

Disability Visibility Podcast

Episode 88: Policy

Guest: Liz Weintraub

Host: Alice Wong

Transcript by [Cheryl Green](#)

For more information: DisabilityVisibilityProject.com/podcast

Introduction

[radio static, voices singing with hip-hop beat]

LATEEF: This is the *Disability Visibility Podcast* with your host, Alice Wong.

ALICE WONG: Hello, hello, hello! Welcome to the *Disability Visibility Podcast*, conversations on disability politics, culture, and media. I'm your host, Alice Wong. With Election Day just two weeks away in the United States on November 3rd, this is the perfect time to talk about policy. Today's episode features an interview with Liz Weintraub. Liz is an advocate who has held many board and advisory positions at state and national organizations. Liz is a full-time member of the policy team for the Association of University Centers on Disabilities, and she's also the host of [Tuesdays With Liz: Disability Policy For All](#), where she talks about policy in accessible language. You'll learn how Liz got involved with disability policy, why she loves it, and why it matters. Please note our conversation took place before the coronavirus pandemic.

Are you ready?! [electronic beeping]

Away we goooooo!

ELECTRONIC VOICE: 5, 4, 3, 2, 1!

ALICE: So, Liz, welcome to my podcast today!

LIZ WEINTRAUB: Thank you for having me.

ALICE: And Liz, why don't you introduce yourself and share something about your background.

LIZ: OK. Thanks for having me. My name is Liz Weintraub, and I'm a Caucasian woman. And I'm a person with a disability. I'm very proud of my disability. I'm 53 years old. I don't look it, but I am. And I'm an advocate for— I don't like the word "self-advocate" anymore. The reason is because I'm a self-advocate when I talk to my husband or when I talk to my friends about what I want or need. I'm even a self-advocate when I talk to my supervisor or my boss about what I need at work. But when I talk to people about disability rights, I think that I should be just like anyone else. And if anyone else's called an advocate, why can't I be an advocate? Is it just because I happen to have a disability? So, that's a little bit about who I am. I'm married, I have three sisters who I just adore, And I have many friends. I don't know what else to say.

[chill, fun music break]

Learning about disability advocacy

ALICE: So, let's talk about your beginnings, because you are a really strong advocate not only on Capitol Hill, but about all kinds of areas. How did you learn about disability advocacy?

LIZ: I was in a, I used to live in a institution. I didn't mention that because I'm quite ashamed of it. And I got in a institution because they tricked my parents. I went to a boarding school in Cape Cod, probably the best school of my life. And after that school, they told my parents to put me into what is called "a community." I won't ever name the name of it, but it was a community of probably four, probably seven or eight houses. And you go down a long driveway. And that doesn't look like a community that I live in today, and I'm assuming that's not the community that your listeners live in today. And I really wanted to get out of that institution. And I felt bad. And so, my friend, Pat told me about this group, and that's how I began to be in self-advocacy.

I also I have to say that when I first joined self-advocacy, I thought it was a political group. It's not a political group. You can get to political. And I think today I do work in politics. I do have to, dealing with things on Capitol Hill and other things. I do need to worry about politics, but it's definitely not politics if you just go and advocate for yourself.

ALICE: Mhmm. Yeah, it seems like it's more of a movement to me, like a movement.

LIZ: Yes.

ALICE: Yeah.

LIZ: Yes.

ALICE: So, if it's OK to ask, how did you get out of the institution? Because you and I know, right now, that there are still disabled people in institutions, and they don't have options. And it's really hard to get out because there's so many barriers.

LIZ: No, sure. I'll tell people. Well, first of all, my parents, my friend, Pat, who I just mentioned, Pat helped me to speak up to myself. I remember talking to Pat in the driveway of where I got services from. And I said, "You talk to my staff, and you talk to my parents about why I'm not there." And she said, "No. No." And I got angry. I got angry because I thought, as my support person, she has a responsibility to talk to my parents that I wasn't happy. And she said, "No, you have, you need to talk. I'll help you, but you need to do the talking." So, I did. And I ran back and forth from the car. And that's not the right way to say it, say no. But I was afraid. I was afraid that if I said no, that I didn't like this place, that they would keep me into this place.

And the other way I got help was from two of long-term friends, Tia Nelis and Nancy Ward. And they just helped me tremendously to speak up for myself. Those are three people I would say.

ALICE: Yeah, that's awesome. And I think that's why these people in our lives, our friends or people who support us are so important, because they can really change our lives.

LIZ: Yes!

[chill, fun music break]

Why people should care about policy

ALICE: So, today's episode is about policy. And I wanna ask you, why should people care about disability policy, especially people with disabilities?

LIZ: I would say because it's our life. This is our life. We need to own that this is our life. And this, out of any year, to vote, and I don't mean to make this all about voting, because obviously, policy is so much more than voting. But this is so important. This year is so important. There's people out there who pick on us, who make fun of us. This is our life, and we need to be talking. And yes, there's support people like Pat Gerke, my friend Pat Gerke, other people without disability could be supporting people. And they're wonderful people. Our sisters, our brothers, and they're wonderful people. But we need to be the one that needs to be talking for ourselves. And I don't mean that we need to do it all by ourselves. I've been an advocate for probably 25 years, 26 years, whatever. And to this day, I still need support. I need someone to be there for me to help me.

ALICE: Yeah, and I feel like that's the thing, is like, independent doesn't mean doing everything by yourself, right? All of us need help, and there's absolutely nothing wrong with getting the support you need. I mean, that's what it's all about, right?

LIZ: Yes. And I have to say that a lotta times, people get confused between independent and interdependence. And I can tell you the first time I met my husband, he said, "Well, I need to do this all by myself, because So-and-So told me that I need to do this all by myself." And I said, "No, Phil. If you need help, I can help you, and you shouldn't be ashamed." And he said, "Well, I'm independent. I'm independent. I have to be independent". And I said, "No, Phil, you can be independent, but I can also help you if you need help. And don't ever be ashamed to be asking for help." I ask Phil all the time for help. I ask my coworkers help. Today, I didn't need help with my computer because all I needed to do was click on the link. But sometimes I do need help.

ALICE: Yep. Absolutely. And speaking of policies, what are some of the barriers that keep people from understanding policy better? And what are some ways we could make policy accessible for all? I know you're very passionate about that. So, what do you have to say about that?

LIZ: That's what my show is all about. I think one of the biggest reasons why it's a barrier is because the words: the words are not accessible to people. People don't care to slow down. People don't care to explain the words to us. Because you know what? They don't want us to be a part of the discussions. It takes too long to explain to us what a word means. What does impeachment mean? What does the election mean? When do the ABLE Act mean? What do Home and Community-Based Services mean? What do managed care mean? Those kinds of things.

And you know what? During the impeachment process, we obviously didn't tell people how to vote or how to think about the impeachment, but there was a time that I said to people, "You know what? What does impeachment mean? I've been hearing all about impeachment on the news. And what do it mean?" And you know what? AUCD made up a plain language version of that. Or another example about it is how do you make public comments? People are allowed to make public comment on laws and acts, and to know how to do that. So, we did the plain language version of that.

ALICE: Yeah. And I feel like plain language helps everybody, right? Why can't plain language be the standard? Because it really helps all kinds of people. So, things that are shorter, clearer, more precise, and more plain is a way to reach everyone.

[chill, fun music break]

Tuesday with Liz and talking about policy

ALICE: So, I wanna hear about your show because you mentioned it earlier. It's called *Tuesday with Liz*, and it's produced by AUCD, which is the Association of University Centers on Disabilities. And how did this get started? Tell me about the beginning of this series.

LIZ: OK. It goes back to when I was little. Because my father was a editor/publisher of a local newspaper, all the conversation, all the dinner table conversation, or the majority of the conversation was about policy. And I never quite understood. I sat at the table, I was included at the table, but I wasn't included. And the reason why I wasn't included was because the discussion wasn't accessible to me. And when I asked my parents, "What was that? Or how," if we were talking about some kind of policy, and my parents said, "Look it up. Look it up." Like, that's silly. Why would I even care? And I wanted to learn. I wanted to understand, and I wanted to be part of the conversation. So, when I had the chance to ask at AUCD to make the YouTube show, that's how it began. And it's been around for probably four and a half years, almost five years, and over 200 episodes.

ALICE: That is awesome. I mean, to have over 200 episodes, plus to be doing this for five years, that's a huge accomplishment.

LIZ: Thank you. And we try to have a new episode every year, every week, I should say. And they're all closed captioning. And we often say that *Tuesday with Liz* is made for and by people with disability. Because the original purpose was for my friends to understand about policy. And it had grown to be for other people who just doesn't understand about policy.

ALICE: Mmhmm. And what do you love about talking about policy with other disabled people? Because I think that's why I like podcasting, because we are in conversation with each other. And so many times, you'll see a interview, it might be one disabled person, but it's not a group of us. So, what do you like about talking with other disabled people about policy?

LIZ: Well, I love, first of all, I love policy. From a very early age, I knew that policy was what I wanted to do. And I can tell you that when I told that to my parents, that I wanted to understand the policy, and can you help me, and can we talk about policy, they made a joke about it. They said how funny this is. "Why would you even care about policy? Why, as a person with a disability, why would you even care? You don't understand about policy." And I love talking about what I love. I think most people love talking about what they love to do. And I also love to help people with disability. I love to help people to advocate for themselves. So, combine those two things, that's why I love doing what I do.

And I can tell you another story, if I can. When I was probably 19 years old—probably a typical age where you would talk to your parents about what you wanted to do—and I said I wanted to be a lobbyist. I wanted to work in policy. And they laughed in my face, and they said, "Why would you ever want to do that? You can't ever do that. All you can do is work in the library." Well, I'm not a lobbyist, right? I'm not a lobbyist because it's not the right thing to do for me. But I'm an advocate. But I'm very close to being a lobbyist, so don't ever say I'm not a lobbyist. Because in my heart, I am a lobbyist.

ALICE: Oh, I think advocates are really persuasive in advocating for certain things. So, I think some people call that lobbying. Some people call that advocacy. And there's a lotta similarities.

[chill, fun music break]

First steps to getting into policy

ALICE: So, as we're gonna wrap up, I wanna ask you one last question. And it's, you know, like you said earlier, a lotta people are kinda turned off by policy. They think, oh, it's just a bunch of junk. It's just, it's not gonna impact me. It's just so difficult. So, what's your advice for people who just wanna start learning more? What are some first steps that people should do to learn more about disability policy?

LIZ: Well, first of all, you should listen to *Tuesdays with Liz*. And you go by Googling *Tuesdays with Liz*, or you can go to our homepage, AUCD.org. There's a button underneath the Policy tab. And you can also go to our newsletter, our *Disability Policy News*, that's in simple language. And I would also say just go out and have fun with policy. Policy, I know it can be scary sometimes, and people might think that oh, I'm too nervous. Somebody told me once that a legislator is just like you. They are just people. And by telling your story, that's so important. Telling stories, that's what *Tuesdays with Liz* is all about: telling your story. And you need to be telling your story. They don't need to hear from professionals. You, you as a person with a disability, you know what you need, you know what you want, and you know how to get there by talking to your Congresspeople. And you might not know how to do it right now, but I can guarantee you that after just doing once or twice or three times, then maybe you'll know how to do it.

ALICE: Yup. It takes practice, and it takes community.

LIZ: Yes. And also you need to have someone to believe in yourself. You need to have someone, I think a first thing that was on my, that has helped me in so many ways is people believing in me who can just say, "OK, great. Do this." And if I can share one more story with you, Alice. When I wanted to be involved in policy and not just do *Tuesdays with Liz*, because my job is so much more than doing *Tuesdays with Liz*. I do other things right now. I go up on the Hill and tell my story and whatever. I said to Andy, "Can I be on the policy team?" And he said, "Well, let's give it a try! Let's give it a try. You might not like it. It might not work for you." I was the first person with a disability that was on the team that had an intellectual disability. I never have gone to college. And so, we didn't know whether I could go up on the Hill. We didn't know that I could do this. Well, we try! And that's what life is all about. You need to try. You need to try your best and try and have people believing in you.

ALICE: That's really powerful, Liz.

LIZ: Thank you.

ALICE: Liz, I am just so appreciative of your work and just your leadership and for just sharing your story with me today. I'm just really honored.

LIZ: Thank you! I'm honored to have been on your show. Thank you.

Wrap-up

[hip-hop music]

♪ How far will they go (oh, yeah)
How far will they go (oh, yeah).... ♪

ALICE: This podcast is a production of the *Disability Visibility Project*, an online community dedicated to creating, sharing, and amplifying disability media and culture. All episodes, including text transcripts, are available at DisabilityVisibilityProject.com/Podcast.

You can also find out more about Liz on my website.

The audio producer for this episode is Geraldine Ah-Sue. Introduction by Lateef McLeod.
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Thanks for listening, and see you on the Internets! Byeeeee!

♪ rocket to the blast off
stop, drop, dance off ♪