

VANESSA Envy and in awe of a lot in the gay and lesbian community as far as organizing, especially politically organizing.

EDWARDS- We've still got a lot of catching up to go but we've really kind of closed that gap very quickly with what we've

FOSTER: done just over the course of the past few years. But where do you see this going in the next few years? First I guess locally, statewide, Sarah.

SARAH Well statewide I think we've jumped-- we've grown by leaps and bounds. We've gone from 30 people attending,

DEPALMA: to 40 people, to 50 people, to 80 people. And I don't really think there's a top end for us. We're just now finally starting to get Dallas involved. And there's no telling how much our membership can grow from that. The Central Texas group, I think is probably going to fold their email list into the TGAIN list, which is going to add another couple of names to that list.

I mean, we're growing by leaps and bounds. I think actually though, it's a lot easier for us to organize at the state level than it is at a National. And that is because we organize TGAIN from the ground up. There was never the organized opposition and the egos involved that you all have to fight at the National level.

MONICA Yeah.

ROBERTS:

SARAH And it's one of the reasons, honestly, I have no desire to go back to the National level. I've gotten kicked as hard

DEPALMA: as I have ever cared to be kicked. And I would never be willing to go back to work at the National level unless the egos were held in check and I don't envy you there at all.

VANESSA But we can take the egos there.

EDWARDS-

FOSTER:

MONICA Yeah.

ROBERTS:

VANESSA I get to be a worker bee. I mean--

EDWARDS-

FOSTER:

YOSENIO And we actually have taken the egos out. The people who will be involved in the lobbying days that [INAUDIBLE]

LEWIS: is sponsoring, let me just plug this. May 13, we have our training. And may 14, 15, and 16, we do the actual lobbying. The people who will be involved in our lobbying are the local people. They are the grassroots people. They are the people who traditionally are not heard and are not listened to.

And it's precisely because that was the case previously where it was all about ego and it was all about whose face can be the closest to the camera when the big picture is taken. We're not about that. We are about if you have a desire to go to Washington DC you can get yourself there. We can help you to get there. And if you have something that you want to say, then you're a part of our group and we want you to be there.

VANESSA Absolutely. In fact, Monica, do you want to give a little background as to the direction this year that we're taking?

EDWARDS-

FOSTER:

MONICA Yeah. For the most part, the direction I wanted to that we basically want to take is twofold. One, the education aspect of it. And in terms of getting us set up so that we can be placed into ENDA and other legislation of vital importance to transgender especially. Because one of the focuses where NTAC differs is twofold. NTAC is a multicultural organization, which is basically something that has been unheard of in the transgender rights movement.

I would say, for the most part you had-- from the outset, you've had persons of color involved in the formation of NTAC and in the formulation of its policy. And that has led-- in my opinion-- to want a focus that was never I'll say, taken by a National organization-- well, at least in terms of transgender. We've also focused more on some of the issues that grassroots-- the grass grassroots concerns such as jobs such as basic bread and butter issues.

YOSENIO Mm-hmm.

LEWIS:

VANESSA Exactly. That's one of the things that we kind of strive for as far as an organization, is to represent the true community, everyone from the ground up, and this includes a lot of the communities that have basically been overlooked before. One of the things that we've sort of striven to do is to include the inter-sexed as well. In fact, one of our founding members was also an intersex member.

Another thing, in fact, this brings up an issue kind of related to a question that I was asking earlier. How do we bring in a lot of the newbies especially from the minority community, the people of color?

MONICA For the longest time it's-- there's a couple of misperceptions in terms of the people of color community. When you look at a picture and you see maybe one or two people inside that are of color in the picture it gives the community of color an impression that basically, OK, they're not welcome. I haven't found that to be the case here at the local level. As a matter of fact, I say every time I've asked for any kind of [INAUDIBLE] help, Sarah will come up and say when do you can-- when can you help me. When do you need me.

Or [INAUDIBLE], I've been welcomed with open arms here in the community. I need some help folks.

[LAUGHTER]

SARAH We need more.

DEPALMA:

MONICA I could always use a few more, hint, hint.

ROBERTS:

VANESSA Hey, I was working on her. That's a really frustrating thing too, because we've really worked hard at recruiting people of color. And it's been partly a class issue. It's been partly an economic issue. It's been partly a racial issue. And it's been frustrating as hell. I don't know that I, as a white person can be the person to do the recruiting. I've pretty much come to believe that that's just simply going to be the case. And honestly, I mean, we need people like Monica and others to come out and do some recruiting.

And I think the hard part is where you have to convince people that they really are welcome. It's the same problem we've had recruiting the men. In each lobby day we've had better and better attendance from the men. But we've really had to prove ourselves to them and show and prove to them that not only did we want them to come out, but we want them in positions of leadership before we were able to get a response.

SARAH Oh, true.

DEPALMA:

YOSENIO And so here I am ladies.

LEWIS:

[LAUGHTER]

VANESSA Thank you, Yosenio. Actually speaking, I guess as the NTAC board chair, can you offer a perspective on this. How do we reach out effectively to the minority community?

EDWARDS-

FOSTER:

YOSENIO I think it has to be a multi-pronged approach. There certainly has to be outreach done by people who look, or

LEWIS: sound, or behave, or live like the people you're trying to reach. There also has to be consistency in what you say and what you do. If you're still there a year later, and if you're still saying the same thing, that goes a long way towards building credibility and reducing the mistrust that any group might have about an organization that's saying come and join us and you can see the World.

I think it's also important just to be patient. There has to be a willingness to recognize that so many groups from so many perspectives have felt marginalized and have felt like what they had to say was not heard and was not seen as important. So just because you do one instance of outreach and you get two people. You were hoping to get 10 and you get two, don't lose faith and don't give up because those two people represent the future.

And if you're willing to wait the other eight will come along. And they'll come along within a short amount of time. They just need to see that the two that came first are being treated with respect and being treated with dignity, and that their words are being heard. And the particular issues, the particular perspective that they bring to your organization is valued. As soon as people see that, they will come. They will come and wholeheartedly support the organization and its mission.

SARAH That's exactly what's happening here. We're now in our eighth year and it has taken that long to convince

DEPALMA: people, A, that if they come out and join us nothing bad will happen to them. And B, we're going to be here the next year and the year after. Our message has been consistent. I don't think our message has changed from day one. And exactly what you said, Yosenio. The most important part is patience.

The first year that we went and we only had-- I think we had seven people. But we came back home and we started telling people look here's what happened. This was a great time. So the next time we drew 30, and the next time we drew 54, now we're at 82. And although that doesn't sound like big, big growth when you start looking at it on a percentage basis, that's pretty darn good. And you're exactly right consistency and patience are exactly the two key issues.

And occasionally it's been a matter of having to prove to people that what I've said is really would have meant. And once people find out that you are as good as your word, the organization not only does it grow, but they begin recruiting other people. And that's exactly what's happened here in Texas.

YOSENIO Mm-hmm.

LEWIS:

VANESSA Let me ask you a question here real quick, Yosenio. This is probably a little maybe frank but is there any I guess distinctions between how the man approach politics and the women? I know we tend to kind of dominate a lot of the political movement or at least have up to this point. How do we reach out to the men and what distinctions are there? How is it that we can amend some of the things that we're doing to bring in a lot more of the guys into the fold?

YOSENIO Oh, boy. That is the \$64,000 question, isn't it.

LEWIS:

VANESSA It sure it is.

EDWARDS-

FOSTER:

MONICA Yes it is.

ROBERTS:

YOSENIO I just want to know where is the \$64,000 once I answer this question. I need that money.

LEWIS:

VANESSA After lobby day.

EDWARDS-

FOSTER:

MONICA Who wants to be a millionaire.

ROBERTS:

SARAH Well, I don't know. Is this your final answer?

DEPALMA:

YOSENIO Really. How do we get the men in?

LEWIS:

MONICA To be honest I think NTAC has made a pretty good start toward that. [INAUDIBLE] involved getting yourself and esteemed webmaster Jerrey McCracken and some of the other guys that are involved in NTAC enthusiastically involved.

VANESSA So can I ask a simpler question. How did you get involved, Yosenio?

EDWARDS-

FOSTER:

YOSENIO Oh, I was tied up. I mean, I was--

LEWIS:

[LAUGHTER]

VANESSA Oh, we know [INAUDIBLE]

EDWARDS-

FOSTER:

SARAH My kind of guy.

DEPALMA:

VANESSA Yeah we need we need a lot of help from that community.

EDWARDS-

FOSTER:

YOSENIO I was asked. And I was asked and I was told that you will have input. You're not there for show. You're not there

LEWIS: so that we can trot you out and say, oh, yes. We got FTM's involved. But you will have to do some work. And we will expect you to do work but we will also value what you have to say because we know your history and we want you to be a part of this.

MONICA Yes.

ROBERTS:

YOSENIO And that's how come I got involved. And of course it was also to do with NTAC's general mission and its goals

LEWIS: that were very, very attractive to me. And I'm somebody who wants to do the work. And I'm also somebody who says this is not right that there's not A, B, C, D, and E represented here. But if I'm a member of A, B, C, D, or E, and I'm not stepping up to the plate then I don't have any right to complain.

VANESSA Yeah--

EDWARDS-

FOSTER:

[INTERPOSING VOICES]

YOSENIO So I could not say to other FTM's you should join us, you should join us, but I wasn't going to be willing to join. So

LEWIS: if I'm there as an FTM, as an FTM of color, then it makes it easier for others, other FTM and other people of color to come in because they see me there. They see me there day in and day out. They see me doing the work and they recognize that if I'm going to be involved in this and I'm going to put my blood, sweat, and tears into it, then I must really believe in it, and it must really be worthwhile.

VANESSA Haggling with all those crazy pushy women.

EDWARDS-

FOSTER:

[LAUGHTER]

YOSENIO OK, well, let's get to it then. There definitely is a difference in the way we approach issues, which is, in my estimation based on our socialization. That does not mean that we can't work together and it also does not mean that we shouldn't work together. It means that we just have to try a little harder to overcome some of our-- what might have become instinct as a way to behave. As a way to treat each other. As a way to communicate with each other. It's difficult but it's also exciting.

LEWIS: Everything that's difficult and challenging is also exciting. And also a wonderful opportunity to overcome an obstacle. And to not to-- eliminate looking at it as an obstacle but as a challenge that can be overcome.

VANESSA Sorry, Jimmy. You want to cut in here.

EDWARDS-

FOSTER:

JIMMY CARPER: I need to remind everyone that they're listening to After Hours, Queer Radio With Attitude on KPFT Houston and KEOS College Station. We've got Vanessa here with a room full of activists, including one on the phone.

VANESSA Yes, long distance. We import them.

EDWARDS-

FOSTER:

YOSENIO We recruit from way over there.

LEWIS:

VANESSA Or as we would like to say, Yosenio, far West Texas.

EDWARDS-

FOSTER:

YOSENIO Oh, far west Texas.

LEWIS:

VANESSA Exactly.

EDWARDS-

FOSTER:

YOSENIO OK. I am not responding to that because I don't want to get in trouble.

LEWIS:

VANESSA Let's hear that drawl there.

EDWARDS-

FOSTER:

YOSENIO I can't even pretend. And I'm not even from California. So I really can't pretend and say anything.

LEWIS:

VANESSA Oh, come on. Actually though, I guess getting back to our subject. You have exhibited a great amount of patience just dealing with a lot of us on the line. And one of the things that I've kind of noticed is-- in fact, I think we even had this conversation-- about the socialization. Is that we as trans-gendered females approach things differently than I guess genetic females would. And similarly, the same goes for the guys as well. The trans men approach things differently than a lot of I guess genetic males. And we do kind of tend to carry over a little bit of as you mentioned, the instinctive socialization.

One of the things, though, that I would like to see is I guess some recognition from a lot of the females and within the activist movement of the input of the guys. We really need that and I kind of sometimes almost feel like we step all over them, and are not really listening all that well. I hope I'm not really doing that with you. I'm sitting over here talking like crazy. But--

SARAH You're just Vanessa.

DEPALMA:

[LAUGHTER]

Does any one listen to Vanessa--

VANESSA And I walk fast to.

EDWARDS-

FOSTER:

SARAH Does anyone listen to Vanessa's opinion?

DEPALMA:

VANESSA Uh, no, of course not.

EDWARDS-

FOSTER:

MONICA Yeah, the last board meeting I was at we were.

ROBERTS:

VANESSA Oh, yes. Speaking of excitement.

EDWARDS-

FOSTER:

SARAH Vanessa I've talked to a lot of-- I've gone to several of the groups for the men around the state and asked them why there's not more participation. And one of the most common answers I get is that they don't want to feel like they're being put on display. And the big fear is that they'll be the one-- they'll only be one or two people there and they'll be talked at instead of being part of a discussion.

And I'm not quite sure how we're going to overcome that. I'm glad that we got more guys to turn out for the lobby day but that's not going to be sufficient. And it's obvious that we have a lot of work to do between sessions of getting the men involved. But we're really going to have to convince them that if they come out to join us that they are working partners not people that we're going to talk at.

VANESSA Exactly.

EDWARDS-

FOSTER:

MONICA Yeah.

ROBERTS:

YOSENIO And one way that you can do that is to get the men involved in the planning stages.

LEWIS:

VANESSA Yes, exactly. Yes.

EDWARDS-

FOSTER:

YOSENIO In between the lobby days have them just as involved then because they take ownership. If you involve people

LEWIS: the planning aspect of anything they take ownership of that thing. It becomes important to them. It becomes central to them and then they'll show up for it.

VANESSA Yes.

EDWARDS-

FOSTER:

YOSENIO But if you just ask them a day or two before the event. Hey, can you come and do this or can you come and do

LEWIS: that? Well, you've been planning this-- you're telling me you've been playing this for six, seven months now. Why didn't you ask me six, seven months ago.

SARAH Right, why was there no input on the ground floor. Exactly right.

DEPALMA:

VANESSA As far as board development, I know this isn't something that really affects TGAIN as yet. I know we're eventually going to be moving in that direction. As far as NTAC's purposes, how do we attract-- especially, a lot of the guys and also the persons of color to our board? How do we actually, I guess reach out as far as board development to kind of ensure that we do have a diverse organization into the future?

YOSENIO Once again, it's all about making sure people know who we are and what we're about. Being consistent with our message and finding the one or two who will actually step up to the plate. Making them feel important. Investing them in our mission and then they can go out and spread the word, and they will. But as long as it's all about making people feel that whatever you want them to do is something that really is important to them. And that they have an opportunity to have a say in how you're going to manifest your mission.

SARAH Can I ask a question as a person that's not a member of NTAC here?

DEPALMA:

YOSENIO Absolutely.

LEWIS:

SARAH OK. When exactly is the National Lobby Day going to take place?

DEPALMA:

YOSENIO Once again, that will be May 14, 15, and 16.

LEWIS:

SARAH OK.

DEPALMA:

VANESSA With training on the 13th.

EDWARDS-

FOSTER:

SARAH OK, here's my-- it's a two part question I guess. One is what are you expecting to accomplish up there? I mean,

DEPALMA: I'm sure you realize that we're not going to be included in ENDA.

VANESSA Right.

EDWARDS-

FOSTER:

SARAH So what are you trying to accomplish? And B, how are you going to overcome the HRC lobbying against you?

DEPALMA:

MONICA Do you want me to get that?

ROBERTS:

YOSENIO No, I'll do it and you certainly feel free to add on to it. A, our first goal is education.

LEWIS:

SARAH OK.

DEPALMA:

YOSENIO We are about making sure that people understand that we do exist. That we do pay taxes. That we are part of

LEWIS: this country. That we do have a voice and that we will continue to be here to make our voices heard, and to make our wishes known. To make our requests known.

MONICA Yeah.

ROBERTS:

YOSENIO B, I have no intention of dealing with whatever any organization might do prior to or directly after our lobby days

LEWIS: in terms of trying to impact us. I'm not about them. I'm not about worrying about them. I am about doing the work that I need to do and showing myself and my organization for who I am and for what it is and that will speak for itself. Anybody else has any right to do whatever they please. But if I do my homework. and I show myself in a correct way I have nothing to worry about.

MONICA Right.

ROBERTS:

VANESSA I love hearing that actually.

EDWARDS-

FOSTER:

BETH RICHARD: You got a big thumbs up all around this room.

VANESSA Yes.

EDWARDS-

FOSTER:

BETH RICHARD: Definitely.

VANESSA Actually that's one of the things that I guess I had always kind of wondered whether or not we approach things incorrectly when we first started lobbying nationally. We started right out of the gate going up and lobbying with a bunch of legislators that basically had no clue as to who we were, or what we were, or what any of our issues were. And we did not really do any of the fundamental education to begin with just to kind of lay the foundation.

And that's one of the things that I saw was probably a glaring deficiency on our part as far as strategy goes. We needed to at least make them working familiar with transgenders who we are, what we are, and what our issues are. And then after-- especially with the kind of situation we've got for the next four years we're not going to get any favorable legislation. We've got the perfect time to actually go out there and do that fundamental foundation education.

MONICA Especially with the way that the House and Senate are lined up right now. You're not going to get a whole lot of legislation through Congress for the next four years.

YOSENIO So legislation should not be the goal but developing a strategy should be.

LEWIS:

MONICA Yeah, and I agree with you totally on that. And [INAUDIBLE] say that is why one of the-- why I'm hammering on the educational aspect those of us on there that our setting this up. We are hammering the educational aspect. If we get fortunate enough to say to-- say, well, it may-- it's not-- we know legislation is not going to pass this session. But a couple of years down the line after we've done-- we've been up to the Hill three, four, five years in a row, or how many other down the line that's going to happen.

The NAACP-- to give you an example from history. The NAACP back in its early history was pushing an anti-lynching bill. They knew what Southern senators-- Southern segregationists house members and Senate members they had no prayer of getting that Bill passed. But they went there every year for 40 straight years until they finally got it passed.

VANESSA 40.

EDWARDS-

FOSTER:

SARAH It took 17 years to get the transgender rights Bill in Minnesota. And people are always asking me why do we keep going after the state legislature in Texas. And it's because it's only going to be through persistence that we're going to ever get anything. You can't go one time expect to get results and come home. That's not reality. And Yosenio is exactly right. Trick to This is going to be education, education, education. Absolutely.

BETH RICHARD: And also a focus on the goal. Not to worry about the peripheral stuff as well. That's one of the things we kind of got saddled with I guess kind of early on. Since we kind of were created out of a schism I guess, if you will, with the community that was favoring the organization that shall not be named.

[LAUGHTER]

But the fact is that we started off with a bit of I guess maybe an anti this other organizational type of push. And it's one of the things that really draws a lot of energy. And sure it's a great, I guess vent for people's frustrations. But the thing is when you're venting these frustrations you're not really focusing on what it is that you're there for to begin with.

SARAH You can't make progress by being against something.

DEPALMA:

MONICA Right.

ROBERTS:

SARAH You have to make progress by being for something.

DEPALMA:

BETH RICHARD: And that's exactly why Yosenio mentioned was-- I mean, just absolutely right on. That is exactly what we need to be doing, is focusing not only on our educational push, but also to try and spend some time getting some of the credibility, and getting some of the friends up on the Hill that we're going to need in the future.

SARAH Are you going to leave them a legislative packet like we did in Texas.

DEPALMA:

BETH RICHARD: Absolutely. Absolutely.

SARAH OK.

DEPALMA:

MONICA Absolutely.

ROBERTS:

BETH RICHARD: Anybody else going to bring pictures with paragraphs on the back.

VANESSA In fact, actually, Beth, if you're going out there bring your pictures.

EDWARDS-

FOSTER:

BETH RICHARD: I'm going to do that.

VANESSA Put it in the packet. [INAUDIBLE] If you don't mind.

EDWARDS-

FOSTER:

BETH RICHARD: In the whole packet--

VANESSA I may just go ahead and put that in the entire packet. I think it's an excellent addition to it. I want them to see

EDWARDS- family values.

FOSTER:

BETH RICHARD: And I don't want to be alone because I'm not the only representative family out there. I want to see lots of those.

VANESSA Yeah, definitely.

EDWARDS-

FOSTER:

MONICA I'd love to--

ROBERTS:

BETH RICHARD: I'd like to see some of the guys out there. Yeah.

MONICA I'd love to see more people of color involved. I know that's not going to happen overnight. But this year--

ROBERTS:

BETH RICHARD: It's still working.

MONICA -- I said but one good thing about the TGAIN Lobby day-- week. [? I say ?] because Christy was up there, we

ROBERTS: actually made a few gains in terms of getting Hispanic legislators on board.

SARAH Yeah, we made a lot of gains this time around with Hispanic legislators that we never had done before. And that's

DEPALMA: entirely Christy's doing. Yes.

BETH RICHARD: Well, one of the reasons I brought that pamphlet is because-- or that picture is because we are a nameless, faceless community to these people. They don't know who we are. They don't know what our lives are like at all. And as long as we remain them and not a part of us, not people in their neighborhood then we're belittled in a lot of ways in their eyes. And so showing them the community, and showing them our activism-- maybe activism isn't the right word. But our participation in everyday community, I mean, brings it home to them that, yes, we are their constituents. We're not just a bunch of people up there making trouble.

SARAH Well, that's a point that I've been hammering now for years. And that is it's much harder to vote against us if

DEPALMA: they see us as actual people.

BETH RICHARD: Right.

SARAH If you a nameless, and faceless, and you're just a thing it's easy to approve legislation that would hurt people.

DEPALMA: But if they see you as an actual human being, if they've met some people it makes it much, much harder to say no.

[INTERPOSING VOICES]

VANESSA Once they know you it's harder to hate you.

EDWARDS-

FOSTER:

SARAH Yeah, that's why I think your education approach in Washington makes perfect sense.

DEPALMA:

BETH RICHARD: And leaving the picture in their offices more than-- the temporary aspect of somebody walking in walking out, of sight, out of mind.

SARAH That's right.

DEPALMA:

MONICA Or having one as your family member.

ROBERTS:

BETH RICHARD: Thank you [INAUDIBLE].

SARAH Yes.

DEPALMA:

VANESSA And this actually works not only on a local level but all the way up to a National level.

EDWARDS-

FOSTER:

BETH RICHARD: Absolutely.

VANESSA This is something that people can relate to and that's actually our primary goal, is to actually have the legislators

EDWARDS- see us not as these objects but as human beings. Not only as just folks that they see on television but actual

FOSTER: neighbors, coworkers, taxpayers, because we are. We're already out there in a lot of instances it's just unfortunately it's catch as catch can right now. We don't have enough of the numbers out there of us.

But slowly but surely we're actually getting more and more examples of people that have successful lives. And this is really one of the aspects that they need to learn. But they also need to learn the other side of it, which unfortunately is one side that gets short shrift a lot of the time. And that's the individuals that are out on the street. These are folks that really have no voice and are very, very easy for folks to marginalize.

BETH RICHARD: Well it looks like this person that was just recently murdered may have been a street person. And there is a mounting evidence that she may have been a sex worker as well. And I have to say, I've had some preliminary discussion with the police department and to their credit, the police don't care about that. They just-- it's a murder. And that's a real pleasant surprise because that hasn't been the case in a lot of cities.

VANESSA But this is one of the areas that I guess a lot of the National organizations maybe or I shouldn't say a lot of the

EDWARDS- National organizations, the National Organization kind of tended to overlook a little bit.

FOSTER:

BETH RICHARD: And they wouldn't be on the street if we hadn't ended.

VANESSA Well, this is true.

EDWARDS-

FOSTER:

BETH RICHARD: Or for many people. I mean, I've had people say to me you ought to disown the sex workers or the street kids that are out there. There's not a snowball's chance in hell we're going to do that. They are living examples of what discrimination has done and we should never desert them.

VANESSA This is the end result of the worst case scenario.

EDWARDS-

FOSTER:

MONICA And a lot of times in terms of what I noticed in terms of the remembering our dead lists. A lot of the people that are on that list look too much like myself. I have this-- I have this equation that I usually say. I say [INAUDIBLE] and in terms of saying that jobs are one of the second most-- the second biggest issue in our community. And I said no job, equals no money, equals no transition, equals no. And say jobs are the issue.

SARAH When we took a poll-- when we took a poll in TGAIN to ask the most important issue, jobs were 1, 2, and 3.

DEPALMA:

YOSENIO Yeah.

LEWIS:

VANESSA You took that here on the radio show a couple of years ago--

EDWARDS-

FOSTER:

SARAH A couple of few years ago, and we got the same response. Jobs. Jobs.

DEPALMA:

MONICA Yeah.

ROBERTS:

VANESSA It's about jobs. And ultimately, that does affect every other aspect of people's lives. If you actually have people gainfully employed and to a point to where they can actually put a roof over their head, and a meal in their body, then that really solves at least a good portion of the tragedies that we see out there. What we're seeing unfortunately is far too many people are falling through these cracks.

And because of the fact that they're, I guess, a bit marginalized, the fact is that we don't really address their needs adequately. And it's something that I guess we really need to focus on. We've got actually Ina Schuck sitting in with us. Ina, you want to introduce yourself real quick.

INA SCHUCK: Hello. I don't know how to [INAUDIBLE].

SARAH Just talk in to the mic and make believe there's nobody there.

DEPALMA:

VANESSA Exactly.

EDWARDS-

FOSTER:

INA SCHUCK: Well, actually I am a person of color. I am a trans-gendered person of color. And I have never lobbied. Never actually seriously done any investigative work into the nature of lobbying or the nature of anything like that. It sounds very foreign to me. And I have just some comments or questions about lobbying. And someone said earlier how the transgender community is a nameless, faceless organization, or people entity towards the legislators the Congress, and everything.

But I think for-- especially for people of color that the Congress and the people who are in office passing the laws are the nameless, faceless organization. And they don't know anything about politics. They don't know who's representing them. They don't have time to sit and pore through the paper every day. They don't have time to educate themselves or they feel that they don't have the time to educate themselves about the own issues and exactly why their lives are so disenfranchised.

And from my perspective, the reason I've been so-- how can I say-- ambivalent or apathetic about politics is that I don't know what it is. It just sounds like politics. And as we all know everybody in politics is a crook. And it doesn't matter that the vote doesn't really count. Nobody really cares about anything, anybody anyway. I just want to get through the day to day, just doing my little routine. And hopefully, I don't get beat up and killed at the end of it.

VANESSA Ina, you're singing my song here. I absolutely thought the same thing and I am involved in this now. And all of a sudden, you look at me and I've been lobbying for what? Five years I guess.

FOSTER:

MONICA Yeah, we've been about the same length of time.

ROBERTS:

VANESSA The fact this is something that anybody can do. And yeah, I was giving you the hard push and I apologize for the hard sell. But you will go lobby with us next time aren't you?

FOSTER:

MONICA Especially--

ROBERTS:

VANESSA I'm still pushing.

EDWARDS-

FOSTER:

MONICA She's part of the target--

ROBERTS:

SARAH Yosenio, you want in on this conversation?

DEPALMA:

YOSENIO Just to say that it's important for us to acknowledge what has been said. That for a lot of people of color politics is a non-issue. There is no time to pay attention to it. There is no desire to pay attention to it because when we do it doesn't seem to matter.

SARAH Disgusting.

DEPALMA:

YOSENIO The people in Florida are feeling and the people all over the country. But especially the people in Florida are

LEWIS: feeling that OK, I did what you asked me to do. I did what you told me I should do. I did what I know people 30, 40, 50 years ago fought to ensure I could do and yet it doesn't count.

SARAH Right.

DEPALMA:

YOSENIO And so we have to acknowledge that there is that sense there. There is that sentiment there. And then we have

LEWIS: to say, you're right. You have been treated poorly and this is a way that you can rectify it and I will be there to support you in the rectification. You don't have to do this on your own. If you don't have time to read everything we'll find people who can do that reading and can give you a summary so that you can just go and say what you need to say.

SARAH That's the way we set up our lobby day, Yosenio. People didn't have to do any kind of research at all.

DEPALMA:

BETH RICHARD: That was the legislative packet basically.

SARAH Our legislative packet was designed so that people who had never even thought about doing anything political

DEPALMA: before could simply show up. And the only thing that we ask them to do was to tell their personal stories. And Texas-- to answer some of that.

BETH RICHARD: Yeah.

SARAH Texas is a unique situation. We have citizen legislators here. What I mean is that they don't-- none like the

DEPALMA: people in Congress. Being a legislator in Texas is not a full time job. There are only there I believe five months every two years. They are paid \$7,500 a year, which means for most legislators they lose money while they're there.

BETH RICHARD: A year or a session?

SARAH No, a year.

DEPALMA:

MONICA A year.

ROBERTS:

SARAH A year. Which means for most legislators they lose money while they're doing their jobs because many of them are high priced attorneys that are making \$200, and \$300, and \$400, or \$500 an hour. So for them to go to the legislature they're losing money. And regardless of whether-- of the party, I'll say this for my experience at least in Texas. Is that you do have some legislators that are total jerks. But for the most part, most of these people are genuinely trying to do their job the best they think they know how to do it.

They work very, very long hours and as they get closer to this session they'll be putting in 14 and 15 hour days. Many of the legislators end up sleeping in their offices so they can be back in session the next day. I mean, they really do work their tails off. And it is true that the media has put it out a perception that politics equals dishonesty. And sure, you get a high profile-- a couple of high profile politicians it taints everybody else.

But the truth of the matter is that at least here in Texas, that's not the case. They work really hard.

MONICA And especially in this area, we've had the traditions of having a Mickey Leland.

ROBERTS:

SARAH Yeah. They have very-- they have-- most of their staff is volunteer for the most part. And if there are paid staff,

DEPALMA: they get paid next to nothing. And our experience has been when we go to the legislature that even if they disagree with us they will hear us out because they think that's their jobs. And I don't know if that's true everywhere. But here in Texas in that respect, I think we're fairly lucky because legislators will hear us and they do remember us.

This time when we went we had a lot of people say, oh, we remember you from being here two years ago. So they knew who we were and the consistency of our going time, after time, after time just reinforces that. And I'm glad to hear what you said because that's exactly the point of what we tried to do with our lobby day. Which was you don't have to know diddly squat about politics. Turn up, we'll teach you everything you need to do that.

MONICA Exactly.

ROBERTS:

SARAH Yeah.

DEPALMA:

BETH RICHARD: She's probably been hearing this before.

[LAUGHTER]

INA SCHUCK: Well, this is encouraging but speaking from my own experiences very easy never to hear about such a thing as a lobby day, or lobbying, or anything. It's very easy to remain ignorant and to be ignorant of what happens. Who actually makes the laws. Who actually-- what actually goes into changing the laws. And when I hear-- I hear things like, oh, you have to go every year and get a few people and then you get a few more people. And then hopefully, maybe you'll eventually get it passed. And it just sounds like, oh, that sounds like so much work. It sounds like it takes up so much time.

SARAH It is. But it's mostly work for the leadership. It's not for necessarily for you all. That's the one thing that I think Vanessa and I have talked about a lot. And that is that we try very hard not to take the whole community and make it sound like this is such difficult work. For me, and for Vanessa, and for the few other people that live and breathe this stuff. I mean, this is natural to us as getting up in the morning.

But I completely understand that people don't know it. I actually had to conduct an online session this last time to teach people how their Texas legislature work because I kept getting emails from people saying, do I have a representative. I mean, literally. Do I have a representative? What does the Senator do? So I had to hold an online session to teach people what a Texas government did and how it affected them. And I don't mind doing that.

And what we're talking about is that with the people who come to one lobby day. This is my biggest hope and Yosenio I think we'll probably tell you the same thing. My biggest hope is that someone will come to a lobby day and they'll go back home to their friends and say, you missed it. This was empowering. This was fun. This was easy and you should go next time. And that's really all we're asking from people. And I think we're getting that.

VANESSA [INAUDIBLE] believe me. I took the same approach as you to politics. All of my life. In fact, my family. Everybody in my family completely eschewed politics, hated politicians, that's what I grew up with. And I always grew up with the sense that I could never affect anything. Just write them all off. They're all plastic people. They're not real. They're never going to do anything for you. Why bother. But the fact is that this actually does make a difference. It's just it doesn't make a difference overnight. It's one brick--

SARAH That's the frustrations.

DEPALMA:

VANESSA And eventually after say 40 years, for instance like the NAACP or 17 years as it took the transgender community up in Minnesota. You keep at it and you do your little part, year in year out. You stay persistent with it. And through the perseverance eventually start making these gains. And then you can look back on this and say I had a part of that. I actually--

SARAH And boy have we come a long way.

DEPALMA:

YOSENIO In the meantime though, in between the lobbying, I think it's important to do the outreach that you want to do to the particular communities that you want to attract. It's important to go where the communities are.

SARAH Yes.

DEPALMA:

YOSENIO If you want for instance, if you want people to know about their legislators don't just send them something in the mail. Find out what events are happening in the community and go there. Have a table there. Have a booth there. Ask if you can speak at a group that's having a meeting. And do a public forum about how your legislature works so that people feel number 1, you're coming to them. They don't have to come to you.

Number 2, you're coming to them with information that will be useful to them. And you're coming to them months before the actual lobby day. So they can get to know you. They can see you. They become-- as we are saying, we become familiar to the legislators. We then have to become familiar to the constituency that we want to bring to the legislators. The constituency needs to know that we are going to be consistent with them as well. We are going to show up to their events. We are going to speak in a language they can understand and which they will invest in.

And again, it's all about the investment. If we give them something so that they feel like they can take ownership of it then they will. And then we will be able to say, will you come to DC with us. Will you come to Austin with us. Will you come wherever with us. And they will say, absolutely. I've seen you here before. You've done for me. You've come to where I am. You have valued what is important to me. So of course, I can help you.

SARAH The thing about going-- about coming to Austin, or Washington, or wherever, my experience has been that
DEPALMA: people who have always had this idea that government is for somebody else and it's not for them get an eye-- get an education first class.

VANESSA Yes.

EDWARDS-
FOSTER:

SARAH It's really contrary to that myth that the media has put out there. Government generally does work for us. It
DEPALMA: doesn't always work the way we want it to work, and it doesn't work as fast as we would like it to. But Vanessa alluded to something which is-- something I've said on the air now for years and years, and that is that my feeling about being an activist is this. My job in my lifetime is to put down a good row of bricks that the next generation can come by and build on. And one day we've got a house.

And I think that so far we've done a pretty good job of that. I think we can now-- and we can-- we've been at this now for 10 or 11 years. I think we can look at it and say, we put down a pretty good row of bricks. And when we look at where we started 10 years ago, where we are now is light years. If you had asked me 10 years ago would we be at this point now. I would have said, not a chance in hell. But it's turned out our growth has been much faster. But it just doesn't-- because 10 years occurs day by day by day. You don't really feel that until you get to the point where you can look back at it.

VANESSA You don't measure the success day by day by day, though. You measure it by what you've done over the course of the year or over the years.

FOSTER:

SARAH That's right.

DEPALMA:

VANESSA And that's how you actually notice the progress that you've made.

EDWARDS-
FOSTER:

SARAH And the thing that I would say is the next time there's a lobby day go ahead and go. I mean, you don't have to-- if you're not educated about politics don't worry about that. It's really not that important. What is important is that you have a sense that you want things to go well for you. And you have the right to ask for the government to help you with that.

VANESSA And you can do this.

EDWARDS-

FOSTER:

SARAH You sure can.

DEPALMA:

VANESSA May 13 through May 16 in Washington DC.

EDWARDS-

FOSTER:

YOSENIO There you go.

LEWIS:

VANESSA The National Transgender Advocacy Coalition. You get to meet Yosenio in person.

EDWARDS-

FOSTER:

YOSENIO And that is a joy, believe me.

LEWIS:

VANESSA Yes.

EDWARDS-

FOSTER:

MONICA Yes, it is.

ROBERTS:

VANESSA He's a sweet guy. He really is. He has the patience of Job.

EDWARDS-

FOSTER:

SARAH I've heard so many good things about you, Yosenio. I'm glad to finally get to talk to you, even if it's just on the phone.

[LAUGHTER]

YOSENIO Thank you.

LEWIS:

VANESSA Well, I guess we need to kind of wrap this up. Yosenio, thank you for joining us this evening. I do appreciate your patience being on hold for as long as you were. I had no idea. I didn't mean to kind of cut you off and leave you speechless so to speak for so long. And I also want to thank my guests Monica Roberts, and Sarah DePalma, and Beth Richard, wherever Beth is. And also Ina Schuck, and Melissa Wright.

And one more time, the National Transgender Advocacy Coalition. The website addresses www.ntac.org. You can go to that and get all the information on the National lobby days. Once again May 13 through May 16. And you can also contact us here locally. Just go ahead and call the station and they'll give you my email address. And we will get you all hooked up. We're looking for a lot of folks out there.

SARAH Just remember when decorum becomes repression, the only dignity free people have is to speak out.

DEPALMA:

VANESSA Yes, loudly.

EDWARDS-

FOSTER:

SARAH Yes.

DEPALMA:

JIMMY CARPER: Thank you. And thanks for being here. I'll see one of you next month at least.

SARAH Yup, I'll be here next month.

DEPALMA:

VANESSA OK. And I'll be here in May.

EDWARDS-

FOSTER:

JIMMY CARPER: And now a little something about a show of interest and a little piece of music. And then the *After Hours News and Views*.

[MUSIC PLAYING]

[MUSIC PLAYING]

JD DOYLE: These songs are part of our culture, which is celebrated on Queer Music Heritage, a part of Lesbian and Gay Voices on the fourth Monday of every month at 9:00 PM hosted by JD Doyle. I play a little bit of everything and mostly I just don't think the music of our past should be forgotten. And I slip in songs from the present as well. It's all about us.

[MUSIC PLAYING]