



UNIVERSITY OF DELAWARE
NATIONAL AGENDA 2021
REFLECTING AMERICA

“A First in the First State”
with Sarah McBride

HOSTED BY University of Delaware
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Sarah McBride When elected in 2020, Delaware State Senator Sarah
McBride became the first openly transgender state senator
in American history. A lifelong community advocate, the
Wilmington, Delaware native has worked for former
Governor Jack Markell, the late Attorney General Beau
Biden, and as a White House intern during the Obama
Administration. Most recently, she served as a
spokesperson for the Human Rights Campaign, the
nation’s largest LGBTQ equal rights organization.¹
Sarah McBride has taught public policy at the University of
Delaware and is the author of the 2018 memoir, **Tomorrow
Will Be Different.**

Transcript of Event

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DR. HOFFMAN: Welcome. Good evening, everyone. It's great to welcome you all to the 11th Annual National Agenda Speaker Series. We are here thanks to the University of Delaware's Center for Political Communication with support from the Office of the Provost, the College of Arts and Sciences, and the Division for Student Life. Welcome to the hundreds of folks joining us from China, Nigeria, and states across the United States. This year's theme is "Reflecting America." How is this historic era in our country, rife with political divides, economic upheavals, and the repercussions of a global pandemic redefining who we are as Americans? As we look in the metaphorical mirror, what and who do we see? We've also seen that Americans find themselves in increasingly narrow echo chambers with access to more information, but it seems like it can't even agree on basic facts much less hear a diversity of points. But that's what we do here at National Agenda. We learn from each other how to communicate effectively across differences, how to disagree without being disagreeable, and how to turn talk into action. This year we've spoken with Appalachian novelist, David Joy and NPR White House correspondent Asma Khalid about religious and geographic divides. We heard from two friends, Bernie Jacques and, and Justin Pierre, who are on opposite sides of the ideological spectrum but manage to engage in civil conversations through active listening. We heard from journalist Eric Michael Garcia who recently published the book We're Not Broken: Changing the Autism Conversation about perceptions and misperceptions of people on the autism spectrum. Most recently we talked with David Hogg who



co-founded March For Our Lives, now one of the world's largest youth led movements. Tonight, is our penultimate event and we'll be inviting audience participation. Just click on the Q and A at the bottom of your screen to submit your question and it may be asked by one of our students tonight. So, tonight, Delaware Senator, State Senator Sarah McBride represents the first State Senate District in Northern Delaware. When she was elected exactly one-year ago today, November 3rd of 2020 she became the first openly transgender state senator in American history holding the highest position as a transgender woman in American History. The Wilmington, Delaware native has worked for Governor, former Governor Jack Markell, the late Attorney General Beau Biden, and as a White House intern during the Obama Administration. She also led the successful effort to pass a landmark nondiscrimination law in Delaware in 2013, worked with state leaders to expand healthcare coverage by Medicaid in 2014, and championed legislation protecting vulnerable youth from child abuse in 2017. That's all before she took office. For her work in advocacy former Governor Markell awarded McBride the Order of the First State making her one of the youngest Delawareans granted the state's highest civilian honor. McBride has taught public policy at the University of Delaware and is the author of the 2018 memoir, Tomorrow Will Be Different with a foreword by one of UD's most famous alumni, President Joe Biden. Please join me in giving a big Blue Hen welcome to Sarah McBride.

SARAH MCBRIDE: Thank you so much for having me. It's wonderful to be on with you, Dr. Hoffman.

DR. HOFFMAN: It's great to see you again, even if virtually but I'm glad you could make it and I'm glad so many of our viewers could make it as well. So, I know



you've told your story many times but for those who may not be familiar with it I wondered if you could give us brief version of kind of how you came to be in the place where you are today?

SARAH MCBRIDE: Sure. Well, first off thank you again for, for having me and thank you so much for the Center for Political Communication for hosting this. I have attended National Agenda events in the past and so I'm really thrilled to be able to be a participant this year. And I, I love those opening credits. I feel like I was part of an action movie opening –

DR. HOFFMAN: [Laughter.]

SARAH MCBRIDE: – so I, I [chuckle], I'm ready to watch whatever that, that show is. I, you know, my journey to the opportunity that I have right now to, to serve as the State Senator for the First Senate District in Delaware, the district I was born and raised in, in many ways mirrors my own journey to authenticity. My interest in politics, my interest in government, my interest in advocacy really stems from my earliest memories as a young person struggling with my gender identity and I think even more than that, struggling with my place in this world. Because, my earliest memories were of lying in my bed at night praying that I would wake up the next day and be myself, that my family would still be proud of me, that my friends would still be my friends, and that I'd still be able to dream big dreams because at a very young age what became crystal clear to me was that no one quite like me had ever made it very far in our society. That there weren't really examples in the '90's or the 2000's of trans people who are out, happy, healthy, and fulfilling their dreams. And I, I think as a young person growing up I feared that who I am and what I want to be were mutually exclusive. That I couldn't be out in trans and live in a community I love, find love, do work that I love. And, at, at, at a young age I was really interested in



architecture and I, I wanted to be an architect when I, when I grew up. And I, I started reading books about different buildings. And I stumbled across some books about the Capitol and the White House. And what, what I was struck by, and what I began to marvel at, was not the buildings or the architecture itself but rather the stories within their walls. The history that occurred within those buildings. And I think what became obvious was that the through line in our country's history, the politics at its best, that government when it's working right is the story of advocates, activists, and a handful of elected officials working together to bring people in from the shadows and the margins to create a more equal and a more just world. And I found hope in that. I, I found hope in those stories that perhaps the chapter that I was living through could be a chapter where people like me could finally be brought into that circle of opportunity, to be included, to be accepted. And, for a while I, I told myself – I got involved – I told myself that if I could make it worthwhile for me to stay in the closet by making a difference in other people's lives, because it seemed so impossible to make a difference as my authentic self, that perhaps if I helped create that world I could almost live vicariously through others. I could find fulfillment. I could heal the pain in my life through that advocacy and effort. And it wasn't until I was in college at American University that I had the opportunities to really see that making change in my community while it was professionally fulfilling wouldn't actually heal the pain. In fact, it would make it worse. I had that experience serving as student body president at, at AU and, and doing that work, working on issues I really cared about and that homesickness, that pain of being inauthentic it only grew as I, as I did that work. And so, I eventually came out to my family and friends and then eventually my campus community and my community back here in Delaware when I was a junior in college. And I was really scared about the reaction, but I was



also very lucky because as fearful as I was with the love and support of my family, with the support of my friends every single day since coming out I've, I've seen that my greatest fears didn't end up coming, coming to fruition. That I could live my truth and dream big dreams and pursue those dreams all at the same time. That I could find love, live in a community I love, and do work that I love as my authentic self.

And, you know, I think that work and that effort continued to, to propel me forward; it introduced me to the man who would become my future husband, Andy. And you know, in talking about my journey to this, to this moment, to this position, no retelling of that would be complete without sharing the story of, of that love. It, it was a transformational love for me. Two trans people, not to use too many trans puns –
DR. HOFFMAN: [Chuckle.]

SARAH MCBRIDE: – in one sentence, two trans people who fell in love. Andy was a transgender man about three years older than me and he was fighting for healthcare as an attorney in Washington, D. C. when we met. And, we fell in love. We moved in together and then about a year and a half into our relationship he was diagnosed with cancer. And he was lucky. I was lucky. He was lucky to have health insurance that allowed him to get the care that he needed. We were both lucky to be able to have jobs that allowed us to take paid leave so that he could get that care and I could be there by his side caring for him without sacrificing our incomes. And, he eventually got through it. But then eventually received the news that, that every cancer patient hears, that his cancer was back. It, it had spread and, and it was terminal. And so, when he found out that he didn't have much time left he asked me to marry him. We married on the rooftop of our apartment building in August of 2014 and then just a couple of days later he passed away. And, not a day goes by that I don't think about Andy. That I'm not motivated and informed in, in



what I do personally and professionally by not just Andy's example but by the lessons I learned in particularly, particularly those final few weeks of his life. It, it left me feeling a sense of urgency. It left me with a recognition that as fulfilling as my work on LGBTQ equality was that at the end of the day we couldn't achieve equality and opportunity for every person unless we were working on every issue. And it left me feeling like we don't know how long we have on this earth and if my life were to be tragically cut short what change will I have brought? What difference will I have made? Will I have lived that fulfilling life? And so, I decided when this seat opened up, my longtime incumbent senator retired, I decided to, to run in this district that has provided me so much, that has supported me through so much I decided to run to give back, to fight for that change, and, and hopefully deliver that urgent change that, that I think is so necessary.

DR. HOFFMAN: Well, thank you for, for sharing that. Those of us here in Delaware know it's a small state but not many people can say that the President of the United States wrote the foreword to their book [chuckle]. Can you tell us a little bit about your history with the Biden family and how you got interested in Delaware politics in the first place?

SARAH MCBRIDE: Sure. So, you know, I think like a lot of young people who, who develop an interest in politics I was, was first just interested in national politics. And it wasn't until a, a family friend decided to run for office that I had the opportunity to, to, to be exposed to Delaware politics. And I was 13 years old traveling around with, with a guy named Matt Dent who became, he was running for Insurance Commissioner, he became Insurance Commissioner and then Lieutenant Governor, then Attorney General. And now actually he's leading a non-profit advocating for, for support and opportunity for children. We've actually been able to have the



opportunity to work together on some legislation over the last year. But he allowed me to sort of shadow him and, and, and volunteer for his campaign at 13. And what was so amazing to me was at a, as a 13-year-old going to the state convention here, going to the political events I got to meet my legislators. I got to meet my statewide elected officials. I got to meet my U.S. senators and my governor. And, what was even more amazing is that most of them if not all of them cared what I had to say as a 13-year-old or as a 14-year-old. And so, it made politics that much more personal and to some degree that much more accessible for me as a young person. And it was volunteering on, on Matt's campaign and then eventually working for, volunteering for Jack Markell's reelection for State Treasurer I met Beau Biden. And, started interning for him during his 2006 election and then eventually when he ran for reelection I was on staff for his campaign serving as his field director and volunteer coordinator, traveled around the state with Beau and developed a really, a, a really deep relationship with him. When people talk about Beau being sort of all of the best things within his father it's really true. I mean, he was the real deal. He was exactly who he seemed in public behind closed doors – compassionate, thoughtful, kind, really family focused, family oriented, hard working. And, and, and so we began to work together and when I eventually came out Beau did not skip a beat. He called me using the right name and pronouns instantly and told me that he and Hallie loved me, that the Bidens still supported me and loved me and that we were, I was still part of their family. And so, when we started working for a nondiscrimination bill here in Delaware, the bill you mentioned, Beau really stuck his neck out there on that bill. Put, put the full weight of his office, the Department of Justice, behind that legislation. And if it wasn't for him and, and the folks that he sent along with Jack Markell as governor pushing for it, we would have never passed



that bill. And so, you know, after Beau passed away my relationship with the now President began to develop even more so because I think in for, in many ways I think Joe Biden's passion for LGBTQ equality stems from Beau's passion and support. And I think Joe feels like he's carrying forward Beau's legacy in life in, in that work among others. We also, I think, connected over our shared losses, our shared losses of a spouse at an early age, our love of Beau. And so, when he wrote the foreword to my book it, it was surreal, it still is surreal. I, I, I wish I could tell my 10-year-old self that Joe Biden wrote, was, was, was not just someone I knew but that he was someone who wrote the foreword to my book. And I, I really cherish it and I, I appreciate his friendship and I appreciate the Biden family's support – really unwavering support.

DR. HOFFMAN: Well, so, speaking of, of President Biden, what are your expectations for the Biden presidency? What's he doing right and maybe what could be improved? There's a lot of issues facing the United States and, and the world. We're seeing the, the climate conference taking place right now. What are some, what are some of things you have to say about his presidency as it is today?

SARAH MCBRIDE: Well, you know, I, I'll say I am very excited about the, the policy agenda that President Biden's put forward. The Build Back Better agenda is really an agenda that one, touches every major issue facing our country in some way or another. And for that matter, really focuses in on the issues that I heard day in and day out on the doors here in Delaware; the, the challenges facing caregivers in our society, whether those are the challenges facing parents, the challenges facing adults caring for aging parents, the challenges of, of spouses caring for, for their loved one. That, those challenges, even before COVID, were the challenges I was hearing about every single day. They're the challenges I, I, I know about in my own



life. And so, I'm thrilled to see an administration that has put forward an agenda that really is transformative, that meets this moment with meaningful change. Now, obviously getting through that agenda, getting that agenda through a Congress that is equally divided in the U.S. Senate and includes a senator from the state of West Virginia has obviously been a challenge. And even the 1.75, 1.85 trillion-dollar proposal that's scaled back from the initially six trillion and 3.5 trillion it would be massive. I mean, the reality that, that we could in this country have universal pre-K and truly affordable childcare, that alone transforms our social safety net in this country. And when you couple that with the other provisions of the bill which was sort of whittled down and then actually each subsequent day has actually sort of expanded a little bit with the re-inclusion of the prescription drug reforms, today the announcement of paid leave getting back in the package in the House at least, it, it would make a real difference in people's lives and I think come 2024 people would be able to see more money in their pockets. Families would, would face less anxiety, less financial barriers, less costs. That is what this is about. Government can't stop all pain or all loss but what we can do is make life a little bit easier for people when hard times hit. And that includes a global pandemic. And so, I am excited that he's fighting the fight, that he's fighting for big bold change. You know, I think the challenge that he faces, and I think it's the challenge that any president faces, it's a challenge any elected official faces, is the challenge that you alluded to in, in, in your opening and in the conversations that we've had around the, the Center For Political Communication is speaking across that political divide. And in an environment with a bifurcated legacy news media and an individualized personal news media it, it's really hard to breakthrough to 50 percent of the country. And it's really hard to get your message across. And so, I think that certainly is the perpetual



struggle that he faces, that others face. I, I am optimistic though that, that once both the infrastructure, the hard infrastructure bill and the Build Back Better Act pass, which I believe they will pass, that the President's numbers will rebound, that we'll head into 2022 with momentum and 2024 with momentum. But of course, they say, you know, the two things that people don't like to see made are laws and sausages and, and obviously right now we're in the midst of seeing the sausage being made.

DR. HOFFMAN: Very [chuckle] true. Well, you mentioned polarization. Let's, let's jump into that topic. Today is also the day after a lot of important state elections. In Virginia transgender State Representative Danica Roem was reelected making the Democrat the longest serving openly trans candidate. At the same time, Virginia voters gave the gubernatorial election to Glenn Youngkin, the Republican candidate who focused on education, parental rights, and critical race theory – something that we've been talking, hearing a lot about. How would you describe those results to see a, a state that, that reinstates a transgender, openly transgender candidate but also votes for someone who has opposed legislation around protecting transgender people? Is it a microcosm of the state of the nation? Is it something that Americans want to see both parties represented in their state legislatures? How do you sort of reconcile that, that, that difference in terms of people voting for people who are, are diametrically opposed to each other?

SARAH MCBRIDE: Well, I, you know, I think last night was clearly a bad night for Democrats. I don't think there's any way that, to, to, to spin it otherwise. And, you know, one of the things I try to do is I really do try to look at the data before I, I, I make a determination on, you know, what are the lessons learned from that crisis, or from that moment? And what I'm seeing is that Democrats have performed about as well as they did in 2017. And, you know, the turnout, the percentage turnout for



Democrats this past election in 2021 was about the same as it was in 2017.

Republicans went from lower turnout in 2017 to not just equaling democratic turnout in 2021 but exceeding democratic turnout. So, 20, 2017 was high turnout for Democrats. So last night was really high turnout for Republicans. And, you know, we've talked a lot about critical race theory in the aftermath of this and I think as, as, as it was looking like Youngkin was winning but Murphy was on, you know, smooth sailing in New Jersey I think there was a, a tendency to say, oh, it was critical race theory was a really potent issue, mobilizing issue. But critical race theory really wasn't an issue that was talked about much in, in New Jersey so I, I think one, it's clear there's a national issue. I think if the President's agenda had gotten through Congress there, I, I think McAuliffe would have eked it out. I think Murphy would have, would've won by a, a, a larger margin. There's no question I think that Democrats would have performed worse last night than they did in 2017 just because it's always more difficult when you're the party in power at the federal level in off year elections.

DR. HOFFMAN: [Indiscernible.]

SARAH MCBRIDE: So, I, I, I think one we, we do have to figure out though what's the path forward? And I'm, you know, Republican turnout's really high. Democrat turnout is still high, but it needs to be higher to compete. So how do we increase that democratic turnout? That is, I think, one of the fundamental questions we have before us. And one of the things that I've learned about politics is one, the only consistency is change right? Things are cyclical. Things evolve. One day is different than the next day and it's hard to make decisions on, you know, a Wednesday to know, and know exactly how they're going to play on a Friday. The world evolves that quickly. And, and really what I've come to the conclusion

[chuckle] of is that all of us in politics are actually pretty, pretty bad political prognosticators. And we tend to, I think on the democratic side in particular, we tend to overthink and overanalyze and over strategize. We, I think, fumble as we attempt to triangulate and mitigate and, and, and compensate for every conceivable risk factor. You know, I, I think we end up being our worst enemy when we do that. I think ultimately we just have to do what we think is right and there are going to be good years and there are going to be bad years. And you can't base your decisions in government on what you think today will be the best thing a year from now and the election. Just do what's right and then you can go out there and sell it. You can go out there and defend it, and you can feel good doing it. And hopefully it will have the biproduct of mobilizing and energizing Democrats because what we certainly don't want right now from the democratic perspective is Democrats to turnout even lower than, even less than they did last night.

DR. HOFFMAN: Well, and of course we are a non-partisan center so we're not advocating for one side or the other. But, you have a really good point in terms of thinking about how Democrats think about things. There's a concept in social psychology called integrative complexity and it demonstrates that people on the more liberal side of things tend to integrate different concepts in their minds making connections between them. Whereas people who are more conservative are seeing things in slightly more black and white terms. They're able to kind of come to conclusions more quickly and democrats or liberals tend to kind of be like deer in the headlights when they're asked to make decisions. So, there is some psychological research to back up your, your claim. But, but it seems like we are so divided right now between the left and the right that Americans, the Republicans and Democrats simply can't see eye to eye. A March poll from the Pew Research Center found that,



listen to this: 93 percent of democrats said they had a mostly or very unfavorable opinion of republicans, 93 percent. And 96 percent of republicans said the same of democrats. How do you explain this polarization? How or can we work across these partisan divides? And then in addition to that, not to add too many questions into one basket but, how do we talk to the people who are in the middle who aren't on these extreme sides?

SARAH MCBRIDE: So, I, I, I think there are, there are a couple of things that, that, that come to mind for me. One is that running for local office is I think sometimes the best antidote to the toxicity, negativity and division of, of, of politics because when you go to door, when you have conversations with voters – I had a lot of them on the phone actually because it was the pandemic which was interesting cold call, having to cold call people – you really do see how much we actually have in common. Even if we don't see it, even if our politics doesn't reflect it, even if our sort of I, I, our identity attachment to whatever group we're a part of supersedes it when we're getting asked those poll, polling questions. What is keeping Republicans up at night is largely on a day-to-day basis similar to what's keeping up Democrats. It's, you know, how do you afford the mortgage? It's how do you pay childcare, for childcare. How do you get back to work? It's, you know, how do you afford your treatment? It's what do you want for, for your community? I mean, there are obviously fundamental differences, don't get me wrong. And, and, and there are forces, dark forces that have always existed in American society that are very much alive and, and, and present in our politics and in positions that, that, that politicians and people take. And, yet with that you're still, I'm still able to see as a local candidate how much we do have in common. And I, and I really think it's important to stress that. We're going to have real disagreements, that's fine. That's a democracy. That's,



that's, that's often times healthy. But to know that there is actually a lot that binds us and to have that – see, I'm really grateful because I think I would have, had I not run for office, win or lose I would say if you want to fall deeper in love with your community run for office. And partly that will be because you will see the goodness of people that you talk with on the doors and that's across the political divide. So, one, I, I think we have to stress that more. I think we all have to stress that more. I think we have to as leaders' model that a little bit more. Again, that doesn't mean sacrificing for principles; it doesn't mean compromising just for the sake of compromise; it doesn't mean, you know, triangulation for political purposes. But it does mean recognizing that, particularly among the electorate, among the voters, we share a lot of hopes and dreams and fears. Two, two, I, I just say, I, I, I think there's, there's, there's two more things that, that I want to say. I think getting into the Legislature, you know, at, at this level there are certainly partisan issues, there are certainly partisan votes more than, than I think there, there needs to be. And, most of our votes are unanimous or near unanimous. Certainly, most are bipartisan. And obviously that doesn't get covered. And that doesn't get covered in part because – we were talking about this before this started with, with Nancy Karibjanian – is the, the decreasing prevalence of local news in our society covering the issues. And so, the, the limited bandwidth that local news has to cover the legislature or city councils, it's going to focus on the polarization, on the fights, rather than on the good things that we're doing that we're actually working together on. And then the last thing I'd say, the, the, the last think I'd say on it, one thing that I think is critical both the public and elected officials to do a better job on, on all sides is to see one another's pain. I think right now the left says to the right your pain isn't real our pain is real. And the right says to the left your pain isn't real our pain is real. And I think it

only deepens the divide because I know the worst thing that a person can say to me when I'm upset, even if they say it with good intentions and it almost always is, is it's not as bad as you think; they didn't mean it that way. It makes me have to defend my pain which only makes me more frustrated and more, more, more stuck in that anger. What the first step to healing is to acknowledge a person's pain and experience. And I think we have to do a better job on all sides of saying I see your pain and what you're facing, that injustice needs to be addressed. And that doesn't mean, validating pain doesn't mean validating prejudice. But it does mean recognizing that justice is not a transaction; that we have to fight for people who might hold, fight for people who might hold positions that we find abhorrent because they deserve justice too. They deserve the injustices and the wrongs that they are facing to be addressed as well. And that I think rhetorically and from a policy perspective is necessary to begin to heal with [indiscernible].

DR. HOFFMAN: I think those are, they are such excellent points and a, a big theme of National Agenda and the class that you spoke to earlier today is, is how to engage in civil discourse across those differences. So, this is a question from Sarah in our class. What do you think is the best way to go about a political debate where your opponent is calling your basic human rights into question? Where do you draw the line between good faith and bad faith in these types of scenarios?

SARAH MCBRIDE: Listen, I, you know, I think there are issues where we agree on a value, and we disagree on the path to achieving that value. And then there are disagreements about values, and I think when we're talking about basic civil and human rights that that's a disagreement over values. And, you know, one, I think, I think that I'm going to, I think one of the tendencies that, that, that we see right now in our society and we see it very much on social media is that we consider it good

allyship to cutoff relationships that are deemed problematic because one of the party's in that relationship has problematic views. And I understand that instinct. I certainly understand for a person who is directly impacted by a, a particular belief to say you know what, this person whether its unfriending them on Facebook or stopping, stopping engaging with them, you know, in person that they are causing the real pain and for my own mental health, for my own wellbeing, for my own selfcare I can't, I can't engage in this conversation, or I can't even engage with this person. I think that's entirely fair. Where I think it actually becomes counterproductive though is when we say that allyship is cutting off those communicate, those lines of communication. The last thing I want is that person who is posting anti trans things on Facebook to be in an echo chamber that only validates those positions. I want them to be exposed to my friends who support me. I want them to be exposed to their viewpoints. I want them to see the articles that they post on social media. I want a conversation. I want someone there to help challenge them. And so, you know, I think when we're talking about these questions or debates around basic human rights I think it's entirely fine for a person who's at the center of that conversation, whose identity is directly impacted, to say for my own, for my own wellness, for my own health, I'm stepping back. But I think as allies for all of us who in some way are an ally to some else to another community we need to recognize that we are abdicating our responsibilities as allies if we cut people out. That we should have to lean into those conversations that much more. And I think that's how we change things. And I think further as we continue to get stories out there around people, you know, there are moments where you are just not going to get through to someone in that single debate. And that's frustrating. But over time I do think most people can change, most people can evolve, and I've

seen that. And the more they're exposed to stories, the more they're exposed to people the more their hearts and minds will change. And I think one of the challenges that we face is how do we replicate that which has occurred for communities like the LGBTQ community and the disability community that organically exist throughout the diversity of society. They're born into families of every race and every political affiliation in every corner of the country. How do we replicate that for communities where physical segregation exists? That's one of the challenges. That's where social media can be both an asset but also a negative.

DR. HOFFMAN: Well, so speaking of social media, you are a public figure who's openly transgender, how do you deal with online hate and harassment and how do you recommend marginalized folks handle such speech online?

SARAH MCBRIDE: You know, I'm, I'm the type of person that so often reads the comments. Everyone always says don't read the comments and I sometimes can't help myself. Oftentimes my fear of what is being said is actually much worse than what's actually being said. So, seeing what's being said, I'm like, oh okay, I can deal with that. You know, the last ten years I've been in the public eye in some form or fashion as an advocate and then a, a candidate and then an elected official. And in my advocacy work I got a lot of, a lot of feedback [chuckle], mostly positive but also a lot, a lot negative and it's always, even if you get 99 comments that are positive it's always that one negative comment that sticks, that sticks in your mind.

DR. HOFFMAN: Oh yeah, I, I get student evaluations; I, I [chuckle] I know how it is.

SARAH MCBRIDE: Yeah, right, its, its, its, you can't get past that one. And, and for a while I really took that, that hatred, that bullying, that bigotry, that, that, that, those mean comments, I took it to heart. It, it hurt. And there was a point in my career

where I thought, [chuckle], I, maybe I don't want to do this; maybe I don't have thick enough skin because this is, this is getting to me. I mean it was, it was it was almost debilitating. And, of the, there was an inflection point for me when I, I, I sort of had this crisis of confidence and I spent a lot of time thinking and reading and researching and I came across a This American Life podcast where there was a reporter who confronted her troll. I don't know –

DR. HOFFMAN: Lindy –

SARAH MCBRIDE: I don't –

DR. HOFFMAN: Lindy West, right?

SARAH MCBRIDE: Yes, actually, right, yes, exactly. Who, who, who I think wrote also Shril, right? That –

DR. HOFFMAN: Yes.

SARAH MCBRIDE: – the, the, the TV show. Yeah.

DR. HOFFMAN: Um-hum.

SARAH MCBRIDE: Lindy West, thank you. And in listening to the conversation that, that, that she recounted with the person who was her troll in that This American Life I think it really helped me to understand where the hate was coming from. And a lot of times people say oh those who bully LGBTQ people they're just, they're just in the closet themselves. And, yeah, in certain circumstances that might be true but it, it I think, I think it ignores a larger similar but more universal truth which is that everyone has an insecurity. Everyone has something that society has told them they should be ashamed of. And whether it's your sexual orientation or your gender identity or honestly any other infinite number of things that society says you need to hide that. Everyone has something; at least one. And the thing about LGBTQ people is we've taken that fact; we've not only accepted it but in many cases we are

walking forward in a place of pride in it. And the bullies see that power, they see that individual agency in conquering our own fears and insecurities and they're jealous of that power. And so, in their attempt to assert power over the powerful, in their attempt to make themselves feel better that they haven't been able to conquer that fear. They lash out. And so, for me, it's simple but one of the things that made it easier was to just understand that that hate was a reflection of the fact that I am powerful. I am powerful just by being and I carry that power with me from the, the safest of spaces to the scariest of places.

DR. HOFFMAN: Well, I think it also harkens back to what you said earlier about everyone, everyone is suffering. Everyone –

SARAH MCBRIDE: Yes.

DR. HOFFMAN: – everyone is feeling some sort of pain and if we can try to see one another's pain. And I think that's one thing that made that episode of This American Life really interesting. And I think it's from 2016 or even, maybe even earlier but a, again the author is Lindy West. Her father had passed away –

SARAH MCBRIDE: Yeah.

DR. HOFFMAN: – and this troll created a, a Twitter account that was her father and in his bio said I'm ashamed of my, my, my daughter. I mean, and it was, it was, it was very, very harsh just, very –

SARAH MCBRIDE: Body shamed, body shamed her, just, just really cruel things. And, but you're right, I, I, I, so it, it's allowed me to both recognize my own power, but I think also develop a sense of radical compassion for the people who are saying those things. And to say honestly like, you know not to say it with, with, with sarcasm or, or any kind of snide but like I truly hope that whatever has caused, whatever pain in their life is causing them to do that I hope it gets addressed.



DR. HOFFMAN: Yeah. Well, and I think that's what made the conversation so interesting when she did have the conversation with her troll and he, he revealed I think if I remember correctly he was, he had been dumped by his girlfriend and he was feeling very resentful and angry and, you know, it was a very candid conversation that you don't hear very often. And I think, it's something that we try to do at the CPC and through National Agenda is demonstrate that, you know, we, we all have pain and trauma and as well as, as delightful happy experiences to share with one another. And I think that's where we need to start from. Is not start from I'm a Democrat and you're a Republican or I'm this and you are that, but this is one thing I really like about – Sarah, you'll have to come to campus and engage in one of our free intelligent conversations. This is something that we're doing on campus where – I don't think I have the signs here – but our students are holding up signs that say Free Intelligent Conversation and they're engaging in conversation with strangers about, think of them as kind of like intellectual ice breakers. They're sort of like, you know, what's, what's the best piece of advice that someone has given you? And it's amazing how much the students and, and faculty in our community at UD can connect with each other maybe without even knowing each other's names or where they come from but just having that sense, shared sense of humanity I think right now is so important.

SARAH MCBRIDE: It, it, you know, it goes back to, to, to something I, I said before that those conversations that I had with voters during the campaign that I continue to have now as an elected official as, you know, out in the community but particularly when you go door to door, I was always shocked just how deep those conversations were. Just how vulnerable a, a, a total stranger was willing to be with me and how much they allowed me to then be vulnerable with them in a conversation on a



doorstep in, you know, the dead of winter. And those conversations I, you know, again win or lose those conversations everyday left me more energized than before. And honestly I think so much of my hope now a lot of it comes from the goodness that I saw in those conversations.

DR. HOFFMAN: Um-hum. It's profound. I mean –

SARAH MCBRIDE: Yeah.

DR. HOFFMAN: – it, it truly is. And I think the pandemic has only made it even more, it resonates even more I think. So, I'll, I'll all of our UD community, if you see a student on campus with a sign that says Free Intelligent Conversation make sure to go and talk with them. Let's switch gears a little bit and I do want to alert folks in the audience that the Q and A is open. We'll start the Q and A in about 10 – 15 minutes so be sure to put your questions in if you want to ask a question of Senator Sarah McBride. I have a question from one of my students, Anawando (sp?), you famously spoke as the first transgender person at the Democratic National Convention in 2016 and you stated we will be a nation where there's only way to love, one way, will we be a nation where there's only way to love, one way to look, one way to live or will we be a nation where everyone has the freedom to live openly and equally; a nation that's stronger together. You mentioned it earlier in class today how, you know, when you came out ten years ago the environment was so different, even since 2016, which ways do you believe America has leaned towards 20, towards, since 2016? Are we a nation where there's only one way to love, one way to look, one way to live? Or are, do you think that we're becoming more open and equal?

SARAH MCBRIDE: You know, I, I, I think what's clear is that progress and society doesn't move in a linear direction. And not only is it two steps forward and one step

back but you see moments of progress and in the same instance, moments of, of pain and prejudice. That the story of our country is the story of that dichotomy. It's the story of those dual paths. And, and, and so the answer is that we're, we're in some ways we're more equal, we're stronger and in some ways we've revert, we, we, we've continued or have even reverted to a land that says there's only one way to love, only one way to look and only one way to live. That, that, that is a constant struggle as a, as a people and as a country that we face. You know, I think in, in, in some ways there is absolutely, in many ways there's absolutely an emboldening of some of the darkest undercurrents in our society. I think in many ways new technologies have unleashed new challenges including the spread and, and multiplication of conspiracy theories in our politics and in our society that are deeply dangerous. And then in other ways we've made significant progress. New technologies have democratized the microphone and allowed marginalized voices that were never able to break through the gatekeepers of, of, of legacy media to have their voices heard. It's, its allowed for people to, to organize and connect. It's allowed communities that aren't physically congregated to connect with one another. You know, we see the election of someone who I believed was uniquely morally unfit to serve as president; a year later usher in the election of the first openly transgender state legislator in Danica Roem. So, you know, what I try to remember – and, and I've gone through crises of, of faith before in, in my capacity to help, you know – whether it's, whether it's giving up on my dreams in order to come out, what was essentially mourning any kind of future; whether it, it was truthfully the election of Trump and, and Charlottesville and, and seeing, you know, are we still really debating whether Nazis are fine people. There, there, there have been moments in my life where I wonder have we really not made any progress. But I, in my own life,



have been reminded of, I think, a, a simple fact and I think we have seen it over the last year, which is that hope as an emotion, like quite literally, hope as an emotion, as a phenomenon it only makes sense in the face of hardship. That the story of our progress is always the story of change coming through crisis, of the darkest hour being just before the dawn. And, and I've seen that in my own life. When, when Andy was passing away my brother who's a radiation oncologist, he said to me take a breath, look around you and take stock in the acts of amazing grace that will fill your life. And that grace was everywhere. And that experience I think has allowed me through whatever challenges I faced or whatever crises I'm witnessing in the world, to see that grace. I think Mr. Rogers who I, I'm, I, I, I, I'm a big believer in the politics of Mr. Rogers and Mr. –

DR. HOFFMAN: I love Mr. Rogers.

SARAH MCBRIDE: – he's great. And, and one of my favorite quotes is that he liked to say that when he was younger and he'd something scary on the news his mother would tell him to look for the helpers.

DR. HOFFMAN: Um-hum.

SARAH MCBRIDE: And, and that's what I try to do. And so, the answer is yes on both fronts but even in our challenges I see opportunities for change. I see the helpers. I see the grace. And I recognize it's always been in our biggest challenges that we take our most significant steps forward.

DR. HOFFMAN: Yeah. Mr. Rogers is truly an inspiration. I, I grew up with him. So, let's get some questions in the online queue as I wrap up my last question. This last question comes from Kaley (sp?) in the class. She says, what advice do you have for young adults and even children who are thinking about pursuing their careers but feel held back by their gender identity, their sexual orientation, their race,



or other marginalized statuses? What's some inspiration you have for telling young adults and kids that they can, they can be successful like you?

SARAH MCBRIDE: So, I, I think there are two things that, that, that come to mind. The first is, is, I think, particularly, it's true for everyone but I think it's particularly true for people of any kind of marginalized background, is that those of us who in this case run for office, or, or whatever sort of goal or dream or, or, or opportunity you're pursuing, we aren't pursuing that, we aren't throwing our hat in the ring because we're fearless. We are scared. We have that voice in the back of our head that says you're not really up to it. You can't do this. You're going to, you're going to, you're going to mess up and fall flat on your face.

DR. HOFFMAN: And every one of us experiences that.

SARAH MCBRIDE: And everyone of us experiences that and I think particularly people from, from certain backgrounds experience it even more, all right, that imposter syndrome even more. That anxiety, that fear, that, that, that and I think oftentimes we mistake that voice in our head as, well that must be a sign that I shouldn't. And, and those people they've got it together. They can handle it. They're doing it. They're not scared. I think to understand that those of us who do it are not fearless, but we are facing our fears. And we're facing that anxiety. And we're facing that voice in our head and we're saying this might not work out –

DR. HOFFMAN: [Chuckle.]

SARAH MCBRIDE: – failure is possible. I, I might make a fool of myself but it's still worth trying. And I think on that note, that's, that brings me to the second thing which is that, and I know it sounds hokey, but what I come away with in looking at my life, and I recognize how lucky and privileged I am, but what I come away with, what I come away with entering the general assembly as my authentic self, being



sworn in next to two trans teens coming in and having a desk in between a, a 33-year-old mom of two and a amazing black queer social worker is that nothing is truly impossible. Nothing is truly impossible. In fact, the only things that are impossible are the things that we don't try.

DR. HOFFMAN: Um-hum.

SARAH MCBRIDE: And, and so I would say whatever you're thinking about doing go for it. Even if it's never been done, you can be the one that does it.

DR. HOFFMAN: Well, that's great advice. Let's go ahead and take some questions from the audience. Our first question is going to come from one of my students in the National Agenda class. Tre (sp?), he has a question from our audience.

TRE: Thank you, Dr. Hoffman, and thank you Senator for taking your time out coming to speak to us. This question is from UD student Robert. He asks; a lot of the strategizing you talked about regarding the recent election focused on turnout. Can you speak to what role independents play in democratic strategizing?

SARAH MCBRIDE: Yeah, well, so, I, I would say that, that, that folks who identify as independent are critical. In Delaware, in some places they are the second largest sort of partisan affiliation if you will. Now what we know – and I'm going to get super poli-sci here and, and, and Dr. Hoffman, I –

DR. HOFFMAN: Um-hum.

SARAH MCBRIDE: – I'm sure this is an appropriate space for me to do that – my understanding of voting behavior is that most people who identify as independents actually operate in their voting behavior in essentially the same way as those who identify as partisan democrats or partisan republicans. And, and, and so I think as we talk about this we've got to recognize that for most people who identify as



independents they still vote for one party or the other. You know, I think it's critical that we reach out to those folks. We are able to understand, you know, where someone is as an independent. You know, are they coming from a lean Republican space, a lean Democrat space? Are they truly right there in the middle, you know, 50-50? And meet voters where they are and have those conversations. And, you know, we ignore those voters at our peril. Most districts you can't get to a majority just by getting and winning democratic voters. You have to win at least some [chuckle] independent voters and hopefully even some republican voters if you're a Democrat. And so, you know, I think it's critical that we do that outreach. I think it's critical that we're showing up and reaching out to those voters. You know, I support legislation that would move our primary earlier. I think that would allow for more engagement in a general election than what we have right now. Or similarly, I think, you know, we could explore those semi-open primaries where independents can have a role in the, the, the state primaries particularly in a state like Delaware where the primary is oftentimes the deciding election. But I think it's, it's critical. And I, I just think though we have to recognize that our sort of understanding of what an independent voter is, I think, isn't what we sort of envision in our mind. And, and just to recognize that as we're engaging with folks we, we, we understand that that's the reality.

DR. HOFFMAN: All right. Thank you. Our next question comes from Kaley.

KALEY: Thank you. The next question comes from Becky Stewart (sp?) of Newark, and she asks: what do you think about Delaware's opportunities for meaningful climate resiliency as an equity issue in a small coastal state?

SARAH MCBRIDE: It's, it's so important. I mean, by every, the state of Delaware either the lowest lying state or the second lowest lying state in, in the country. And I,



I think there's a number of things that Delaware should do to, one, adapt to the climate crisis and also to do our part to prevent the climate crisis. So, you know, in terms of, of, of prevention obviously we have to be much more cognizant of new development and new construction and how the threat of climate change impacts that development and to ensure that we're not just continuing this tendency of lower income communities, communities of color living in environments that flooding is more likely. The, the storms of the last, the, the past season that we saw in Wilmington, there was, there was flooding in, in various parts along the Brandywine River but the worst flooding happened in predominantly black and brown communities. And we have to recognize that as we move forward, as we look at infrastructure ahead of us – you know, there's obviously a lot of talk about hard infrastructure – as we look at infrastructure whether that's roads, bridges or houses in particular, we've got to make sure that we're preparing everyone for what's happening to our planet and that we're not just pretending like it's not happening and continuing to, to push low income communities and black and brown communities into environments where they're being displaced because of now routine flooding. And, you know, similarly there's a, a, an initiative my colleagues – Representative Larry Lambert (sp?) and Senator Marie Pinkney (sp?) – are, are cochairing called The Justice Forty Agenda committee. They've been meeting across the state to really figure out how to approach environmental justice with a stronger equity particularly racial equity lens. And that's a biproduct of, of the Biden Administration. Its implementation at the state level of a Biden Administration initiative. Beyond that though, you know, there's so much that we can do in Delaware to, to, to do our part in preventing the climate crisis, or reversing or stopping the climate crisis. I think one big area that's been left on the table that we have not seized yet is, is wind. We



are the only state I believe on the Eastern seaboard that doesn't have a commitment as a state to offshore wind. We should be pursuing that and, and that's actually why we commissioned as a legislature as study to figure out exactly the path forward for the potential for offshore wind. This past legislature we did increase what's called our renewable portfolio standard which is essentially the standard that the state has to, to meet of the energy that we produce and, and use that has to be coming from renewable sources. We've increased that standard. And then on top of that we actually also started a, a community solar program here in Delaware. And then finally, a, a, you know, an issue that I'm particularly passionate on and, and I actually [chuckle] didn't expect this before I got into the legislature but for some reason it's, I, I, I've just found it to be so important and fascinating is the shift to electric vehicles. And, building out our infrastructure and policies to reflect that shift which is not ideological, it's imminent and it's inevitable. Every automobile manufacturer in the United States has announced that they are moving in this direction in the next 10 or 15 years and if we don't prepare now before demand for EV chargers and EV ready homes is at a fever pitch, if we don't adapt now, if we don't plan for that we're going to be very far behind. We're going to be playing catchup. We're going to be in a moment of crisis. And the, the market has made clear where it's moving. The planet demands that we move in that direction. And we as a state have to prepare for that shift. That's why I passed legislation through the Senate that requires our largest cities to create permit processes for curbside electric fuel, charging stations at home since at this point still home charging is about the most practical way to in a sustainable way continue to recharge your, your car. And for a lot of folks who live in urban environments they don't have access to on-property parking. So, one piece of legislation that we've already passed through the Senate requires municipalities,



large municipalities in Delaware to create a permit process to allow for that. And then the second companion piece is going to require – I haven't introduced it yet – but it's going to require all new home building in Delaware to be EV capable. And I think those are, are, are two important parts of a larger strategy we have to engage to prepare for, adapt to, and, and seize this massive market shift that's the most significant market shift since probably the advent of the internet and before that the creation of the automobile itself.

DR. HOFFMAN: Hum. Yeah, I mean, this is certainly a relevant topic with COP26 happening right now.

SARAH MCBRIDE: Yeah.

DR. HOFFMAN: How much hope do you have that world leaders will really affect some change, or do you think that this kind of change needs to happen more at the state level with, with proposals like you're describing?

SARAH MCBRIDE: Oh, I, I mean, I think it has to happen globally. You know, we can do our part, but we do not have the capacity state by state and, and frankly recognizing that half the states if not more are not going to do anything at the state level, we don't, we, we can't, we can't piecemeal our solution to this crisis. There have to be nationwide and even more importantly global solutions which is why COP is so important. And, and why I'm, I'm, I'm hopeful that there will be. I mean, the, the, the Build Back Better Act, even scaled back, is the most significant investment in addressing the climate crisis that we've ever seen. And the President is, you know, able to go to, to, was able to go to Glasgow with the strong potential that something is going to pass Congress that will allow him to say we're, we're, we're as America certainly stepping up more than we have in the past to do our part. We've



still got to do more but it's a, it's a good investment. It's a long overdue investment and, and I'm excited to see hopefully that pass Congress.

DR. HOFFMAN: Okay. Well, let's go to another question from the audience.

Margo is our student who's up next to ask the question.

MARGO: Hi, thank you so much. The next question also comes from another UD student, Amanni Gauthier (sp?). He wants to know; how do you think that the sessions about gender-based violence could be more trans and non-binary inclusive in Delaware? What needs to happen to include trans individuals in these conversations especially after the UD community dealt with such a violent incident just two weeks ago?

SARAH MCBRIDE: Well, I, I, I think a, a couple of, of different things. One, we've got to make sure that all of our services for survivors are truly inclusive of trans and non-binary folks. And I think, you know, we're having this discussion about sort of rhetoric and gender inclusive language, I think you, you, you know, there's a conversation around how that manifests itself in the political debates. I think where its super-duper important is among service providers to make sure that the language and, and, and cultural competency that exists for service providers is truly inclusive of trans and non-binary folks. You know, we've passed nondiscrimination protections in this state but there's more that we can do to, to build on those protections to make sure that service providers are truly inclusive. That shelters are truly inclusive of trans folks. That's incredibly important. I'm actually the sponsor of, of legislation that would create a paid family medical leave program in this state, and I've included in that too safety leave for survivors of, of gender-based violence. And, recognizing too that for a lot of trans and non-binary folks our family structures look a lot different and so we've also made sure that the definitions of family in that program that I hope

to pass next year are inclusive of all different kinds of families, both blood and chosen. And so, that's, that's I think an important part of the piece of, of the puzzle. And, and I think too, back to that rhetoric point, I mean I think we have to; we have to, we have to evaluate our language. We have to figure out how we recognize the inherent nature that gender plays in this violence. We have to recognize that, you know, similar to the issues of choice that if cis-gender men were experiencing or needing reproductive healthcare or were experiencing gender-based violence at the same rate that non-cis-gender men are that this would be a, you know, a crisis that every elected official would agree needs to be met in the context of gender-based violence and, and a right that needs to be protected in the context of reproductive health. And so, I, I don't actually have a good answer as a trans person and how exactly to thread the needle when we're talking about those broader political conversations to say we need to make these inclusive and we need to recognize in, in clear ways that are accessible to people the role that gender and the fact that women are disproportionately impacted, both trans and cis, that that plays in societies prioritization and treatment of these issues. And so, I don't actually have a good answer on that, on that question.

DR. HOFFMAN: Yeah, it's definitely something that, that kind of rocks the UD community and I think is an important conversation to continue with our students and faculty and administration. Let's move on to another question from the audience and Sarah, a different Sarah, is going to ask this question.

SARAH: Thank you, Dr. Hoffman and thank you, Senator McBride for being here. So, I know earlier we were talking about allyship so this question from UD student Luka Haverbeck (sp?) is kind of calling back to that. So, he's asking



how can cis gender people best support trans people in everyday situations. Is it just mindful language or are there more options?

DR. HOFFMAN: Great question.

SARAH MCBRIDE: That is, that is a great question. It's, it's an all of the above approach. You know, I think it's, it's one, being more mindful of our language, being more just mindful. I think one of the things that we sometimes forget is that kindness sometimes does require effort. Sometimes it does require intentionality. It's just, it's not just not being mean.

DR. HOFFMAN: [Chuckle]

SARAH MCBRIDE: And, and, and I think recognizing that sometimes there's behaviors that we have to unlearn. There's behaviors we need to change. That might not be rooted in bad, bad faith or, or bad intentions but still obviously have the consequence of, of potentially hurting someone. And so, I think one, it's being more mindful, it's recognizing more broadly that kindness takes effort. I think it, it, it also means that recognize, that, that you're going to make a mistake. Everyone makes mistakes. Every ally makes mistakes. And I think sometimes when we make mistakes we get so consumed by the mistake that we apologize profusely, we almost make it about ourselves because we feel so bad. I mean, it's understandable. We feel so bad and we, [chuckle] we want absolution, we want people to know that we genuinely feel really bad, but it ends up making a bigger deal out of it and it ends up sort of unintentionally making the exchange about the person who made the mistake rather than the person who was on the receiving end of that mistake. So, I think, you know, recognizing you're going to make mistakes, apologizing, correcting yourself and moving on, not belaboring a point is an important just sort of role of the road for an ally, I think of any community. You know, and then finally I'd say

recognizing that allyship isn't just about interpersonal relationships. It's not just about, you know, whether you treat your friends well. You know, it's, it's, its great that some of my Republican colleagues call me by the right names and pronouns. It's, it's, it's great that, you know, I can have a conversation with them and, and they treat me with respect. But what about the black trans woman who's facing housing insecurity? You know, what about the trans kid who's facing bullying in schools? That person deserves allyship beyond just being nice to a friend. They, they deserve policies that make a difference in their lives. They deserve change that let's them live and thrive. And so, recognizing that whether you're an elected official or not that we all have our own ability to effectuate structural broader change and that we need to use our voice to do so. And again, I think that means not cutting out people who, who have what we deem problematic views because that's only going to make, it only makes the ally's job easier. An allyship should not be easy, it should be hard and that includes hard, difficult conversations.

DR. HOFFMAN: Hum. I think that's a really interesting point. I, back a few years ago, six years ago now, I have DeRay McKesson was one of our speakers, a Black Lives Matter activist, and you're talking, using the term ally and I'm realizing that relates to not just gender issues but racial issues as well. And one of the things that he said that, that I, I've said many, many times it's been very inspirational is that to be an ally you need to use your privilege to disrupt the privilege. And I felt like that was a really powerful way of saying like, okay I do have some privilege here; I do have a voice that maybe another person doesn't have and that's where I might be able to speak up for, for them.

SARAH MCBRIDE: Well and I, I think sometimes we hear – and I'll just add this briefly – you know, sometimes I hear folks say this too, and, and I think it's true, that



it's, its not allyship we want too, it, it's we want accomplices. We want people to put something on the line. And most frequently that's our own comfort as allies. That means disrupting a, a, a situation, a conversation, a dynamic, a status quo that might be a little bit uncomfortable for us in disrupting that and in saying that hard truth but we've got, if, if we want to be allies we've got to put something on the line and comfort is both the easiest and most frequent thing that we put on the line.

DR. HOFFMAN: That is 100 percent true. Through my research and through the work that we do at the Center for Political Communication being comfortable with discomfort is one of the most important, it's the first steps you can take. So, all right, we have another question from the audience and this one's going to come from Tre. We're going to go back to Tre.

TRE: Thank you. So, a UD student asks; I'm a transgender man who is not out professionally and sometimes out of fear that my colleagues will not accept me if I am out. How do you engage with fellow state senators or constituents who did not accept or see you as a woman?

SARAH MCBRIDE: [Sigh] you, you, you know, I'll, I'll start by saying more broadly that one of the more dangerous narratives I think that exists for LGBTQ people is that we have a responsibility to be out all the time, everywhere to everyone, right? That we're failing the community if we're not using every interaction as an opportunity to educate and change, change hearts and minds. And, and, and there's no question that LGBTQ people being out has helped foster change. Right? Knowing someone is the, the most important and determinative driver of, of, of support for LGBTQ equality. I think that's an unfair burden though to put on a community. I, I'm not going to say that we need to give people individual agency in their sexual orientation and gender identity and the only way to do that is to require a



particular community to live out their sexual orientation and gender identity in a particular way. And so, one, I just want to say I think we need to move past what, you know, Harvey Milk talked about which I actually think was a harmful narrative which is you don't have to be out. You don't have to put yourself in that space. You need to do what is right for you, what makes you feel healthy, safe, and happy. And sometimes safety comes before happiness. Sometimes happiness comes before safety. You are the best judge on how to prioritize those factors and therefore whether to be out or not in whatever given circumstance. I don't know if I'm actually on the screen right now [chuckle] because I'm seeing Tre, but, or Tre's screen that says his name, but, but then I think, you know, for me it was interesting because I, prior to going into the legislature my, my, my professional experience had been almost entirely in LGBTQ spaces, right? I had worked for advocacy organizations. And while I had advocated to legislatures that included a lot of diverse opinions, I, that wasn't my day-to-day workspace. And so, I was, I was apprehensive, intrigued by what it was going to be like to go into a space where a large portion of my colleagues don't just fundamentally disagree with what I feel to be my basic humanity but have a record of voting against it. And most of them have not said to me they regret that vote. I'm sure some do. And, and so it, when I went in one of the things I thought to myself was I don't know how people are going to treat me but I'm going to go in with a level of just confidence and engagement that communicates that I expect everyone to treat me with respect. I think most people want to be perceived and to be nice, good, kind people. And if I go into an environment and I'm sort of standoffish with the Republicans I felt like I was going to give them permission to treat me differently. By, by letting them know I expected them to treat me differently I felt like I was going to let them treat me differently. I wanted to force

them to have to disappoint me. I wanted to force them to have to not rise to the standard that I communicate I expect. And so, I, I sort of went in with that, with that mentality and I will say that the 99 percent of my interactions have risen to that standard. I, I've heard about one or two; I've heard about a joke that was made at my expense by a, a, a Republican legislator not, when I was not present, and it was frankly a bad joke. Like, I'm like, I, I can hang in there with the best of them on the trans humor but like work on your material a –

DR. HOFFMAN: [Laughter.]

SARAH MCBRIDE: – little bit [chuckle]. But, you know, 99 percent have been positive. And again, I think that that's reflective of previous relationships that I had; it's certainly reflective of my privilege; and it certainly doesn't absolve those members, you know, of the moral responsibility that comes with some of their votes both in the past and in the present. And, you know, there was a [chuckle], we, we put forward a, the House of Representatives passed a LGBTQ Pride Month resolution, and they did it through what's called a, a consent agenda which is one that's just included on a bunch of other resolutions, and it just passes unanimously. And, initially I was going to have when it came up to the Senate, that resolution came to the Senate and I was the prime sponsor, I was originally going to try to put it on a consent agenda and I as like, you know, what actually I want an up or down vote on that. I, I, I don't want people to sort of have the out of just voting for it unanimously along with, you know, 15 other resolutions. I want them to have to say yes or not on that question. You know, there were members who vote, went not voting and there was I think one who voted no. And interestingly enough on the floor of the Senate he said that he was voting no but he wasn't going to share why and if anyone had any, any curiosity of why he was voting no they could come see him

afterwards and have a private conversation. And I'm like, well first off, your no vote says everything, so I don't need a conversation. And, and, and, two, why can't you say it on the floor? I, there is a, there's a scene in movie, and LBJ movie I saw where LBJ was negotiating with, with, with Senator Russell from Georgia, a staunch segregationist. And he was whispering his opposition to civil rights because there was a, a black woman in the next room. And he was, you know, emphatic that nothing was wrong, nothing was wrong about that position and LBJ leans in and says well, if nothing's wrong why are we whispering? And so, that was an interesting experience to see that person vote no and to, to say I'm voting no; I have my reasons, but I won't share. And I think that begs the question do you know that it's wrong then? If, if you're not willing to share what, what, what are you ashamed of in your position because frankly you should be ashamed of that position.

DR. HOFFMAN: Well, thank you for the candid question and the candid answer. Let's move on to Kaley. We have another question from the audience.

KALEY: So, the next question comes from UD student Charlotte Northeen (sp?), and she asks; what is the hardest part about your position? And do you ever feel as though you are treated differently because you are a trans woman?

SARAH MCBRIDE: Again, I've been very pleasantly surprised, I should say, that on a day-to-day basis legislating I'm, I don't think about my transness on that day-to-day and I'm very lucky. I mean, that makes me very lucky as a trans person. So, I don't feel like I'm getting treated differently by my colleagues. I don't feel like I'm getting treated differently by the people who are in that building advocating or certainly not by my constituents. I mean, my gender identity during the campaign and since getting elected never comes up from constituents except for instances where it's a parent of a trans young person who's talking about how meaningful it is for them to



see trans representation. So, I don't feel like I get treated differently by the public and I don't feel like I get treated differently by my colleagues. I think the media treats me very differently. I think the media tends to pigeonhole me. I think sometimes the media, you know, will write a story about a bill that I'm working on and put in the paran; put in, you know, in, in a parenthetical that I'm the first openly trans state senator. Or that I'm a trans state senator on an, in an article about an issue completely sort of unrelated to that. It's something that doesn't happen for any other legislator. Their identity isn't just like randomly included when its particularly not sort of relevant in that context. The media's focus on my identity, the media's elevation of my identity sometimes creates a challenge of being able to be seen in my full complexity and being able to be seen for all that I'm working on. And that was particularly true during the campaign. I think it's less true now that I have this opportunity and this platform to demonstrate the breadth of my interests and experience and passion and, and results. But it's something that I still certainly struggle with. I think the, that the hardest thing coming into this job, you know, is, is the [chuckle] is the fact that there is a lot to do. Change making is hard but there's a lot to do and governing requires prioritizing [chuckle] and I'm someone who when I see a problem I want to help solve it. And so, figuring out how to prioritize, figuring out how to triage, figuring out how to do a handful of things really well rather than trying to do everything not very well. And, and that's hard, it's hard for someone like me, it's hard I think for most people but it's a necessity in this kind of job. And, and that doesn't mean that you let issues get unaddressed it just recognizes that there are going to be other people who might take lead, other people who might be working on that. You don't have to be, you know, in every conversation, working on every issue. You've got to pick the issues that you feel like you can make a



difference on, prioritize those, really fight for those and you're going to get them over the finish line if you do that.

DR. HOFFMAN: Okay. Great questions. I think, I think we have time for one more. Let's go with Margo.

MARGO: The next question is from a UD alumna, Rachel Sulecki (sp?) and she asks; you said earlier that local government positions are the best anecdote for toxicity and negativity in politics. But do you have any experience, a significant experience, with divide and toxicity in Delaware's government specifically?

New Castle County is very liberal leaning and Sussex is very conservative leaning. Does that ever create an issue?

SARAH MCBRIDE: Sure, I mean, I think the, the greatest divide in, in, in our country is not between red states and blue states, it's between sort of urban, suburban, exurban, and rural. And, and that's true in every state across the country; it's certainly true in Delaware. And obviously that means that legislators come to different issues with different perspectives and certainly with different constituencies. You know, one of the challenges starting this job was I started it remotely. And it's an inherently relational job and it's difficult to develop relationships over Zoom. And, and so, what I've tried to make up for in the lost time is to, to meet one on one with colleagues from different parts of the state. I just had a great coffee. I, I, and I go to them. I, it's not me, you know, having, summon people up to the, to the big city of Wilmington. No, I go to them, or I meet them halfway and we have a cup of coffee. And you know, I ask them things like, you know, what, what, what sparked them running for office. What are some of the issues that really matter to, to their constituents? What are their priorities. I think it's important for all of us in the legislature to understand the diversity of our state beyond our own districts.



Obviously, we are there to represent our districts. But we need to get an understanding of what the rest of the state is and looks like and thinks and feels. And that includes Sussex, it includes Kent, it includes rural communities, it includes beach communities. And that's certainly something I've, I've tried to do. It's been hard with COVID but it's important for me because ultimately while I represent a district my, you know, 120, 120, 120th of a vote in the legislature, in the Senate, you know, that impacts an entire state and I have to be cognizant of, of, of how it impacts people in my district but I also need to be cognizant of how it impacts people in Seaford, or in Dover, or in Bethany. And so, I think those conversations aren't just important in breaking down the divide between legislators interpersonally, but also to make sure that all of us are able to have as much information at our disposal when we're making decisions as possible. And frankly it's the only way to do the job because at the end of the day I have to, I have to advocate to 62 different people or 61 different people and, and get a majority of, of, of that, of those 61 and in some cases a super majority of those 61 other people. And in order to meet people where they are, you know, it's not always an intellectual exercise. It's, it's often times politics as we've talked about is often emotional. And you've got to, to speak the language of the person that you're talking to otherwise you're not going to reach them. And the only way to do that is to understand that person, to understand where they're coming from. And that has been an important priority for me now that we sort of get back to in person to make up for that lost time, develop those relationships, bridge that divide that does exist between, you know, above the canal and below the canal.

DR. HOFFMAN: I think that's so important to be thinking about how the decisions that you make affect not just your constituents but, but everyone across

the state. So, I do want to have, have one final note before I give a few announcements and we wrap up and say thank you. The transgender man, man who was not out wanted to say this to Sarah; he said I appreciate that you pointed out that I and we don't have to be out in every setting. And I so admire you for being out and proud and representing us in this world. I will take these words to heart. Thank you. So, I don't know if you wanted to respond to that?

SARAH MCBRIDE: Well, first off, thank you and, and thank you for sharing your self in that question with us and, and that vulnerability. And, you know, it, it, it's incredibly hard. I mean, even if we make that choice to not be out in a circumstance because of our unsafety or, or because of the fears of what may come, it, it, it, you then, you then feel invisible. And I think people who aren't in our community don't often understand how demoralizing and, and how affecting that feeling of invisibility can be. And, and how important these parts of our identities are for us. And so, I just want you to know that I see you, I hear you, and there are so many other people I think across this state who are working both in our community but beyond to try to build a world where we can all bring our whole selves to work and it not be a huge deal but it also not be something that we have to hide. That we can feel safe and comfortable being our authentic selves and sharing all of our selves with one another.

DR. HOFFMAN: Well, on that note before I say thank you, I do want to ask our producers to pull up a couple of slides just to indicate where we're going next in National Agenda. And first I wanted to point out that our, our next speaker is Nikkolas Smith. He calls himself an activist. He's an author and an illustrator most recently of the book that will come out the day before November – it's actually 17th, that date is incorrect there. So, November 17th. His book will come out on November



16th. It is the children's book that's accompanying the 1619 Project written by Nikole Hannah-Jones. It's called Born On The Water and he's the illustrator of that particular book. So please tune in to that. That will be live in person in Mitchell Hall. You can also stream it right here online as you are doing tonight. So, please go to our website to sign up for that. And I wanted to point out some important facts around voting. I don't know if we have that slide to pop up here really quickly before we wrap up? Yes. So, we at the, at the University of Delaware subscribe to a service called The National Study of Learning, Voting and Engagement out of Tufts University, The Institute for Democracy in Higher Education, and I'm really excited to announce that our 2020 voting rate among UD students was 75.2 percent. That's almost 20 percent up from our voting rate in 2016 and it's nearly 10 percent higher than the annual, I'm sorry, the, the institutional rate across over a thousand different institutions. And I want to point out specifically several fields of study where our voting rate has been extraordinarily low: engineering, 2016 voting rate was 45 percent, in 2020 it was 75 percent – a 30 percent increase; in business, the business school we saw a voting rate of 42 percent in 2016, that went up to 75 percent in 2020 – a 33 percent increase; and in math and statistics which in 2016 had 34 percent voting rate they jumped up to 70 percent in 2020, that's a 36 percent increase. So, kudos to our University of Delaware students for voting, for getting out there. And just a reminder to our audience that UD now has a connection with Issue Voter, and you can sign up with Issue Voter now that you have voted one day after the election in many states you can find out what your legislators are doing. Hold them accountable. Email them, call them including Senator Sarah McBride. So, I want to thank you so much for joining us – and if we could get Senator McBride back on just to say one more goodnight and thank you. Hi, there you are.



SARAH MCBRIDE: Hi.

DR. HOFFMAN: Thank –

SARAH MCBRIDE: Thank you so much for having me. This was such a great conversation and, and the questions were really wonderful and insightful. And I just so appreciate everyone taking the time this evening. I look forward to being able to join folks in person.

DR. HOFFMAN: See you soon.

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ⁱ Sarah McBride led the successful effort to pass a landmark non-discrimination law in Delaware in 2013, worked with state leaders to expand health care covered by Medicaid in 2014, and championed legislation protecting vulnerable youth from child abuse in 2017. For her work and advocacy, former Gov. Markell awarded McBride the Order of the First State, making her one of the youngest Delawareans granted the state's highest civilian honor. As a state senator, McBride is committed to fighting for health care for all, strong public schools for every child, good paying jobs with real benefits for Delaware's families, and safe communities where each resident is treated with dignity.

Sarah married her late husband Andrew Cray in 2014 and is the proud aunt of Juliette, Theo, Bennett, Sydney, Ben, and Addison.