

Oral History Transcript

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Annika Olsen: The Internet told me you're recording?

Ellie Cook: The Internet was right, hopefully. I have trust issues, but we'll hope! I also lost my voice this weekend.

Katie Meeker: Okay, so just getting started: today is October 28, 2024, at 6:11 P.M. And we are having our meeting for the Honors 300 Ethnic Studies interview. So, Annika, are you ready to start?

Annika: Yes, ma'am.

00:00:36

Katie: Okay. So just kind of getting the ball rolling. Could you introduce yourself? And kind of give us a brief overview of how you've gotten involved in public policy?

Annika: Yeah. So, my name is Annika Olsen. I, well, I'm a Poly Sci major, so that's kind of my first "involved in public policy." I've worked on a number of campaigns in the Sacramento area, and I'm heavily involved in a group called the National Women's Political Caucus, the Sacramento Chapter. And through Sac State where I go to school I was able to participate in the SAC semester program, which put me in a legislative office for a semester, so about 15 weeks, and we got hands-on experience with policy and with advocacy and what working in a legislative office looks like. From there, I was able to get my hands on a bill and work with that piece of policy throughout my time there. But that is a very brief overview of my involvement in public policy.

00:01:49

Katie: Okay. Perfect. So, kind of backtracking a little bit, just for you as a student and an individual, what are some areas of public policy that affect you personally that have kind of gotten you involved a little bit more, not even necessarily in what you've gotten involved with, but just you as a person, What are some things that affect you?

Annika: Yeah, I mean, my [Poly] Sci answer is all policy affects me. But, you know. Growing up, my mom was an immigration attorney. So, I grew up a lot with a very hands-on upbringing, growing up in

San Diego and having an immigration attorney mom. I heard a lot about immigration policy, especially following the 2016 election. I watched my mom's job get a lot more stressful. And you know, coming into high school at the same time, it was kind of perfect, like this is where I start learning about the world. So that's a very indirect, direct way that policy affects me. And then, you know, just as a woman, recent Supreme Court decisions have affected a lot of things that, you know, California is a sanctuary state, but, you know, outside of that, where reproductive freedom can be accessed and, you know, what the implications are for other pieces of reproductive care and women's healthcare and women's rights, those all personally affect me. And then as a gay woman, you know, there's a lot of pieces of policy that directly affect me. Right now, there's a constitutional amendment on the ballot to legalize gay marriage in California and trying to get it into our Constitution. There's questions about Supreme Court rulings. You know, there's a lot of pieces of policy that directly affect my life as you know. And student, too, as a student, you know, you got the whole student loan things with Biden. So, there's a lot of pieces that directly affect me or have the potential to directly affect me.

00:03:50

Ellie: Speaking of being a student, you go to Sac State. Did any of your campaign or lobbying work impacts the CSU system and if so, how?

Katie: Specifically, like the campaign work and lobbying, we'll get to the housing bill.

Annika: Well, the campaign work specifically, not really. So, the two campaigns that I was directly involved as a team member on, one was for district attorney race, so Alana Matthews. She did not win, so you know, maybe there could have been some implications if she had won, but she didn't, so not really. And then the other one was for the Sacramento Municipal Utility District. So, the SMUD Board race, and she did win, but that district wasn't in SAC state, like SAC State wasn't in that district. So, neither of them really directly affected SAC State campaign wise.

00:04:52

Katie: What about some of your lobbying work? I know that you've worked with some women that are part of maybe the school board, stuff like that, some of the NWPC endorsements. How do you think that electing those women to different education boards or just even stuff as broad as mayors, governors, stuff like that, how is that inadvertently affecting the CSUs?

Annika: Well, women make up 50 to 51 percent of the population, and, you know, if you don't have women in positions of power to be able to provide perspective to things, then you know, you're missing out on half of the population's perspective. And obviously not every woman is the same, and not every woman has the same perspective, but there's a certain point of view that we get from diversity. The diversity of opinions means we get more opinions, which means we have better ideas, typically. So, it helps to diversify opinions, and it helps to provide role models. For students, electing women into office,

especially people who don't typically get to be in office, so women of color, queer women, women from lower socioeconomic backgrounds. It really, it shows students and other women and other people that, like, look, you can do this. This isn't just like an old white man game, like, you can run for office, and you can win. And so, you know, people get elected to The Board of Trustees for community colleges. The Sacramento mayor's race is going to affect SAC state. You know, even the SMUD board, like the utilities that SAC State uses, right? Like everything affects everything in politics. So, you know, the more women we have in power, the more it diversifies the voices that we hear, and it diversifies the input and opinions we get. In all of our systems and in our CSU systems and in the state legislature, it affects, you know, how women legislate or how people legislate the CSUs and if you don't have a female perspective, you don't have people I mean, of course, there are male allies that would stand up for Title nine, but men don't typically think about, you know, taxes on tampons or having access to tampons in bathrooms. That's not something they would need to think about. Why would they? You have women in these offices that can say, "Hey, look, the CSUs need this." It's very important that we have people who are willing to advocate for women and be able to think about and understand the issues that women are bringing up because it's very easy for women lobbyists to come in and be like, "Hey, we need this," and a man goes, "Yeah, but do you really?" And it's like, "I'm a woman. I'm telling you I need this." And the men go, "we don't have the money for that." Whereas, you have a woman who hears you and goes, "Hey, I went through that same thing. That is a real problem, or I know someone who went through that," you know, I've gotten on my soapbox. I love policy. But that's kind of that. In a nutshell in a very roundabout way.

Ellie: But it's an amazing point that diversity, I mean, you can't go wrong with it, really. Right?

00:08:04

Katie: So, why is it that you switch from this campaign work? I know that you're still involved in lobbying things, but you are planning on kind of leaving that field, too, to kind of just primarily work in legislation. What's caused you to kind of go towards that direction?

Annika: Just, you know, my personality as who I am as a person. I think in a non-derogatory way, there's a very specific person who works in lobbying and works in campaigns. And it's just not for me. I personally hate canvassing. I don't like knocking on people's doors and saying, "Hey, have you heard about this person?" That's not for me. I've tried it. And I didn't love it. I like policy. I like working on tangible pieces of legislation that I can watch go into effect. That's my preferred area. There's no real reason other than my personality just works better behind the scenes on individual pieces of legislation where I can watch, you know, tangible change happen and advocate for tangible things that I want or think that other people need or want, rather than, you know, getting those people elected into office, both positions are important at different stages. I just happen to like that stage a lot better.

00:09:24

Ellie: It's important to choose things that match with your skill set. So, it sounds like you're doing a really good job of that. How do you manage your time spent on political involvement while also being a full-time student? It sounds like you're very busy.

Annika: Not well! [laughter] No, it's a work in progress. It's a constant work in progress. I mean, it's just flexibility on everybody's parts, my part, my school's part, my boss's part. When I first started the semester, I was still working in the Capitol. So like, I would go to class in the morning from nine to like one, and then I would go change in my car into my suit and blazer and drive on over to the Capitol and go hammer home some policy for 4 hours, and then come home and do homework. So, it really depends. I mean, a lot of when I worked in campaign work and lobbying, a lot of that happened on weekends because that's when people are home. A lot of events happen in evenings because that's when people are home, so that's a really easy thing for, you know, a student to manage. It is like, you know, I am a student nine to five when people are working, and then afterwards I go, and I do campaign work. So, it was a little easier doing campaign work and lobbying, but, you know, policy wise, again, it's just flexibility on my part, flexibility on my employer's part and just, you know, making it happen.

Ellie: Making it happen. I love that.

00:10:57

Katie: All right. So, I think we're going to start talking about the housing bill now. So going into that. So, if you could just, like, describe what the housing bill was and what it aimed to accomplish in just like a brief overview.

Annika: Yeah, I'm going to keep this as brief as possible because housing and tax credit law is a little complicated. But essentially, what the bill was, AB 2005, was an expansion of a previous set of bills that opened up the low-income housing tax credit, which is a tax credit for developers when they are developing housing. They will get a break on their taxes if they develop a certain number of the units as low income or affordable housing. So, it would open up this tax credit to the CSUs. So, these tax credits are very narrow, and this would allow the CSUs to apply for the tax credit to build affordable housing for the staff and faculty. That's a very broad overview. I can get more in detail if you want, but you said a brief overview, so I will stay brief.

00:11:58

Ellie: Okay, we have a list of questions. What specific groups of people does this housing bill aim to support?

Annika: Very broadly staff and faculty, more specifically, low income staff and faculty for the CSUs. There are, according to studies done by the CSUs and numbers that we were given, approximately 9,000 staff across the 23 campuses would be eligible to live in these homes. These are staff, like we all know, California is very expensive. These are staff that may have to leave California and go get a teaching job

elsewhere. We would lose very qualified staff because they can't afford to live in Los Angeles, Sacramento, San Diego. Very expensive places to live, San Francisco. You know, you lose all of these talented staff and faculty because they can't afford to live there. And it's like if we want the CSUs to be competitive, you know, we have to provide our faculty a place to live. So, essentially low-income staff and faculty.

00:13:02

Katie: Are there specific groups that we see that make up the majority of this low-income staff and faculty? So maybe specific races, gender, anything like that that kind of stands out just from your knowledge as a poli sci major history major of just who you know makes up the majority of that.

Annika: Well, I'm going to preface all of this, but I don't have any specific numbers or stats on me. I'm just going to go off of what I know from other classes as a history and political science major. But typically, we see people of color, immigrant families as lower income. Those are typically the families that are in that area. And you know, the tax credits are based on the area median income, the AMI, which is the midpoint of income distribution in a certain geographic area. And if you look at the distribution of racial and ethnic minorities that live in, let's say Compton versus Beverly Hills. You see a wide disparity, and socially, we know that minorities tend to be those that fall under the socially disadvantaged categories, and this helps us to rewrite, not necessarily rewrite that narrative, but help support them in getting past secondary education and into a field, breaking into a field, because if you can't afford to live where you want to teach, you can't teach there or you're commuting for 2 hours, you know, it helps people who are socially disadvantaged, you know, regardless of their racial and ethnic minority, but, you know, those that are socially disadvantaged tend to be racial and ethnic minorities. It helps them get a foot in the door better than, you know, people that are privileged and have the ability to live in San Francisco, by their own means on a professor's salary, which is not enough to live in places like San Francisco and Los Angeles and San Diego. Very roundabout answer.

00:15:13

Ellie: You said housing bills and all that stuff. It's very complicated. What were some of the difficulties that you ran into when you were working on this bill?

Annika: Politically, a lot of it was explaining the necessity. So, a lot of the pushback that we got was like, Well, why do we need to open this? Like, if we open up tax credits, then it just becomes a free for all. The point of having specialized tax credits is that not everyone can access it, and it encourages people to do this. And so just convincing people that, you know, faculty need housing. And one of the arguments that we got when we were talking to our opposition was like, "well, why not just pay faculty more?" And it's like, you know what? Two things can coexist. You can pay faculty more and have affordable housing for them. They're not mutually exclusive. So that was a lot of the opposition of just like, "well, why do we

need this?” And the previous bills that I referred to at the very beginning opened up the tax credit to K through 12 schools and community college schools. And the community college districts haven't utilized the tax credit. And that was another argument that was like, “Well, they might just not use them, you open it up and then they don't use them, and then what's the point of opening it up?” But if you look at the CSUs and the attractiveness of working for the CSU, that was a bit of an easier sell of like, look, people want to teach at the CSU, you just kind of got to make it easy for them. So convincing people that this was actually a necessity, and this does solve a problem and that there's a benefit to opening up this tax credit to people who need it quite frankly.

00:17:08

Katie: So, you said that it's more just applying for this tax credit, and people don't necessarily have to use it. What are some ways that students specifically, at least, like, speculative that you could think that students could get involved in furthering this bill's agenda to actually start implementing these housing policies and being able to create this tangible housing for faculty and staff beyond just making the bill?

Annika: So, I think that's a bit more of a complicated question than you realize. The first step is to get students politically involved with things going on and things that don't necessarily directly affect them. And that's hard to do, even for Poli Sci majors, we don't, as humans, typically care about things outside of our little bubble, especially not politically, we do what we're told by our parties. That's just a statistical phenomenon. We do what we're told by our parties. And you know, I don't remember the last time I heard a politician directly speak about faculty at a college or, you know, CSU faculty specifically, except for when we were having the CFA strike. You know? That was a big thing. A lot of students got involved in that. But to answer your question of how to get them involved, just encouraging the CSU to apply, encouraging their campuses, there are ways that you can, like, suggestion boxes for your president? See, I don't even know. I'm not that involved with my campus politics, but I'm sure there are ways you can contact your president, your dean of Faculty Affairs, CFA. You can talk to CFA and just be like, “Hey, you know, this bill has passed. You can apply. Let's build housing.” I'm sure CFA would love to hear that. They were supporters of our bill. They signed on in support. If I remember correctly, don't quote me on that one. Don't write that one down. But you know, all of the CSUs did write in letters of support for this bill. So, they're all aware. All of the campuses are aware they just now have to apply. So, it's an administrative decision, which makes it a little more difficult for students to get directly involved. I don't think this is something students should write signs and go stop traffic for. But I think it's definitely something that, you know, you can let your campus know just like, “Hey, you can build housing for your staff and faculty, and they can live here and do good things for your school, and you can keep your cool teachers, you know?”

Ellie: Yeah, we just have to get people to utilize the things that are provided for them. It sounds like. To oversimplify.

Annika: Yeah. Nearly every campus has channels and like suggestion boxes, essentially. I couldn't tell you how to access SAC states because most people don't use them, but I'm sure they do, and I'm sure if people really cared, they could find them and use them.

00:20:33

Katie: All right. Awesome. With this idea that students were able to get this housing built and all that type of stuff, let's say 20 years down the line, what impact do you personally hope that this bill will have had? Again, speculative, what you hope happens.

Ellie: Dream big.

Annika: I mean, I hope they build housing, and that faculty has a place to live. I mean, if you want a diverse faculty, which the CSU brags, we're the eighth most diverse employer, or some statistic or no, eighth highest producer of first-generation upper level, something. I looked up a lot of stats for this bill. But we provide opportunities for a lot of diverse groups. And, if we don't provide housing for historically socially disadvantaged groups or just socially disadvantaged groups, then you lack perspective in your faculty. If you only allow privileged people who typically tend to be white and male and over the age of 45, Then you're not really opening the door for a bunch of diverse perspectives. But providing opportunities for faculty who come from different backgrounds or are still paying off student loans. It allows for the CSUs to become a more attractive place for professors to go, and it allows for our colleges to be better, and it allows for a better educated set of students who graduate, and it allows for more broader perspectives to be taught and a more educated graduating class who then go out into the world with a more educated and informed mindset, when you get taught by people with different perspectives, you learn different things.

Ellie: Yeah, it really comes back to that diversity, the need for diversity in politics.

00:22:48

Katie: Okay. And one thing, just I'm sure you saw the thing flash across your screen, where we may have to do two separate Zoom meetings, which means two different recordings. So, when one winds up cutting off. That's why. So now, going into the question because I know that you worked on a lot of bills with Assembly Member Ward. So just an overview, what are some other bills that you worked on that were significant? Not necessarily maybe even to the CSUs, but just ones that stand out that were the significant ones that you think you worked on.

Annika: Worked on as helped with or worked on as staffed?

Katie: Let's go specifically ones that you like, well, whichever ones do you think you made an impact as a student within the SAC Semester Program, anything that you think that you had a big impact on. And that can be whatever you think it is.

Annika: Mm hm. The other bill that I worked on was AB 2832, which essentially allowed the governor's office - this one is a little more technical than the Housing Bill - but it allowed the governor's office of business and economics to conduct their own financial interactions when acting abroad. So typically what the law says - said previously - was that if they wanted to conduct any financial transactions outside of the United States, they had to use a third party bank, which means that if they wanted to do trade shows or coordinate business meetings with California small businesses, which is typically what they do overseas, they would have to get a third party bank to pay their employees working overseas. Which is ridiculously inconvenient, takes forever and is really complicated. So essentially what this bill allowed was for the Governor's Office of Business and Economics. To conduct their own financial dealings with international entities without having to go through third party banks and just be paid directly from the governor's office. That one is a little more difficult to pinpoint and impact on the CSUs and students in general. But I think we can all agree that advancing small businesses in California is good for everyone. It helps the economy; it helps provide options. It increases competition, which again, is good for the economy. And just it allows for more economic and business opportunities for people in California. Once they graduate, it provides new avenues. And it's just another tool in the governor's office's tool belt when they are expanding California's reach across the globe as the fourth largest economy in the world. You know, we have a pretty far reach, and this kind of expanded that. Did you want other bills or?

00:25:45

Katie: Well, obviously, I know some of the different stuff. I would love for you to talk about Ward's forced outing bill.

Annika: [Deep sigh] Oh 1955. Okay. So essentially what this bill did was it said that schools could not require - and schools being K through 12, I believe - could not require teachers to forcibly out students. There were some school districts in Chico, for example, one of them was in Chico, where they had policies that said if a student were to ask a teacher to refer to them by a different name, different pronouns, asked to use a different bathroom that didn't assign or aligned with their gender at birth. The teacher was required to inform the parents, just required outright, and could face discipline for that. And all this bill says is that you cannot require it. Teachers still may, they still may, the school districts simply cannot require that they do, and they cannot face punishment if they choose not to. So, it's still up to teacher discretion. My involvement with this was really just being in the office and helping with office tasks, running folders around, helping to draft some talking points, helping with press conferences, handling the many unhappy phone calls we received [nervous laughter], helping show people who were

supporting the bill. But it was fairly popular, so it was all hands-on deck for a while. And, you know, that's one that really directly affects schools. I wouldn't say the CSUs immediately, but that pretty heavily affects schools.

Katie: And it affects the mental health of students going into the CSUs and their ability to afford the tuition if students are getting cut off by parents.

Ellie: And the anxiety.

Annika: It also impacts the prejudice. It impacts the aspect of it a lot where you know, the more different we were talking about this earlier, the more perspective people are exposed to the more tolerant they become. And if you are going to school in an elementary school where they teach you that this is so wrong that we need to inform your parents immediately, it's going to lead to essentially a school wide version of, "Don't ask, don't tell." And people don't get a safe space to be who they are in school doesn't become a safe space, homes aren't a safe space, then where do students have as a safe space, and then people take these prejudices into university and then you run into issues of, you know, bullying and harassment. As a college student now where you know, things can get pretty extreme and then police get involved and things get really bad for everybody. So, the earlier we can teach tolerance and empathy towards others, the better. Again, this prevents "Don't Ask, Don't Tell," sort of policy.

Ellie: And then all the mental can that come with that? I mean, it's already hard to be closeted. To add in the anxiety of, will asking for this thing that will make me more comfortable leads to being forced out of the closet.

Annika: Mm hmm.

Katie: Okay. I think really quickly, we're going to end this meeting and then start another one just so we can have those two different recordings. So, five seconds.

Katie: Okay. I think it's recording. Did you get your little notification?

Annika: I sure did.

00:00:10

Katie: Okay. Perfect. So how did Ward's other bills impact the passing of your housing bill? I know there were some controversial ones.

Annika: Mine specifically, not too bad. Mine fared pretty well. There were some others that did not. For example, we had a bill that basically said on transit buses - you know how on school buses, you have little stop signs that come out? It basically said on transportation buses, you can have those little stop signs. That one got grilled for an hour and a half on whether or not we actually need those in retaliation. Anyways, mine was not too bad. 1955 kind of made Republicans very upset with our office and not a huge fan of bills that we passed, but my bill actually got a Republican vote in the Senate. So, a Republican supported my bill against the Republican Caucus recommendation. So, you know.

Ellie: That's good.

Annika: It fared well. So, I would say there was, you know, minimal effect, but, you know, our office. We were not the Republicans' favorite office for that session.

00:01:45

Katie: Okay. All right. So, kind of just some questions, wrapping up your work on those housing bills and just bills in general. So are you partaking in any political activism currently? I know that you've already ended your session with Assembly Member Ward's Office, so what are you kind of doing right now?

Annika: Well, my little Poli Sci answer is, we're always partaking in political activism. Everything we do is a political statement. You know, especially as a queer person, everything is a political statement. But currently, I still work with the National Women's Political Caucus, and there's a lot of work going down. You know, we have a woman running for mayor in Sacramento, and we're all very excited about that. We have a lot of women challengers for Republican seats for Assembly and Senate. There's a lot going on. I mean, we're two weeks out from an election. So, I'm still involved with them, working with campaigns, trying to get them money, trying to get them volunteers, ultimately trying to get them votes. So still involved in that way. Less policy, more lobbying, more campaigns, but, you know, very active in that regard.

Ellie: It's a very important time of year.

00:03:29

Katie: All right. So, are you going back to work in the Capitol?

Annika: If someone will hire me, yes, one can only hope that I apply for a job, I interview, and I get it. But if all goes according to plan, I would like to. I think that it's a good way to make a positive impact on this state that I love very much. California forever. I think that, you know, I care very much about the issues that go on here. There's a lot of good work that gets done here. There's a lot of very real questions that get tackled here. Questions not only about LGBTQ issues and women's rights issues, but questions about AI and the film industry and how that impacts all of us public safety questions. You know, California is a leader for a lot of states. Policy that we do here, other states watch us and then copy what we do. So, it's very exciting to have had a chance to look at this policy that can become inspiration for other states. 1955 has already been copied in a couple of other states now. So, the rest of the United States and a lot of the world is watching what California does, and it's very exciting to be able to hopefully make a positive impact policy wise on my friends and family who live here, but also, you know, hopefully, set an example for the rest of the world.

00:05:02

Ellie: And going along with that, are there any other areas of policy that you'd like to work on that you haven't gotten the opportunity to yet?

Annika: Judiciary issues. So, the California legislature is divided into a bunch of committees, and, you know, I enjoyed my committee assignments, transportation, human services, and all that. But I enjoy legal questions. I would like to maybe become an attorney at some point in the future. So being able to work hands-on with California law, like “law law,” in a way that, you know, checking how things balance out with the California Constitution would be very interesting, and balance out with the United States Constitution would be very interesting. So just kind of those more abstract areas, but applying them in a very concrete sense to the state of California, I think would be a lot of fun for the nerd that I am.

00:6:01

Katie: Perfect. Are there any specific policy issues that you'd like to see some bills made that you haven't worked with yet?

Annika: Well, I mean, there's work to be done in every area, not to sound like a politician, but, you know, there's always work to be done. You know, I think there are some protections that could be made for women in the workplace. There are some fail safes we could have for single mothers, especially now that the rest of the country or a lot of the country is trying to limit access to contraceptives. And, pregnancy planning access and Planned Parenthood is coming under threat, I think that now we need to look at ways that we can protect mothers in the workplace, because if we're going to encourage people to be mothers, we must protect them in the workplace and make it so that they can participate because when we have more people participating in the economy, we have a stronger economy. I think looking at ways that we can tackle the housing crisis would be very good. I know a lot of people are doing that, but, you know, just the ability to help people, nobody really wants to be homeless. And so, you know, helping find humane ways that we can help these people get into homes, manage addiction, and just, you know, live lives as their best selves. I think questions about AI in the film industry are very interesting to me. I know that's a completely different topic. But the AI film industry is very interesting and very controversial. There was a bill this last session that said that if you wanted to use a deceased person's likeness, you had to get their families permission, and a lot of film industries didn't like that. But the selling point for the bill was, we don't want Elvis out there selling lunch boxes. I think they have a point, and I think those are very interesting questions that could be broached, and I think those are all broad specific policy areas.

00:08:20

Katie: So, going along that same vein, do you have any political aspirations of your own? You said, maybe like some attorney work, but-

Ellie: That's a big question.

Annika: Yeah. I'm being recorded, so I make no promises. I don't know. I personally, don't like the amount of personal attacks politicians get. I feel like it gets very personal. People take politics very seriously. And, you know, uh, watching what my boss went through when he did 1955. He didn't personally field a lot of the phone calls, but you know, some of the threats that we got over the phone were pretty aggressive and pretty tangible. We had the FBI call our office one day because there were some pretty tangible threats made against my boss. Nothing ever happened, thankfully, but, you know, there was a period of time where he was escorted by sergeants everywhere because we were concerned about his safety. It got very big and people feel very strongly about issues, which, it's good that they're engaging in the political system, as is their right, as is their legal constitutional right, but they have no constitutional right to make threats against others. And I just think that currently we're in a very very tense political situation, and if the question were, do I want to run tomorrow or next election, the answer would be absolutely not. Thank you for the offer. But, you know, a few years down the line when I've got some life behind me, and I have some real-life experience, and hopefully, things calm down and get better. You know, I'm not permanently shutting any doors, but I also don't want to think that far ahead. Quite frankly, that's scary. I just want to do my little job, make my little difference in my corner of the world, and then, you know, we'll see where life takes me.

00:10:17

Ellie: Yeah, it sounds like you're getting some really awesome real life experience like you said, wherever it takes you, which ties into our next question, which is, how has your political involvement helped shape you as a person? Just you personally, has it helped your confidence?

Katie: Are there any lessons?

Ellie: Yeah. Just as broad as you want to take it.

Annika: In a very cynical sense, people are crazy. People are really crazy and will believe anything that you tell them. In a more positive sense, people care. A lot of people really care and really engage with a lot of issues. It was really nice to be in the capital, and you know, you hear about, like, money runs politics, money runs politics. At the state level, that's not what I saw. That was not my experience. It was a very even listening to everybody's opinions and everybody's suggestions and everybody's thoughts and ideas and taking it in and saying, okay, I hear you, let me factor that into what we're doing. Let me see how this fits in. And the willingness to talk to people was very nice. As an individual, I learned that I really care about foster care issues. I didn't know that I cared about foster care issues. But I really do care. There's a lot of issues with our foster care system. But there's also a lot of solutions, and I think that what we have going is a really good system that just kind of needs a little bit more propping up. It's helped with the confidence a little bit, but it's mostly just, you know, It's made me realize that I like helping people just as a person like that that feels good, that, feeling like I'm making a difference in someone's life

somewhere hopefully in a positive sense, hopefully, is really fulfilling and that this is something I'd like to pursue. And on the whole, it's made me feel a lot more positive about our government and about politics in general, and I know that California has a supermajority, but it's nice to see that there's not that much fighting in the California government, like what you see from the federal government on TV. It has just made me feel a lot, you know, happier about being in California, but, you know, more happy with our government system as a whole.

Ellie: It's a really interesting point that you make too about how everything has solutions. Whether it's one situation is harder than another or you can't get certain people on board, does it give you kind of a sense of hope that there are tangible solutions to these problems that feel so huge?

Annika: Mm hmm. Yeah. Yeah, exactly.

00:13:24

Katie: All right. And kind of going off of that, like type of solutions and stuff like that, as kind of just like a final ending note, how do you recommend that CSU students and just all of the schools get involved with the political nature on their campuses, within their state, all of that different stuff. Kind of like the CSU's as a bubble.

Ellie: Even like a student that's never been involved before and wants to be, like, what's that first step?

Annika: Politics, whether we like it or not, impacts everybody because we all have something that we care about, and politics touches everything and everyone, whether we like it or not, it does. And so, I think again, everybody cares about something, so there's an issue for everybody. I think just being informed is a really good method of getting involved. It's very simple. And everybody has a very limited amount of time and a very limited amount of free time, and I know that most people don't want to dedicate their limited amount of free time to politics, especially seeing how tense and contentious it is right now and how nasty it is. People don't want to dedicate their free time to that, but just understanding what's going on, even if you're not getting involved with it is a really good way of connecting to your country and, you know, finding things that you care about because you know, voting is also a really good, really, really, really good way of being involved and not just in presidential elections, but like down the ballot. It takes research and effort to vote well, but, you know, the people that run your school board are the people teaching your children. They decide what courses are offered. They decide the caps on your classrooms, they decide what money's going where. You know, they decide what kind of lunches get served. Like, there's a lot of things that these people decide and, you know, oftentimes they only get like a few thousand votes. Yeah. It's very small. These people decide a lot of things. And so, I think just understanding what's going on, doing your due diligence when you vote, even if it's every other year, and, you know, biannual elections, just understanding what's going on. And then voting. So staying informed and voting. Those are my two simple ways to get involved. And if you feel so inclined, please go

volunteer for a campaign. I don't care which side of the aisle you're on. Go volunteer for a campaign, get some steps in, meet some people. It's fun. Whether or not you like politics. It's fun.

Ellie: Good advice. Maybe I'll volunteer for a campaign, I like politics. I've never even thought of it.

Katie: And all the things on social media now, you can just reach out to somebody so easily and be like, "Hey, you need me to make a phone call?" and they do.

Annika: Honestly, any candidate's Instagram will have canvassing days and you just show up and they'll give you a bunch of pamphlets and they'll teach you how to use the little app, and you just go knock on doors and say, "Hey, have you voted yet?" and they'll be like, "No. Why?" Then you go, "go vote for this person." And it's a nice way to get out and see your city and talk to folks and, you know, meet other people that are canvassing and learn things about what's going down.

Ellie: Really cool idea. I'm gonna keep that in my brain.

Katie: Well, that is all of our questions. Thank you so much.

Annika: That's it? It's over?

Katie: I hope that one day somebody will see this and be like, "Oh, that's our governor."

Annika: No.

Ellie: President, that's my president.

Katie: Madam President.

Annika: Oh, heavens.

Katie: All right. Well, thank you so much for all of this. This is a great interview.

Annika: My pleasure. Anything else I can do for you?

Katie: No, I think we're all good.

Annika: Sweet. All right, have a good one. Thank you. Bye.