

**Geoff Bennett (GB):** Today is National Voter Registration Day. That's a civic holiday for organizers to encourage and register Americans to participate in elections up and down the ballot.

It comes not just as the 2024 presidential race heats up, but as six states go to the polls this year for major races with broad implications for issues like abortion policy and voting access.

The League of Women Voters is one of the largest nonpartisan on-the-ground organizations signing people up.

Its president is Dr. Deborah Turner, who joins us now to discuss the effort.

Thank you for being with us.

**Dr. Deborah Turner, President, League of Women Voters (DT):** Thank you. and it's great for you to have me. I appreciate it.

(Laughter)

Very excited to be here on this day.

**GB:** And we're excited to have you.

Well, your organization is overseeing lots of events around the country to register voters. And we spoke with a youth mobilizer, Claudia Yoli Ferla of Move Texas. That's a nonpartisan group getting people registered to vote. And she's in San Antonio. Here's what she said.

**Claudia Yoli Ferla, Move Texas:** For us, it's really just bringing fun, making democracy accessible, fun, exciting for young people. We have also been handing out free pizzas on campuses across the state, handing out also popsicle sticks, right, to just get the conversation going, because, often, when we begin that conversation with a young person about, are you registered to vote, we're able to have meaningful conversations about the issues that they most care about.

**GB:** So, how is that effort going, making voting, as she says, fun and accessible?

**DT:** It is going very well. Glad to hear what she had to say.

And one of the key things she said is that engaging the younger voters, because they are one of the groups that are less likely to be registered and who we need to come to the polls, and that lining them up with the reasons to vote and how voting affects their life is how we get them to the polls, because most of us vote because something means something to us.

And that's — and that's what they're doing. And that's exciting to hear. I give them kudos for doing that.

**GB:** Dr. Turner, there is this widely shared view that higher turnout helps Democrats and hurts Republicans. Is that the case? Is there any evidence that turnout is correlated with partisan voting choice?

**DT:** No, really what it turns out is that it depends on where you are who turns out to vote.

But the key is that, when everybody is registered and everybody votes, what will end up how — the results will end up being what the people want. And that has nothing to do whether you're Democrat or Republican.

So, when we register voters, we don't even ask what their party is. We simply say, we want you to vote, we want you to be registered, and we want you to go to the polls and express your feelings, so that your representatives can represent you, your ideas, and your community, regardless of party, regardless of religion, regardless of race, regardless of ethnicity.

**GB:** Our team also spoke with Nora Vinas. She's the deputy executive director of Engage Miami. That's a South Florida nonprofit that works to engage young people in elections. And our producers asked her what issues are motivating young voters. And here's what she said.

**Nora Vinas, Deputy Executive Director, Engage Miami:** I think when you affect anyone in their day-to-day what they can read, where they can go, who they could love, all of that really makes people feel certain rage and confusion about why it's happening. So I think, unfortunately, we have culture wars and these assault on books. And I also think it's a big motivator for young people to pay attention and to care.

**GB:** So what are you hearing from voters about the issues they care most about and what's really engaging them?

**DT:** What we're hearing is that voters are really interested in making sure our democracy stays strong, and, therefore, they're going to the polls to vote for things that shore up our democracy.

They are concerned about education. They are concerned about health care. They're obviously concerned about bodily autonomy. They are concerned about the finances of the country. They are concerned about everything that our elected officials take up. But they have their own opinions, and they want to voice them.

So those are the things that are going to count. And, for young people, one of the other big issues is gun safety in the country. So that's what we're hearing from our voters.

**GB:** Today, we saw Pennsylvania enact automatic voter registration. It's now the 24th state to do this. How does it work? And does it actually boost the number of people who show up on Election Day?

**DT:** Actually, it does.

So, how it works is that when you engage in any governmental agency, for whatever reason, you have the automatic opportunity to register to vote. And one of the things that people will say about voting is, well, I never registered because nobody asked me. And so if you go to an agency where you're — even if you're getting your driver's license, for example, and somebody says, "Have you registered to vote?" it triggers you to say, oh, maybe I haven't, and I can vote.

And so it gives them the opportunity to do it without pain and suffering. And, at the time, they're doing something else, and it becomes a natural activity. We are 100 percent in this fight for automatic voter registration at the League of Women Voters, and we hope it becomes standard across the country.

**GB:** As we mentioned, this is an off-year election year, but there are six states holding elections for governor, state legislature, and for the Supreme Court. How can states close the gap between off-year turnout and presidential election year turnout?

**DT:** I think one of the things is to talk about the issues. What issues are going on in your state that are important enough for you to vote for?

And so gubernatorial vote — races are very, very critical to people, because their governors probably have a lot more power over what's going to happen in their lives than maybe their senator or their congressperson. The other thing is that there are other races that are really important, and we spend a lot of time working with races around school boards, around city councils.

These are all critical to what are making your life better and what you want done in your community. And that's how we try to encourage people to understand. Basically, politics is local. Voting is local. You got to get those local people in there, because they're going to make a difference in your life.

**GB:** Dr. Deborah Turner is president of the League of Women Voters. Thanks for joining us this evening. We appreciate it.

**DT:** Thank you for having me. And make sure you're registered and vote. Thank you.