems, helping with their public narrative. So all the things, the

nuts and bolts of what it takes to run a campaign is really what we do. So sort of a hybrid of like a VC firm and an accelerator, that's kind of our model.

Mila Atmos: [00:13:38] You're really talking about both running as a candidate, as a person, as a human who's going to represent others, and also basically getting this big operation off the ground and hiring people and building a team which are very difficult things to do. Both of those things are difficult in and of themselves. So I wonder, though, if in the current state of politics a service-minded person, you know, with these obstacles, I mean, this is a big undertaking the way that you're describing it, might think that, you know, achieving more in civic service is more viable than going into politics. Is that a barrier? Have you discovered that that they're like, no, you know what, I'll just go back to AmeriCorps, or I'll just go back to the military. What do they say?

Emily Cherniack: [00:14:20] Yes. As someone who made that false choice herself, I did AmeriCorps. I went to school in D.C. and I literally did not step one foot into Capitol Hill. I was like those political people. I mean, I was just like, they're grimy, they're, you know, narcissistic. I had a lot of feelings about that. And I was like, I'm a service person. I work with young people. And that's my role, right? I do direct service. And I made a false choice that you had to do one or the other. And and I think the biggest challenge is what I realized is that civic engagement and direct service are, you know, the lifeline of our country. And so we should always do that. But political power is what really changes the system. So I could care a lot about my young people in Boston who were, you know, struggling in these, you know, inequitable school systems. But if I didn't actually care about who was on the school board or who was the mayor or who was making these decisions that were changing and affecting the systems that they are in, then I wasn't actually doing my job as a youth worker. And so if we want to change things, it has to be about politics because they are the ones that are making the decisions about our communities. And so for anyone to say, I'm out of the game, I don't do politics, I become a total evangelist for like, if you really want to change things, you have to get elected. You have to work for electeds. You have to get engaged in the political arena because there's no other way to change our democracy and to change our policies.

Mila Atmos: [00:15:40] Right. Right. Yeah. Politics is for power. I totally agree. You say that servant leadership is critical to a healthy and inclusive democracy. What do you

think of when you're imagining a healthy, inclusive democracy? And in what ways do you think your organization can help us get there?

Emily Cherniack: [00:15:58] I mean, I think it's it's a representative democracy. So our elected officials should reflect our communities in which they they represent, which, you know, that's not what happens now. You know, I think that it should be an engaged and inclusive democracy is that elected leaders should actively think about how to engage and be inclusive with their constituents. A lot of times what happens now is it's just the only people that vote or the political activists are engaged. A congressional member represents a million people. You know, I would say like 30,000 vote in a primary. And if you're in a safe Democratic seat, only those 30,000 people are people you have to care about. The rest are kind of like -- whatever. Right. And so the system is set up where you don't have to actually represent everybody because not everybody votes. So I think an inclusive democracy is where everyone would vote, but also that the elected officials would think about that as everybody votes in my district, whether they do or not. You know, Mike Johnston, who was a former state senator and a Teach for America alum, he was the only state senator in Colorado that put his office in the community. It wasn't actually at the state house. He had a second one in the neighborhood, and used it as a community space. It was a convenient space for the community and it was sort of this basic idea, right? Like, why wouldn't you do that? But as a state Senator, he was the only person that did that in the state House. So just thinking differently about how are we engaging people in the political process and being inclusive? And then I think the second part of that question of New Politics, us recruiting and electing leaders like Mike Johnson who think that way and instilling that type of culture in the political arena is how we can play a role in transforming and really helping elect leaders that are representative, breaking down those barriers so that they can be successful in politics.

Mila Atmos: [00:17:38] We're going to take a quick break to hear from our sponsors. When we come back, Emily is going to talk to us about potential servant leaders who talk themselves out of stepping into political roles. There are citizen change makers who aren't veterans, but who have served their country and their communities. But first, thanks to the Jordan Harbinger Show, which combines in-depth interviews with some of the world's most fascinating minds, like writer Arthur Brooks on practical ways to help improve our country, starting with loving your enemies, and Michael McFaul, former United States ambassador to Russia on developing relationships, creating allies while

under fire, and building trust, and rapport in uncomfortable situations. On the Jordan Harbinger Show, you'll learn useful advice from his heavy-hitting interviews with guests. Michael McFaul, for example, said he's still being trailed by the Russian government, and that's just the beginning. Jordan also does Feedback Friday episodes to respond to listener questions about everything from conventional conundrums like asking for a raise at work, to doozies like helping a family member escape a cult. Whether Jordan is conducting an interview or giving advice to a listener, you'll find something useful that you can apply to your own life. That could mean learning how to ask for advice the right way. Or it could just be discovering a slight mindset tweak that changes how you see the world. Search for the Jordan Harbinger Show. That's J O R D A N H A R B I N G E R in Apple Podcasts, Spotify, or wherever you're listening now.

Mila Atmos: [00:19:11] Thanks also to Avast. Avast is a global leader in cybersecurity for more than 30 years and trusted by over 435 million users. It empowers you with digital safety and privacy no matter who you are, where you are, or how you connect. Enjoy the opportunities that come with being connected on your terms. Avast's new all in one solution, Avast One, helps you take control of your safety and privacy online through a range of features. Learn more about Avast One at [Avast.com](https://www.avast.com). Avast has a large array of features from antivirus, which stops viruses and malware from harming your devices to ransomware protection, which keeps your personal photos, documents, and other files from being changed or deleted. It also offers Smart Scan, which finds and removes viruses and fixes the most common issues through this optimization scan. And it also offers PC Speedup which manages the background data apps use and speeds up your PC. What could be better? Free and premium versions are available. My favorite feature is Avast Data Breach Monitoring. It finds out if your online accounts have been compromised or your passwords need to be changed. Avast prevents over 1.5 billion attacks every month, and with Avast One, you can confidently take control of your online world without worrying about viruses, phishing attacks, ransomware, hacking attempts, and other cybercrimes. Learn more about Avast One at [Avast.com](https://www.avast.com).

Mila Atmos: [00:20:49] And now let's return to our conversation with Emily Chernick, founder of New Politics and the New Politics Leadership Academy. I have a question about sort of the candidates with backgrounds in service as opposed to the people who are veterans. What's the difference between them in terms of how they approach running or how they become candidates and even how they are as leaders?

Emily Cherniack: [00:21:13] You know, I think they're actually very similar because they've had similar experiences around working with diverse people and bringing people together. They're different in that a lot of the National Service want to run for city council, school boards, state reps, state senate. So they're much more about the domestic kind of community issues, whereas veterans are really about... You know, they kind of want to run for Congress right away because their sort of international foreign policy experience. So getting them to understand why state legislature is important is like a conversation. It's not like they think they're too good for it. It's just more that they're like, "Well, I want to. I want to talk about Ukraine right. Or I want to talk about Iraq and the war. So Congress is where I want to be." So that's the differences and we have to actually talk to National Service alumni to be like, "well, what about Congress?" Because they're like, "Well, why would I do that? You know, the education policies are at the state house level and that's what I care about." So it's just a difference of their pipelines, of where they start.

Mila Atmos: [00:22:05] Mm hmm. So that leads me back to the work that you said you do with them in getting them ready, about finding out what they really stand for and how they want to serve. And, you know, in the dark space where they have, you know, Siths hanging around, how do you help them with their inner work to get ready for this kind of race?

Emily Cherniack: [00:22:24] We do a program called Answering the Call, which is our sort of gateway into politics. And we really base it on our our chief program officer Max Klau, has a PhD from Harvard and Leadership Development, studying under Ron Heifetz, who is sort of famous for his adaptive leadership models. Otto Scharmer at MIT, his leadership model. So we kind of base our leadership development programming in real research. And the two of those professors and leaders in the space really talk about being clear and connected to who you are. So we have, the program we do, is facilitating that for them. And then staying with them along the way. We coach and we have coaches for them, leadership coaches, that kind of give them reflective space to stay centered. Because I think a lot of times in politics, reflective space and time for sort of debriefing, it's not really culturally like seen as okay. And the nonprofit space where I come from, we reflect all the time. And so it's just kind of bringing that culture into politics. So we try to do that through those ways.

Mila Atmos: [00:23:22] I think that's very helpful to help them to reflect. I mean, one of the things that you described is what a grind it is to be an elected official. You know, you have to show up and press the flesh and have a town hall meeting or you have to drive, you know, in inclement weather, because that's the time that was scheduled and all this. And it takes a lot of work. And if you're not convinced about what you stand for, it makes it very difficult. So I wanted to pick up on something you said about representation, because is it really the case that military service members are underrepresented in political office? I mean, it used to feel like it was a prerequisite in the post-war era. And it's still something that people campaign on. Like, you know, if you run for office and you're a veteran, that's maybe the first thing you say in your campaign literature. I know that the numbers are a lot less than they used to be in the seventies. But tell us about sort of proportionally what we're talking about.

Emily Cherniack: [00:24:17] Yeah. And so representation for me means two things. One is the diversity of our country. So we don't want all white people in elected positions when our country is is not that way. So I think representation in that way. But the other way is we have the lowest number of veterans in history in Congress. And I didn't know any of this till I researched the data, but I was surprised to see that in the 1970s, I think 75 to 80% of Congress had come from service backgrounds. And now we're at the lowest point in history with less than 20%. Now, granted, that was during the greatest generation, WWII. You know, everybody in a lot of ways had served. So understandably, there's some reasoning for that. But but we still have an underrepresentation of service leaders in our politics. There's no causation, but there's a high correlation, I think, between the lowest number in our history and the the greatest increase in gridlock. And Congress is the least productive that's ever been. So there is, I think, a correlation there.

Mila Atmos: [00:25:12] Hmm. So what is the percentage now of veterans serving in Congress.

Emily Cherniack: [00:25:17] 18 to 19%.

Mila Atmos: [00:25:19] And you think that if we had more of them than we would have less gridlock?

Emily Cherniack: [00:25:23] I think yeah. I think if we had significantly more of them, they are the ones that are willing to work across the aisle. And we've seen that even the ones that we've elected. They're more bipartisan and that they're willing to get things done and kind of work with others to find compromise. A lot of them talk about, well, they don't agree with issues with all the Republicans. The Democrats will say they find somebody that they agree on one issue that they can work together on and get something done that way. So if we have more people that approach it that way, I think we would be in a better place.

Mila Atmos: [00:25:49] Yeah, I agree. If we, if we had more people to approach it that way. But yeah, we just don't. Well, I have a question about sort of, you know, in general service, I totally get your premise that folks with backgrounds in service make better candidates and better elected officials. But I'm also thinking about some of the former service members who participated in the attack on the Capitol on January 6th. And is that something you've thought about? You know, we talk about the positive things, but maybe there are some negative things also about recruiting or about people who are running with a service background.

Emily Cherniack: [00:26:23] Yeah. I mean, I think we, obviously we don't support every veteran that runs. I think for us it's really about service is a filter, but it's not, you know, it's not everything. Sorry. That was my three-month old just woke up from his nap. So my, luckily my significant other is home to grab him. So I apologize for the the interruption.

Mila Atmos: [00:26:41] Oh, no worries. It's like we're all working from home, so we have these interruptions, children running in the background and your three-month old. Congratulations on your baby.

Emily Cherniack: [00:26:49] Thank you. You know, you can look at the military history and it's like the Ku Klux Klan and other things have kind of come out of that, too. So there's a whole history around military that that there's a there's a dark side to that. So I think for us, it's about service as a as a filter. But also then we look at, you know, the core values around integrity, empathy, you know, courage. And so I would say, like the people that ran in the insurrection or in the insurrection are veterans... Like empathy is

probably not a quality they have. Right. And so really, we would filter out people like that. And we have and again, there are people, there are veterans that are elected that we don't support.

Mila Atmos: [00:27:24] So to circle back on the January 6th thing in general, under the Trump administration, it was really toxic for I think most people. So have the attacks on Alexander Vindman affected the perception of being in public office specifically for people who used to serve in the military?

Emily Cherniack: [00:27:43] It's a huge concern for when we recruit. A lot of people say, I don't want my family -- and it's really interesting to sort of like, I can handle it. I just want my family to be involved. And so, you know, this sort of fear of like my kids being, you know, attacked or my wife or my husband. Right. So I think it's a very real thing. And there are people that we talk to that are just like, I can't put my family through that and I won't do it. And so, unfortunately, you know, it's real and it's it makes people not want to engage in the political process.

Mila Atmos: [00:28:11] What is the most successful line of reasoning for service members to agree to run?

Emily Cherniack: [00:28:20] It's about the mission and it's about the country. Because a lot of them too are like, it feels really narcissistic. It's all about me. They feel uncomfortable with their name on a sign or a bumper sticker. I had one candidate that she had made signs before she talked to me and it said Team; Together Everyone Achieves More. But her name wasn't anywhere on the sign and I was like, "They have to know who they're voting for. Your name has to be on the sign." So I think that it feels really selfish, narcissistic to run for office to be a candidate. So tying it to a mission of your country needs you. It's a mission to protect our democracy. And actually, if your children look back on history during this time, what are you going to tell them you did? And that's a real motivator for people to say, "I want my children to know that I stepped up and that I fought for this country when it was about to fall apart."

Mila Atmos: [00:29:09] Right. Right. Well, you mentioned several times now that it seems narcissistic. Is that your perception or is it really narcissistic to run for office?

Emily Cherniack: [00:29:18] No. I mean, I think the perception is that people who run for office are narcissistic and then hence why we're in the mess that we're in. But it is not, I think at its core, was not narcissistic when this country was founded. I think it was about service to others. And I think I think we've gotten off track. So I do think I understand where people can see that. I used to think that too. So it's convincing people because it does feel a little bit about you. Again, you're like, I'm running. I need you to give me money. My name is on everything and, right. So it feels a little bit like it's all about you. And so getting people to sort of understand that it's a larger mission is really important.

Mila Atmos: [00:29:56] Got it. So what are two things that an everyday person can do if they're considering a run for office?

Emily Cherniack: [00:30:03] Two things that anyone can do is: one, in your community, in your city, I would go to some meetings. Like there's licensing commissions, there's housing board. I mean, you really could learn a lot by showing up and participating in a local meeting like that. And I think getting involved that way is, is one start. The other is whether you're Republican or Democrat. I would go to a political meeting and you could even go to your, like every state has different sort of laws around elections. But in Massachusetts, like we have a convention. And so I would go and just see what it's like and just sort of understand the dynamics of what that means. And I think it's just really interesting for people to sort of engage because I think a lot of us who do community service and civic service in terms of like we work at soup kitchens. I think the political side is really different and I think kind of getting involved in that, where people are making decisions and voting on laws or voting on policies or supporting candidates is something that we all should at least show up to a space and learn what that's about.

Mila Atmos: [00:31:00] So in your mind, what is the biggest misconception people have about running for office or serving in office?

Emily Cherniack: [00:31:06] I think people think it costs like millions of dollars, which I get for Congress. Yes. But there are 500,000 elected positions in this country that you can run for. And running for City council might be a \$7,000 endeavor. State rep, you could knock on every door yourself. Right. And so I just think that's actually more accessible. People think political office, they think Congress and Senate, and they

actually don't realize that there are a lot of local positions that you could run for and win. And so I think getting people to understand that it's doable, that it's not so scary and out of people's reach.

Mila Atmos: [00:31:40] Right. So how many people have you helped get elected? And what's the breakdown between people who are serving in Congress and people are serving in local or state offices?

Emily Cherniack: [00:31:50] Yeah. So I think we've helped like almost 500 people run for office over the past several years. 70% are are down ballot, so only 25 to 30% are Congress. So most of our work is actually on the local level and the state level.

Mila Atmos: [00:32:05] Oh, that's amazing. That's really good because that's where we need people, right? People forget that that's actually the place where people make decisions about our everyday lives.

Emily Cherniack: [00:32:14] And it's also. I mean, Kamala Harris was a district attorney before she was vice president. You know, 20% of Congress were former mayors. 50% of Congress comes from the state legislature. They were former state reps and state senators. 20% were formerly staff members. So there is a real pipeline for political leadership if people want it. And so I think people think like, well, I want to run for Congress. It's like, well, if you actually ran for state rep first and four years later, you could be a member of Congress and you would actually learn a lot and have a foundation to really kind of build from. So yes, it's really important because that's where all the laws are decided on the state legislature, but it's also then a pipeline for higher office, too.

Mila Atmos: [00:32:49] So in closing, I have just one more question. Looking into the future, what makes you hopeful?

Emily Cherniack: [00:32:55] I'm really hopeful because I get to be around these amazing servant leaders like James Talarico in Texas, who's a state rep who helped lead the walkout when the state reps left Texas to prevent voter suppression laws from passing. David Crowley in Milwaukee, who was the first African American elected county executive in the history of Milwaukee, that was the seat that Scott Walker held

before he ran for governor. David, just a year ago, he called racism a public health crisis in Milwaukee and has been really entrepreneur and thinking about how to bring Milwaukee into a place where there's real equity. So I'm just inspired by the work that all these local leaders are doing. And I'm really grateful that we have leaders like Mikie Sherrill and Jason Crow and Seth Moulton and Peter Meijer in Congress, who are really courageous and doing what they can to make Congress better. And we need more of them. They need to be the majority and not the minority. But I'm hopeful because they're all leading. And I think people need to realize that they're coming, that there's a whole generation that's really willing to step up and we're going to get there.

Mila Atmos: [00:33:55] Terrific. Those are indeed very hopeful, hopeful statistics and hopefully will be a trend going forward for all of us here in the United States. Thank you for joining us.

Emily Cherniack: [00:34:06] Thank you for having me. It's been an honor. I appreciate it.

Mila Atmos: [00:34:08] Emily Cherniack is the founder of New Politics. Next time on future hindsight. States are described as the laboratories of democracy but have often been overlooked by national political leadership. David Toscano, a former lawmaker from Virginia with decades in the state house under his belt, joins us to discuss strategies for meaningful cooperation and shoring up our democracy at the state level.

David Toscano: [00:34:37] A lot of people do this: They will focus on some local races and they'll focus on the federal, but they'll lose the state altogether. But that's where the lot of the action is. States are making a big difference in people's lives from education and criminal justice, even to climate change and energy issues.

Mila Atmos: [00:34:55] You won't want to miss it. On the next episode of Future Hindsight. Looking for more civic engagement content? Follow Future Hindsight on Instagram for special updates, episode clips, and everything in between to help you build your Civic Action Toolkit, find us @futurehindsightpod. And one more thing. Remember, you can find our survey link in the show notes and our newsletter. Thank you for your time and look forward to your thoughts. This episode was produced by Zack Travis and Sara Burningham. Until next time, stay engaged.

The Democracy Group: [00:35:35] This podcast is part of the Democracy Group.