

This is KPTZ 91.9FM in Port Townsend, Washington. I'm Nigel O'Shea bringing you news and commentary from the Jefferson County *Beacon* for Wednesday, October 16, 2024.

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The upcoming presidential election has inspired people who would not normally be politically active in a partisan way to find ways to connect with other voters. Danielle Fodor is an unlikely poster child for knocking on doors and having conversations with strangers. The Irondale resident struggles with social anxiety, but her desire to connect with voters in other states and foster feelings of mutual aid and solidarity won out.

Foder worked with Seed the Vote, a national nonprofit organization with a simple goal of blocking the right and building the left. They work to build the long-term power of multiracial and working-class communities by making it easy for grassroots organizations to absorb thousands of short-term volunteers to have face-to-face conversations at election time. They recruit and train volunteers, fundraise for travel, and provide support staff to their partners on the ground.

Through Seed the Vote, Fodor traveled to Philadelphia, Pennsylvania and Racine, Wisconsin to knock on the doors of swing voters. Fodor says, "When I knock on doors and listen to the people I meet, I know that my community of friends and family in Jefferson County are not struggling alone. From Philadelphia to Irondale to Racine, our stories echo each other's – difficulties with housing, underpaid labor, disability, child- and elder care, food costs, debt, inadequate schools, and addiction. What does it mean to be a member of multi-racial working-class America? While the details vary from place to place and the burdens fall more heavily on some shoulders, we are not as different as we have been led to believe."

In a country plagued by polarization, Fodor believes that it's possible to find connection through having meaningful political conversations with people you disagree with, giving each person the opportunity to share their experiences in a meaningful way. If this work appeals to you, Seed the Vote is still placing volunteers from around the country in swing states to have conversations (by phone and in person). Travel assistance is available if needed. If you're interested in volunteering beyond this election cycle, Movement Voter Project supports grassroots organizations in swing states that work year-round to build progressive movements, hiring people to talk to their neighbors about issues that matter most to them.

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In other election news, rural young voters continue to feel ignored in politics as the presidential election intensifies, according to research this spring from the Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement (or CIRCLE). Described as the least contacted and most undecided demographic by the Rural Youth Voter Fund, their participation in the upcoming presidential elections could be critical in deciding the next four years and beyond. In swing states during the 2022 midterm elections, youth made up 10% to 15% of all votes cast, according to CIRCLE, large enough to change outcomes. "There's this huge opportunity to engage with young people [and] to give them the opportunities to learn more about the system and make their mark," said Michael Chameides, communications director of the Rural Democracy Initiative, which helped to create the Voter Fund.

The Voter Fund supports local youth-led initiatives and brings together leaders interested in civic engagement. Chameides noted the successful initiatives are relationship-focused and allow young people to become leaders and reach their peers. Initiative projects are also dependent and modeled on their local communities and relatability, based in schools and popular events. One organization that's found ways to reach young rural voter is Forward Montana. Through polling, they've noted affordable housing, climate change, inflation, and reproductive rights as paramount. Courtney Smith, director of voter engagement at Forward Montana, said

focusing on change at the local level can increase accessibility and engagement. However, both on the local and national level, youth feel ignored and disillusioned with politics.

However, Smith said Forward Montana has noticed more energy around voting from young people since Biden dropped out, largely because of Harris' younger age and increased relatability. But above a particular candidate, Smith noted young voters care less about party systems and more about issues. She hopes that they will increasingly be treated as persuadable voters who don't identify with a party.

If you're a young voter in Jefferson County, The Nest is having an event on Wednesday, October 23 from 4:30pm to 6:30 pm. At "Who Cares? Showing Up Makes the Difference! A Voter Registration Event for All Ages" young people can register to vote, enjoy free pizza, participate in community dialogue with local politicians to inspire civic engagement. This is a non-partisan event. Thanks to Antioch University for the grant funding making this event possible. Special thanks to Clemente Course at OWL360 for organizing efforts to inspire civic engagement.

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KPTZ 91.9 FM brings you local news at noon and 5 Monday through Friday and at noon on Saturdays, partnering on Wednesday to bring you stories from the *Jefferson County Beacon*. This is Nigel O'Shea. Thanks for listening.