

Weber Shandwick

Kellogg Conference

Session A

“Addressing Voter Suppression”

Moderator:

**Maya Wiley,
President and Executive Director,
Center for Social Inclusion**

Panelists:

**Judy Browne-Dianis,
Co-director,
Advancement Project;
Genaro Lopez-Rendon,
Director,
Southwest Worker’s Union;
Alvin Warren,
Principal and Executive Vice President,
Blue Stone Strategy Group**

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MAYA WILEY: We're going to get started in a minute. We were giving people time to find the room, which was a little bit of a challenge for me, so I'm glad you all found it. (Laughs.) OK. So thank you all for coming to this panel, which of course will be the most important panel of the entire conference. (Laughter.)

MR. : Mmm hmm.

MS. WILEY: My name is Maya Wiley and I have the tremendous privilege of moderating this panel. I am the president of the Center for Social Inclusion, which does a lot of work on how to create an inclusive society across race by paying attention to communities of color and thinking about the strategies for inclusion. This particular issue, voter suppression, is obviously important for a wide range of reasons.

I thought – one of the things that we do at the center is often try to think about how we reframe the conversation that we have to have. And so I thought we should talk about what we're for. So maybe we should reframe this the democratic participation panel rather than the voter suppression panel, so we can say what we're for rather than what we're against.

But I want to start by introducing this panel. I'm not – these are extremely accomplished, impressive, important leaders and I can't possibly – it'll take us the whole panel if we really talked about all the wonderful and important things they've done. So I hope you will go and check out their bios so you can see how much they have done and what they're contributing. I'm just going to give a few highlights.

Judy Browne-Dianis, who I – she's Judith, but see I've known her for a long time so she's always going to be Judy to me – has been a long-time civil rights lawyer. Judy and I worked together about a hundred years ago at the NAACP Legal Defense Fund when we were only three.

JUDITH BROWNE-DIANIS: (Inaudible.)

MS. WILEY: So – (chuckles) – I speak for myself. And we also both went to Columbia Law School together. So she going to be Judy to me forever. But Judy, in addition to having done a tremendous amount of work, actually, on motor voter law and has been also working on school-based discipline and trying to make sure kids stay in school, she's done a huge amount on housing in New Orleans post-Hurricane Katrina and has been named one of Essence Magazine's 30 women to watch. But Judy, and the Advancement Project in particular, has been doing a huge amount of work on trying to ensure that voters have an opportunity to vote, particularly coming out of Bush v. Gore in Florida. So thank you, Judy, for joining us.

We also have Alvin Warren. And Alvin Warren – the really important thing to know about Alvin is he had three children, and one of them was born in the year of the golden dragon. So that's not in his bio, so I thought I would share that because one of my children was too. So that's extremely important. But Alvin is the principal and executive vice president of Blue Stone Strategy Group. He is a long, long, long time leader, who's been working to support his community Santa Clara Pueblo Tribal member in Santa Clara, New Mexico.

There's so much more that I could say about what he's contributed. He's been a member of tribal leadership – tribal government, actually serving in multiple positions, including lieutenant governor. One of the things that's important to lift up while he's here on this panel, is that he chairs the Democratic Party of New Mexico's Native American Caucus and State Central Committee. You're on the State Central Committee, right, so – and New Mexico being a very important state.

Genaro, OK. Genaro is actually – Genaro Lopez-Rendon, also someone I've known for a long time and hope to know a lot longer, is the director of the Southwest Worker's Union. And Genaro has been – he's from south Texas. I think Genaro will probably talk a lot more about his experience there, but is a long time organizer and has been organizing with Southwest Worker's Union since 1999 – is that right – and has been a leader on environmental justice issues as well as a huge number of issues around electoral participation for Latinos, particularly in south Texas.

And importantly, Southwest Worker's Union, under Genaro's leadership, has been doing a lot of work across the Black Belt south and the southwest on black-brown organizing and alliance building through South by Southwest, which is pretty impressive work and I think pretty groundbreaking. So thank you all for being here. Yeah, I think this is an important panel coming out of the plenary, and I wanted to lift up a couple of things before I ask you all to speak, just to frame the discussion.

You know, I think we've been hearing over the past two days that we're in a time, as a – in this country, of tremendous dislocation. You know, Harry Belafonte talked about the fact that something is dying, and therefore something's also in the process of being reborn. And I think we heard from Ian Haney Lopez today that some of that's also about the changing demographics of this country and the fact that we are becoming a country that Professor Manuel Pastor would say – where we have no majority.

We have no racial majority for the first time in perhaps – well, not the history of the country; we have native peoples here, so – (chuckles) – we can't say that – but certainly the history of the United States as we know it today as a governmental form; and that that dislocation is creating a huge amount of insecurity in people who are white.

And that insecurity being coupled with economic hard times that unfortunately is starting to pit people against each other, often by race-based groups, has created an environment, I think, in which voter suppression becomes one very virulent indicator of that – of that dislocation and the unfortunate way in which people respond to it.

Just to give a couple of statistics, you know, in 2008 – you know, Barbara Arnwine talked about this in the plenary, about how this really is a backlash to the political participation in particular of people of color. And in 2008 the electorate was the most diverse in the history of the nation in terms of actual participation. And black electoral participation increased 5 percent. Latino participation increased 2.7 percent, Asian 2.5 (percent). But these were actually huge numbers in terms of numbers of people. We don't have Native American because we don't collect that data, so that's unfortunate.

But just to say that the mid-term elections, then, we saw actually the greatest resurgence of the white electorate, particularly people over 65, and strengthening the Republican majority. So that's part of that story of what happened in 2008, and then what happened – what started to happen as a mobilization after 2008. I think that's important to – first of all to understand.

I'm going to ask Judy to start us off (from ?) – we're going to have our panelists each speak for about 10 minutes. And then we're going to have a dialogue across the panel and then open it up to the audience so that it's – so that it's fully participatory. Y'all can move a little closer too. We won't bite – (laughter) – at least not for the next hour, because we do hope that this can be a dialogue about solutions. We want to lift up what's happening, but we also want to talk about what starts to solve it.

So Judy, I'm going to ask you to start, and particularly since you can give us a good sense of what's happening nationally, both in terms of the problem and the solution.

JUDY BROWNE-DIANIS: Thank you. So I wanted to start just by putting out there a probably pretty bold statement, which is that we in 2011 and 2012 have seen the most wide-scale, most significant attacks on voting rights that we have seen in a century. And it really is quite troubling, what we saw in – starting in 2011. And as Maya indicated, it was, you know, in response to higher turnout rates of African-Americans, of Latinos, of students, of elderly voters.

And as a result of that, in 2010 with a Republican takeover of several legislatures, there was a quick effort to – I mean, very quickly. In the first two months of 2011, there were 34 states that took up voter ID proposals. And in those 34 states, most of the ID proposals were very similar. And that is because the American Legislative Exchange Council, fondly known as ALEC, was – had put together a template that could be used by (legislators ?) across the country.

And they moved them very quickly. For example, in Texas the governor actually put it through as emergency legislation. In the midst of a budget crisis, this was the emergency. In many other states they all looked the same. It would require a state-issued photo identification that was unexpired with your current address, with a signature and a photo on it. And what we found was in fact that the Brennan Center did a report that showed that actually 21 million Americans do not have state-issued photo identification, 25 percent of African-Americans do not have state-issued photo identification. And when you look at the states where this is being put through – actually the states where it passed – in 2011, two-thirds of those – I'm sorry – those states account for two-thirds of the electoral votes needed for the presidential race. And so clearly, you know, a partisan effort. When you look at it, with probably the exception of Rhode Island, all of these bills were passed with, you know, Republican majorities, no Democrats voting for them whatsoever.

And so the impact of it is clear. But also when you look at the numbers of people impacted – in Texas, for example, there are 600,000 already registered voters who do not have state-issued photo identification that is current. So we're talking about even people who – these are people who have been voting. And for the first time, they're going to show up and be told in fact you cannot vote this time because you don't meet the requirements.

And so one of the things that is kind of the silver lining in the – in this is that 34 states pick it up, only seven states actually it got through. But it's also important to understand the doggedness with which these bills were taken up. So North Carolina, for example – North Carolina, the legislature passed it and the governor vetoed it. They have tried to override that veto three times, the last one of which being a midnight session at the beginning of this year in which they tried to override it. Many states, if they didn't get it through in 2011, took it up in 2012. In some states like Mississippi and Missouri, this – you know, it was let's put into a ballot initiative.

So in Missouri, for example, they couldn't get it through the state legislature, so what they did was they put it into – they actually were able to pass out language so that it could go to a state ballot initiative, right? And so we recently – Advancement Project had a lawsuit against that language. It was actually called the Voter Protection Act. And we were able to defeat the law just based on the language, because it was deceptive language, et cetera. But that wasn't the end of the story. We literally just won that case about a month ago. And what has happened since then is that the legislature has taken up a new bill.

So they tried to get it through the legislature, couldn't do it. Then they got it through the legislature as a ballot initiative. We beat them back on that in court. And they're back in front of the legislature with a new bill to try it again. So this is not something where people are giving up. That – you know, we are really happy about what has happened with ALEC and, you know, ColorOfChange and others taking on that fight. But we have to realize that if it's not ALEC, it's going to be somebody else.

And we also have to understand that it wasn't just voter ID. In Florida – in Florida in 2008, a – there's early voting in Florida. The two to three weeks leading up to the election, you can go and vote. You can vote on a Saturday, you can vote on a Sunday. In fact there was a thing on the last Sunday of – before the election. It was called Take Your Souls to the Polls – (scattered laughter) – where churches throughout the state of Florida – black churches – would ride in caravans to the polling places. And in fact, the turnout for early voting was quite high. African-Americans were more likely to vote by early voting than any other group.

In 2011, the Florida state legislature decided that they should restrict early voting. So here we have a law that's making it more accessible and easier for people to engage in our democracy, and the legislature has decided no. In fact, what the legislature did was that they eliminated that last Sunday, which was the Take Your Souls to the Polls day. That one Sunday, they said, had to go. And they also reduced the number of days that early voting could take place.

The other thing that they did was that they restricted – they put more restrictions on voter registration groups. And what it has done is that not only are nonprofits subject to fines – which are substantial fines – for not turning in their voter registration forms within 48 hours, but the volunteers themselves have personal liability now for these kinds of – for not turning in the forms on time. And so what that has done is, groups like the League of Women Voters, who

have been doing voter registration in the state of Florida for 75 years, have shut down their voter registration program.

So here we have on both ends of the spectrum: We're not going to let more people into system to register, because we're going to restrict it such that – we know that voter registration groups – actually the voter registration drive – African-Americans and Latinos are more likely to register through voter registration drives than any other groups. So now we're going to restrict the registration process to make it harder for people to register. And we're going to make it harder on the other side, when it's time to vote. We're going to restrict the number of days for people to vote and make it harder for them when they show up to the poll.

So all of these things have made a really difficult environment. For who? For the voter; for particular groups of voters who participated in record numbers in 2008. And then let's add to that the group that Barbara mentioned, True the Vote. So True the Vote is an organization that was set up by the King Street Patriots, which is the tea party in Houston. And they have actually pledged to train 1 million poll watchers to be at the polling places in November.

Now it's very interesting to understand that True the Vote has become actually its own (c)(3). They are training people. But in order to be a poll watcher in just about every state, you actually have to sign up to be a poll watcher either through a candidate or a party. And so they are training volunteers who will then go work for the party or candidate, OK, when – I don't know which party, but I could probably guess which one. And those people will be stationed there to challenge the eligibility of voters – voters who don't have the right identification. They will be looking at IDs, to say, that doesn't really look like you.

Research actually shows that people of color are actually subject to racial profiling in ID checks, OK, that people get more scrutiny about their IDs if they are a person of color than their white counterparts. So imagine. Poll workers, first of all, now have to be trained on looking at IDs and telling whether or not you are who you say you are. And then you've got the poll watcher looking over their shoulder trying to challenge eligibility.

Other thing that's important is that, in the state of Florida for example, 41 percent of black people have moved between 2008 and 2012. And so the other thing that will happen is eligibility will be challenged on the basis of your address. And there are certain laws about where you can vote if you've moved, et cetera. But we know that that will be the thing that they will be doing, because the other thing is that they're looking at the voter rolls, this group. They are looking at the voter rolls to see who should be on it, who should be voting where, et cetera.

And so these are the kinds of things that – this is the environment and the climate in which people are going to have to go to the polls to exercise their right to vote. And so one thing we want to make sure of is that we're not scaring people off, right?

The other thing is, we have to cut through the rhetoric, the rhetoric of voter fraud. You are more likely to be struck by lightning than to find a prosecutable case of voter fraud. And people need to know that. People need to know that this is a story – it's lies, OK? It is total lies.

So the right would have you believe that you actually have to have that same state-issued photo identification to get on an airplane. I testified in front of – Senator Durbin had a hearing in D.C., and the Right had somebody from the Heritage Foundation, and he made that comment. And we knew that that wasn't true, because the night before I had gone on TSA.gov. And TSA.gov says, under frequently asked questions, we know people show up without their ID sometimes. And so they give you a whole list of other kinds of identification that you can use.

But what the Right has said to people and people have bought into is, if you need an ID to get on a plane, why shouldn't you need it for voting? Well, it's not true. And guess what: You don't need it to buy Sudafed either. And so the rhetoric is winning over the truth, because people are buying into this. And the thing is that they've created this story about voter fraud. But the Bush administration spent five years looking for voter fraud, and they couldn't find – they found less than a hundred cases across the country, and none of those cases would have been solved by ID. They weren't Mickey Mouse showing up to vote Judith Browne's ballot.

And so the rhetoric is really winning. And so I actually – so I handed out this piece that we did for The Washington Post because we've got to debunk the myth. So now, they've moved off – because we actually have been debunking the myth, they have moved off of this idea that there's rampant voter fraud, and moved on to a frame of we're actually preventing fraud. And so what we say is, no, you're not preventing fraud. You're preventing voting, OK?

And when you look at what they're doing now with one of my favorite groups, Project Veritas – Project Veritas, the group that probably single-handedly – well, I shouldn't say single-handedly – them and Fox News and Rush – took down Acorn, OK – are now going after voter fraud, right? And what they are saying is that voter fraud exists. So now they're out, going to the polling places, you may have seen the clip, they tried to vote Attorney General Eric Holder's ballot, right? They show up to the poll – but again, lie.

They edit the video to show certain things and not to tell the full story of what has happened. And guess what? At the end of the day, they didn't commit voter fraud because there are laws in place that prevent them from doing it. They would have been criminally liable for actually committing voter fraud. And they know that. There are laws in place. We don't need IDs for this.

The other thing that they have done is now they're after organizations like MOM (sp). They have now, again to actually make us think that ID is important in the world, they have a videotape of them coming into my office building and asking to see – to come to the Advancement Project and them being basically told: You need ID. Huh? (Chuckles.) And actually, you don't need ID. If you called up and you had an appointment and I said let the person up you wouldn't need it.

And so they're continuing to try and do this. And what they've also – they continue to do this piece about going into polling places. What they have to do is, because there is no voter fraud, they're conjuring it up. It's hocus pocus, again, to make the American public think that voter fraud exists.

So I just want to end with a few – a few things of what we can do. I think at the end of the day, what is important is that we understand that what is at stake is our democracy. And there are people who do not want all of us to participate in our democracy, that there is an underlying story and debate going on that we haven't dealt with yet, which is whether or not voting is a right or a privilege.

There are those who believe that it is a privilege. And so to make it harder, it's OK, because you should have to jump over the barriers. In fact, they say, well, your people died for the right to vote. So why shouldn't you have to go get an ID? Not that big thing to do. And so there's – and there are those who say that actually poor people should not vote. Young people should not vote because they don't know anything yet.

And so this question about right versus privilege is not only in the public discourse and underlying the debate, but there is also this more public discourse around – I mean, it's actually a Supreme Court discourse also, because the Supreme Court and federal courts have been hammering away, chipping away little by little at the right to vote.

In *Bush v. Gore*, they basically said we do not have a right to vote. And so part of what we think at Advancement Project is this is big bold idea of we need a constitutional amendment for right to vote, because you don't have a constitutional right to vote. And we have to make it explicit, so that the Supreme Court understands it and those who want to erect barriers to it understand it.

The other two things I want to say is that we've got to debunk the myths. We've got to tell people in our discourse, in our Twitter – you know, Twitter – we had a Twitter party on right to vote, just to tell people that this does not exist in the way that it does. The other piece is we've got to continue to do the legislative work, which is fighting these things as they come up in the states. And really, even though we may not be – you know, some organizations that we work with are not democracy groups or don't do voting rights as their mission, it's all of our missions to protect voting rights. It's enviro-groups' mission to protect voting rights. And so we've got to build a broader alliance around these issues, because if we lose the right to vote, we lose all the things we want to get done in environment, in health care, for children, you name it.

And I think also that locally we have got to be putting pressure on our local election officials, because they have a lot of discretion on how elections are handled, how the administration of elections handled – is getting handled day by day. And we've got to be meeting with them and holding them accountable, because at the end of the day, it's on us to start reframing this. It's on us to make clear that this is a right.

And you know, I've seen for the – since 2008, I will tell you that people said, don't even talk about voter ID. It's a – it's a goner. We should just let that go, because the polling showed that it's a loser for us? I'm sorry; we should not be in that place of saying that it's gone, because if it's this, what are they coming for next? And so we've got to fight this fight. And we've got to have this broader vision about what it means to engage in our democracy.

MS. WILEY: Thank you, Judy. All right. (Applause.) (Inaudible) – can you pass the mic? This is being audio taped, so we need to make sure we're using the mic so we capture it.

Alvin, New Mexico, First Nations. How is this looking there?

ALVIN WARREN: So thank you all for coming to our session. I think that was a great way to start the discussion. I'm going to bring it to New Mexico now and a particular focus on Native Americans in our state. And I'm going to start with maybe a direct point. But I'm kind of tired of hearing, we don't have data about native people. Let's do something about that.

MS. : Yeah, absolutely.

MR. WARREN: Yeah.

MS. : Yeah.

MR. WARREN: You know, unfortunately we can get used to not – to the absence, meaning, you know, that it's less important, but we accept it for different reasons. We don't need to accept that. So here's a good reason why. You know, I'm going to talk to you about New Mexico, but there are at least eight states where native voters make a difference and have actually proven to be swing votes in key elections. New Mexico is one; Washington State, Arizona, Oklahoma, Alaska, Oregon, Montana, right? So something we should – we should all be doing, right?

So I'm going to be talking about voter protection, education and promotion efforts in New Mexico among Native Americans. Now first a quick background, for folks here who don't know. So our population – native population in New Mexico has gone from about 134,000 in 1990 to almost 220,000. So we make up nearly 11 percent of the state's population. We have 22 federally recognized Indian tribes in New Mexico.

Each of us have – are fortunate to have our languages and our cultures largely intact, which is something very, very unique about New Mexico. And all of us reside on some portion of our traditional land base, so that's really important. We also have a very large off-reservation population. So just Bernalillo County, Albuquerque has about 44,000 Native Americans who live there, representing more than a hundred tribes.

Until 1948, we as native people did not have the right to vote in state elections. Many people do not know that. It took a returning World War II veteran to challenge the fact that under our state constitution, Indians who lived on the reservation were not allowed to vote. And although he won his victory in 1948, it took until 1967 for the state's constitution to be amended to take that provision out, a couple of years after the Voting Rights Act of 1965.

So you know, without getting into details, you know, in New Mexico we actually have had very similar experiences to the South when it comes to discriminative, active and intentional, systemic and institutional, with regard to native voting. In particular, we've had since 1975 several New Mexico counties that have been under federal monitoring for voting rights

violations. Under the Voting Rights Act amendments of 1982, there were five particular counties that were identified for this monitoring that went from 1982 all the way to 2004. And that had to do with everything from redistricting plans, precinct boundaries, polling places, that kind of thing – again, all familiar.

As recently as 1988, the Department of Justice had to take action to force the state of New Mexico to provide election information to Native Americans based on the minority language assistance amendments to the Voting Rights Act of 1965, because we still have individuals in New Mexico who communicate – their preference in communication is our indigenous languages – Navajo language being one, the Towa language (in ?) Jemez being another one – so that’s really critical.

So I’m proud to tell you, though, that after all of that, we are in this incredible period of resurgence, of native people regaining our voice and our vote. We have 65,000 registered Native American voters in the state, which I think is going to go up, probably to 70(,000) to 75(,000) this round. We have 11 counties that have a significant native presence, 91 precincts.

If you know our geography, we’re a key demographic in the west, northwest and north central parts of the state. And if you look at it from the standpoint of parties, the vast majority of natives, about 85 percent, register as Democrats. So we make up 20 to 25 percent of the Democratic vote in New Mexico. So this is – this is an important thing for New Mexico.

In terms of elected officials, we have three Senate districts and six House districts that have a – that are comprised of a majority of native voters, plus seven additional districts that have a significant percentage. However, we only have two native senators now and only three native representatives in our legislature, plus a handful of county commissioners.

So what are we actually doing to counter voter suppression, to encourage our folks to get out and have an impact in the political process? I’m going to race through a bunch of different things which may leave your head spinning, but the overall impression is lots of things are happening by lots of people, and they all need to continue if we really mean to counter everything that was just told to us so poignantly.

So one of the success stories, which may be a different point than Genaro’s going to make, redistricting for us was a success this year. It built on the victories of 2000, and we did an even better job this time around in 2010. What happened is the majority of the Pueblos, which is 19 of the 22 tribes in New Mexico plus the Jicarilla Apache Nation, working closely with the Navajo Nation and their human rights commission, produced a single Native American redistricting consensus plan and a set of principles that would guide all of the negotiations.

We did this early. We weren’t playing catch-up. Everybody knew what was coming. We have a solid team of lawyers, like individuals sitting at this table, native lawyers and allies who help to work with tribal leaders to create this consensus plan. First time ever to have that kind of level of solidarity in proposing to the legislature and to the administration: This is what we want out of redistricting.

Everybody saw redistricting as an opportunity to reverse historical discrimination, to make sure that tribal leaders had a say in how to protect their communities of interest, and to preserve and actually build on the majority districts that we had.

Now, of course, the bills were proposed in our legislative session. Our Republican governor vetoed them. So we also had – in the lawsuits – we had three native people participate in the different redistricting lawsuits. I was happy to be one of those three plaintiffs. Long story short, through all the different maneuvers, you will find that the key principles and the priorities of the tribes were respected in the final outcome – in the final plans that had to in fact – some of them – one, our House plan, had to go all the way to the state Supreme Court. It's getting challenged in federal court. I think that's going to go away if it hasn't already.

But it was the hard work and the solidarity of the tribes that made that happen. And as a result, all of our majority districts were preserved, and we actually added an additional influence district in – it's Senate District 30, which is an area of big contention over uranium mining and the protection of cultural sites, which leads to my next point.

One of the key interventions for us is actually having native people run for office, because we've seen now that when our own people are running for office, that's a big motivator to get our folks to go to the polls. And so I'm going to embarrass and point out somebody who's standing – or sitting in the audience here, Mr. Benny Shendo.

BENNY SHENDO: Hello, everybody. (Applause.)

MR. WARREN: So if you didn't clap now, you're going to clap in a second – (laughter) – because Benny is running for our state Senate – Senate District 22. He is the first person in the United States to be appointed as Cabinet Secretary of Indian Affairs in the history of our country. That's where the applause comes. (Applause.) His only mistake was choosing me to be his successor. (Laughter.) So Benny's running for office, right?

In that new Senate District 30 as its reconfigured we have a Laguna Pueblo woman, Maxine Velasquez running. And then probably – I hate to say this, Benny – but one of the more exciting opportunities for us is we are – we are very likely to get our first Pueblo woman state representative, a woman named Georgene Louis. And what's even cooler about it is she's not coming from a reservation district. Her district is right in the middle of Albuquerque. So this is very, very important, a key milestone for our state's history. So that's one piece, native candidates.

The other one is, we have tribes – and it's kind of – it's not uniform. So one of our efforts, several groups, is to make more uniform the efforts across tribes, because some tribes are just – they're going all out. Pueblo of Laguna has the Laguna 1,000 Voter Project. They've invested tribal funds to do voter registration drives. So they're at one end of the spectrum. Then you have other tribes where there really is no infrastructure, there's no emphasis. Their individuals will get registered by happenstance or by interest. And so we've got to kind of fill that gap.

But we have – I would say the majority of tribes now are actively involved in doing some kind of voter registration. They're in their communities doing voter education. My community, I'm proud to say, we've been actively doing this for the last, oh, five or six cycles. And this time around we're doing something even cooler.

We actually shot a video – our own young people shot a video during the legislative session of state leaders, of tribal leaders, and then did some video back at home with our elders and youth, and are going to put together this video that's going to go out probably – I expect to see it on YouTube. Hopefully it'll be useful in other parts of Indian country about why it's important to vote, because what we saw in 2010 that was so disturbing – 2008, similar kind of trends in New Mexico: huge turnout of native voters, huge increase in voter registration; 2010, we totally fell flat, right? We can't allow that to happen again.

So part of this means re-engaging our voters as to why this is an important thing. Yes, when they have native candidates that'll help. Yes, if there are particular issues that are of concern, that'll help get people to the polls. But one of the things we're doing now is making that connection, because a lot of folks in our communities don't necessarily connect the issues and challenges of their day-to-day life with who's sitting in that office, who's making those decisions, what those key votes are.

So – and the other problem is, sometimes we wait until the last minute, right? Well, I'm sure we're not the only community that does this. We're, like, trying to educate people in October about why they should be getting ready to vote. Well, we have communities that are doing that now, that are getting out to the communities in every which way possible, why does it matter for you to vote, OK? So there's a variety of efforts there – endorsements of course.

The interesting piece for us is beginning to use technology, because a lot of tribes have really been left to – you know, the county clerk's voting list, cross-checking it with tribal rolls and trying to figure out, well, who's voted when. You know, we don't need to do that anymore. We have all sorts of technology and lists available, partisan and nonpartisan. So that – so that's happened this year.

We have – the All Indian Pueblo Council, which is the consortium of the 19 pueblos in New Mexico, has a voter committee. Just finished a candidate questionnaire that's going to go out to all the candidates running for office in New Mexico, and that'll be used to shape endorsements and a voter guide that will go out to all the tribes. Native American Voters Alliance, which is focused primarily off-reservation, Bernalillo County – they're doing what – you know, all of the things that you would expect: voter registration, education, organizer training. They have a piece on legislation, but I'll come back to that in a second. They have a special focus on youth, you know, for obvious reasons.

And they're also doing things like a digital town hall that involves folks statewide to kind of gauge opinions and attitudes. And they're finding out that a lot of the PR by a particular political party – since we're supposed to keep this nonpartisan, right – that their PR is hitting home with our folks. And our folks are actually beginning to buy into some of the things that are really intended to be wedge issues, right?

So like the – you know, the whole immigrant license debate in New Mexico that some of you might have read about – it's amazing. If we're not countering that kind of, in many cases, misinformation, that's enough to keep some of our people from even going. You know, just create – and the attack ads – we all know this part. So the attack ads and all that just – that make it so – you know, generate such negative feelings, is enough for some of our people to just stay home and not cast their vote.

We have had some efforts through the secretary of State's office, by virtue of the DOJ's intervention. But we have in New Mexico fortunately something called the Native American Election Information Program. They have county coordinators. Their particular role is to hire native vote – or native language interpreters to be at the polls to help with interpreting various aspects of, you know, election- or campaign-related materials. That has improved. But of course that's subject to politics as well.

Legislation – proud to say New Mexico defeated all three of our voter ID bills second time around. You know, they tried in 2011, tried again this time. And it's a – it's a – it's a strong coalition of folks, including folks like the Native American Voters Alliance, that were very actively involved in that. We've also had a state legislator from (Benny's ?) home community, Representative Roger Madalena, that's introduced bills to counter one of the more recent challenges we found, which is certain county clerks that are unwilling to put early vote sites on tribal land. And they come up with a variety of excuses, either population or we don't have enough money. So fortunately by virtue of having our own elected officials, we can have folks introduce bills to counter that, whether it's in appropriation or whether it's reminding folks of why this is important.

I'm going to wrap up here on a couple points. Native American Democratic Caucus, which I happen to chair now, one of our key efforts was to get a state-wide native vote coordinator and organizer hired on early in the process. And I'm happy to say New Mexico, I think, is the first state to do that. Our vote coordinator – native vote coordinator was hired last month. So that person will be working with people in all of those precincts that I just mentioned to make sure that they're not just doing this alone. And this is one of the themes, for me, that's important in New Mexico, perhaps here. We over-rely on our volunteers. We over-rely on those folks who are active in our communities, who are interested in getting – in getting people together to register to vote. We don't provide enough support from the formal structures that we have.

And that's – part of our job at the NADC is to try to make those connections so people who are looking for training on how to do voter registration aren't sort of trying to figure it out, that they're connected with the resources that exist out there. Getting native people more involved in the Democratic Party structure – again, not to be necessarily partisan, it's fine if folks want to do that on the Republican side; it won't be me doing it, but somebody else can do that. But we need to have that, to really institutionalize our participation in the political process – again, the recruitment and support of native candidates, voter education so forth.

The last thing I want to just mention is NCAI. So we – we’re going to hear later on today from Jackie Pata. She’s going to talk about Native Vote, but it would take a whole other presentation to tell you what they’re doing at a national level. But if you go onto nativevote.org, you’ll see a lot of the things that they’re doing. They’re working in partnership with folks like Penny (sic; Peggy) Flanagan, who’s the Native American Leadership program director at the Wellstone Action, Heather Smith at Rock the Vote, other folks at State Voices. So this is a really important national effort that is landing on the ground and supporting some of the things we’re doing.

So this is my last point, again, to kind of finish with what I started. I’m very happy that we were invited to be part of this panel to share with you what’s happening with native voters. Well, I really encourage all of us who are involved in this, you know, let’s not just make that, oh, that was a really interesting presentation I heard in that one session and then we forget about native voters. Let’s not forget about native voters, because those are swing voters and because of all the history of discrimination that’s happening. Plus, we have native people on the ground in these states that are fighting back against the history of being completely disenfranchised and ignored. And each of us has a responsibility to help native people regain our voice in the political process. Thank you.

MS. WILEY: Thank you. Thank you. (Applause.) And you know, before I turn it over to Genaro, I – because I think it’s important when we have these moments to acknowledge the point of inclusion of all of us who are marginalized communities and how we not do that to one another. And so I hear your call, Alvin. And I have a personal pledge to make to you, if you’re willing to participate.

The Center for Social Inclusion, we’re doing an interview series, as part of our 10th anniversary, to lift up community of color leadership. So we’re talking about civic engagement broadly defined, where we’re identifying for the country how this is the future of the country. And it’s about all of us. And so if you will consent, we would interview you – and this is something that actually we may get run on either The Nation or Atlantic Monthly. So I say that because I think it’s – it is extremely important for people to understand Native Americans are swing voters. So –

MR. WARREN: Happy to help.

MS. WILEY: OK.

MR. WARREN: Thank you for that.

MS. : (Inaudible.)

MS. WILEY: Yeah. No, it’s –

MS. : (Inaudible.)

MS. WILEY: Yeah, yeah, yeah. And the data point too, because I think that's for – and it's true for all of our communities, and we have to understand that native populations have probably the worst – I mean, the least light shined on how dollars are spent and what kinds of supports people get and the situation for the community, so I really appreciate those points.

MR. WARREN: Thank you.

MS. WILEY: Genaro.

GENARO LOPEZ-RENDON: Good morning, everybody. How's everyone doing? Thank you for coming. My name's Genaro Lopez-Rendon, and I'm the director at Southwest Worker's Union. And also thanks to my fellow panelists and my – so I'm going to tell you a little story and then we'll talk about voter suppression after that. (Chuckles.) I think it'll be woven into the story.

But I grew up in small-town Texas, small-town America, a little town called Hondo, Texas, about 6,000 people. My grandma and my grandpa settled in this town in the '30s. And their family worked at farm workers, as campesinos.

My grandma, her parents, her brothers and sisters traveled throughout the Southwest and the Northwest picking crops – onions, cotton, et cetera. She was only able to achieve a third-grade education because she had to travel with the family in order to them to survive and sustain themselves.

My grandpa's childhood is fairly similar, but he was more of a place-based farmer. His dad was a farmer on a land there in South Texas – actually lost his father at the age of 12. And then he had to continue the work. My grandpa then served in World War II. And coming back from the war was when he met my grandmother.

And they went to a local theater in this small town in the mid-40s. As they entered the theater, they went to the front, sat down to enjoy the movie. Then they were asked to move to the back of the theater. They were asked to sit in segregation by the theater owner and a local sheriff. They were asked to accept to being less than –

And because my grandparents had a strong sense of who they were and pride in who they were, they left the theater. I think it's these kind of circumstances that led my grandfather and many other veterans to come and fight for civil rights upon returning from the war. He helped form many organizations in this small town, like the American Legion and LULAC.

He also helped form a labor union in this town at a potter's plant that existed. And we're talking late '40s, early '50s, so you just have to be able to imagine – you know, I'm kind of in awe of what was happening – you know, of what they were doing this era and kind of the trailblazing efforts that my family and many other families at this time took.

One of the actions that my grandparents took in the early '50s was to then desegregate the schools in Hondo, Texas, and Medina County. Chicano youth were not allowed to go to high school because the high school was set up for white youth. And because of that – you know –

So anyways, I think – I'm sharing this story with y'all because it tells a story about the economic, political and social reality of Texas, of the Southwest, and really the southern half of the United States.

So this bi-regional connection between the South and the Southwest really was about this slow-road development that continually failed to invest in our families and in humans. It failed to invest in social capital. And it left this region with poorly-educated families and workers, and a poor social infrastructure. Moreover, segregation and Jim Crow laws prevented our families from voting and really exercising their constitutional rights.

We also have to think about the influence of colonialism and conquest in the South and in the Southwest, as well as the historical reality of African slavery in the South and "Manifest Destiny" and war in the Southwest. So, you know, we're talking about hundreds of years here. And hundreds of years of oppression and control really have a tremendous impact physically, mentally and socially on people and on our communities.

And to really heal from this, we have to know and understand this history and this culture – and using it as a real way to unite our communities. So I – no – well, I won't tell this part of the story, but –

MS. WILEY (?): (Inaudible.)

MR. LOPEZ-RENDON: (Chuckles.) So I think that's really the story of voter suppression, of keeping our people out of governance and, really, the apportionment of districts in a way that would not let our communities win. So you know, there's moments when you go out and you're like, well, that guy just didn't run a good campaign. You know, he should have worked harder. He could have done better.

But if the – if the redistricting process and the percentages are stacked against you, it doesn't really matter how hard you work, you're not going to win that space. And that's part of what we came to understand as an organization, is if we're not working on the census process, and if we're not working on the redistricting process, we can't expect these districts to be won by people that are – that have similar values or principles that we do.

So because of that, we made it a point as an organization to – we did a tremendous amount of work around the census process and really counting the hardest-to-count communities, which are communities that we work with on a daily basis.

And on the redistricting process, I think folks here have probably heard about the great process that is happening in Texas, when we think about the state-wide redistricting. Texas got four new congressional districts through the census process. The large percentage of growth in Texas was by the Latino community. So when you – when you then looked at what came out of the state, they actually – the amount of districts that existed, congressional districts that existed for Latinos went down. The amount of districts that existed for Republicans went up.

So we, along with the Advancement Project and other groups, have – we weren't directly involved, but we were part of the Latino redistricting task force, which was part of the group that sued the state of Texas. I think there's a couple of things that are important when we think about the redistricting process in Texas and the argument that's being made in the Supreme Court now. Majority-minority districts – that's what we're fighting for. We're fighting for if there's 60 percent of Latinos that live in this district, it should be representative similar to that amount, or if there's 40 percent Latinos and 20 percent African-Americans and that also makes it 60 percent. What Supreme Court Justice Roberts said was that actually we don't want minority groups coming together. So if you're a majority-minority district, you either have to be Latino or you have to be black or you have to be Asian. We don't want Latinos and African-Americans coming together to form these type of majority-minority districts. I think that's a huge thing that we really have to be paying attention to when we think about the Supreme Court process.

What we ended up doing was really focusing at the local level. We did work with community groups in Houston to push up the Latino districts from two to four. In Medina County, which is where Hando (ph) sits, we did a series of redistricting schools where we brought community folks together to really learn what the process of redistricting is – what – you know, what is stacking, what is packing, you know, there's all this language that we needed to learn – and to also develop maps that were community-based that people understood where they lived and how they wanted these maps to look.

What Medina County ended up doing was retrogressing on the only two Latino districts that existed. So there was one strong one that was at 58 percent Latino; they retrogressed it down to 51 percent. And they did it similar with another one. We actually ended up suing Medina County around this issue, of which they settled with us. And actually, we created stronger Latino districts. And these two – I mean, so you have to understand Medina County. It's rural Texas. It's solid red. And it's controlled by white men at this moment. And it's 60 percent Latino.

So because of the work that we did on redistricting, now we have two Latinos running in these two districts. And they have an opportunity to win because of the work that communities and organizations like ours did to really set it up in a way that makes it winnable.

But now we have voter ID, which Julie was talking about. So all the kind of like having poll watchers and all that kind of stuff – like, that's already happening in small counties around Texas. You have people being turned away. They're on the voter rolls one year, they're off the next year. They put cops at the polling places, so people are intimidated to go and vote there. There's all these – one time they set up the – they set up a camera to, like, videotape who was going. I mean, they ended up having to take that down because Department of Justice is (on the regular ?) at the elections that are happening in Medina County because of the history that has existed in this county.

When we think about voter ID, what Texas is doing now, through the voter ID process, is challenging Section 5 of the Voting Rights Act. So Lieutenant Governor of Texas, he's saying Section 5 should not exist anymore. The state should have the right to determine, you know, 40, 50 years later after the 1965 Voting Rights Act, like we got our act together now and you should not be coming down on us. We should actually be determining, at the state level, what it is that we need.

And it's going to impact, like Judy was saying, hundreds of thousands of registered voters already and hundreds of thousands of potentially registered voters in Texas. So I mentioned my grandma. And my grandma is now 90 years old. She votes in every election. She has not had an ID for the last 20 years, 15 years. So my grandma's going to be one of these 600,000 people that will not be able to vote if this type of proposal goes through.

When we think about the changing demographics in the country, you know, about this new majority of people that – and it will not be a – (inaudible) – that Texas is already on that path. The country is expected to reach this point by 2040. Texas is expected to reach this point by 2020. Currently right now in the elementary school system in Texas, it's made up of youth of color. So what is the Republican-controlled legislature do last year in the state is they cut 4 billion (dollars) from public education.

So it's – they're looking at it in a very strategic way, that how do they continue to be in control even though they're not the majority of the population. So it's not enough just to become a new majority. Medina County is a new majority already. How do we really work with communities like redistricting schools, candidate trainings so that it really becomes true in this sense that just becoming new doesn't mean you have power. You really have to organize and build that power in order to have some true representation in these spaces.

And even when you get to that – so another story about Hondo. In 2008, three of our members ran for city council in this town. For the last decade before that, you were having about 130 people come out to vote. And so the election was like somebody got 70, you know, somebody got 80. You know, that was like the election and there was 3,000 people-plus that were registered to vote in this town.

In 2008, our organization went and did a GOTV program and a voter education and registration program. We had members that were progressive and ran an independent campaign. That year in 2008 we got almost 1,700 people to come out and vote, 50 percent of the registered voters – unprecedented numbers that have never happened before. And why was it? Because we actually told people that you do have power in this process, you can make change in this process. So that was a great victory for the community.

Immediately after that, six months to the day when you're allowed to do a recall process, the white community in Hondo launched the recall process, saying that the three Latinos, Mexicanos that were in office were going to bankrupt the city, that they did not know how to handle a budget and that they were ignorant. I mean – and also what was happening during those six months of – you would have folks screaming up to the dais from the audience saying: Go back to Mexico, you dirty Mexicans. And this was 2008. So we're not talking '50s and '60s anymore, we're talking three or four years ago.

They launched the recall process; 93 percent, 94 percent of the people that signed that petition was the white community from Hondo. So even if you take power, you also have to understand that the powers that be are not accepting to that, and they're going to immediately go on the attack and on their offensive. So they – on the newspaper, they have the people that are

working at the elections department, they run the city, they have people in the police department. So immediately there was a – and they run all the businesses in the small town, too. So it was immediately a campaign of intimidation and terror, we can say, about how bad these people were and how bad they were going to leave our city.

And because of that in the recall election, which again was the highest turnout this year – that year in '09, there was 2,200 that came out and voted, 50 – high 50 percent of the registered voters. And our folks lost the election by 23 votes. And a lot of bad things on how they set up the ballot, on the translation of the ballot, on letting people that were outside the city vote – there was all these different discrepancies in the process. But it was demoralizing.

So you have a community that really stood up and took a stand and worked hard. And the very next moment you're being cut at the legs. So then I – and then – so – and then – and then a special election happening after that. So it was, like, definitely voter fatigue, but it was more voter intimidation and voter suppression that was happening through the process.

And I think, you know, when we think about suppression, we also have to think about the public institution that our folks are moving into. You know, we've been under 500 years of control and suppression and colonialism; we have not been in positions of governance. So we do have a gap in understanding how governance works. And we do have a mission to really train our people to understand that, that it's a very corruptive process. You kind of get swept away in this vortex of Robert (sic; Robert's) Rules of Order. And you're like, what – (chuckles) – is this thing that's happening here? And it actually pushes you to be an individual and to forget about the community that you come from, and to have, you know, backdoor deals.

And that's really what we're trying to work against too, that – when we think about civic engagement and voter suppression, there's a bigger umbrella of – that we have to talk about governance, that there's a process that we have to prepare people, and that we also have to help folks once they get into that position at the same time as holding them accountable. It's very complex, and I think it puts our organizations in a difficult place, but it also puts us in a place to be able to really grow what this movement should look like and to really be able to share our experiences with many other communities.

We're part of a bi-regional process that we call the South X Southwest Experiment. And that's one of the things that we're taking up, is this question of governance, and really about connecting black, brown and red communities in the South and Southwest as a way to transform our country; that if we really want to change the country, we need heavy investment into these regions that actually develop the voter suppression laws like the voter ID laws and the anti-immigration laws. And then we have the worst stats – when you look at graduation rates and educational attainment, et cetera, et cetera, et cetera – that the black, brown and red communities in these two regions have historically been at the bottom and now are being used as the testing sites to develop these bad policies and legislations that are coming up.

So with that – I mean, I think that's really – I mean, part of Southwest Worker's Unions – what we're doing now is registering voters. We're getting – you know, we're doing our GOTV work. It's all the mechanical type of stuff. But what I'm really trying to say is that there's a

historical trajectory here that we have to be really keen on. And I think that's what really gives us the answers to be able to solve what some of the problems are currently. Thank you.

MS. WILEY: Thank you. (Applause.) (Inaudible) – you. Unfortunately Judy is – not unfortunately – she's on the plenary at lunch. But that means she has to run out. And in the interests of time – I actually had some questions, but I want to make sure that the audience gets in the conversation. So if anyone has a question or comment, if you could use the microphone, because this is being recorded. And also it'll help everyone hear your question – that would be great.

And I – so one of the things I heard in both of your comments, which I think – oh, we got some –

MR. : Maya –

MS. WILEY: Thank you. OK. See, I – (inaudible) – go run my mouth. Go ahead, Scott.

Q: Scott Reed (sp) with the (PICO ?) National Network. I share the passion and love – and Genaro, I loved the story of your grandmother. And we're involved in Missouri in a big signature gathering campaign to cap the rate. Three hundred of our clergy received a letter from a law firm in Texas threatening their (c)(3) status. So the sense of potential attack against anyone who's trying to expand or to create change is real. And the thing that helps us best to counter that is the stories out of local communities, like the story of your grandmother.

I'm just wondering if we're collecting those stories about this issue and creating some public campaign around it, because frankly, in most communities, the notion of voter ID makes sense. It's not the sort of thing you go to the mat to fight. And yet they will fight for the neighbor – (inaudible). Because it really changes the mental – or the perception of what's happened – (inaudible).

MR. : I don't know if there's necessarily a collection of the stories, but I definitely agree. I mean, I think it is the stories of people like my grandmother and her neighbors. I mean, I think one of the other things that we did during our get out to vote stuff was get 200 elderly people to vote by mail. That was also record-breaking in the city. So that's going to impact the elderly in a way that, you know, they don't have the opportunity to vote. And this is the process for them to be able to do it. And there's 200 stories in this one small town of many elderly people that could be told.

We had the biggest numbers of young people come out at this time, too. Folks were voting, like, with their school ID, you know. Or I had – we had people that were 65 and had gone to prison when there were 20 and saying that: I'm a criminal and I can't vote. We had people that had gotten out of prison and actually used their prison identification to go to the polls and vote. So I think those are the kind of stories that people are overcoming and really trying to, like, put their best foot forward because they want to participate in the democracy, but continually being chopped down.

Like, so now this voter ID process is one. But the guy that went to prison, two, he's very intimidated when you have the cop and the sheriff set up at the polling places. You know so, I think that you're right, you know, Scott – like, those are the stories that – and maybe there's a partnership that can happen here. I mean, I know PICO (ph) has many partners throughout the country that that would be something powerful, just the stories from across the country of people that want to participate. My 90-year-old grandma, you know, I mean, like, wants to vote, and she should have the right to vote.

MS. : (Off mic.)

MS. : I just wanted to say that the ethnic media that are a part of New American Media have launched a monthly teleconference call with the Brennan Center. We just had the first call on Tuesday. And each of them is trying to aggregate and create stories that are specific to their local voter – the realities of voter suppression. I'm also thinking of just the extraordinary appeal of candidates who are running – first-time candidates of color who are running being featured in the media that reach the communities that would be most inspired by that. So definitely very inspired by your panel this morning. I did want to ask about voter – (inaudible) – the whole effort to include ex-felons in voter enfranchisement and whether – I guess Julie could have spoken to that, but that was sort of a fifth plank in this ALAC (ph) attack.

MR. : Right.

MS. : And like in Texas, I would imagine it's very difficult for people with a felony background record to vote.

MR. : Actually, in Texas, once you're done with your probation or parole, you're eligible to re-register to vote. And vote – that's how some of the folks were able to do it. But I know that there's other states like Kentucky, you know, that have definitely been putting up a strong fight around ex-felons being able to get – and Alabama, you know, being able to get the right to vote.

Q: (Off mic) – you mentioned about the – about people getting involved in the local party – local party politics. Can you speak more about that – (off mic)?

MR. WARREN: Sure, sure. I'll talk a little bit about the party piece to this and the immigration sort of reform part probably isn't my area of expertise. But you know, it took a long time for folks to realize the importance of participating in the party at the local all the way up to the national level. Now, that isn't to say that we're sort of inventing the wheel now. There's folks who've been very involved, probably in at least – at least the last three to four presidential campaigns, probably all the way back. I mean, we tend to sort of focus on sort of our immediate sphere. But this is a – been a cumulative process that goes all the way back.

But a greater level of engagement, people who think on the DNC for example like Cecilia Fire Thunder, and that – those are somewhat recent developments. For us, at a very local level, this was another aspect of disenfranchisement, even as we were increasing our voter registration. We became the majority of voters in our precinct, and yet we had no access to the leadership of that precinct as part of the state party. In fact, all the same techniques that were used to keep

people from voting were the same techniques used to keep us from having any kind of real influence.

And in fact, it wasn't until last year once we were nearly 75 percent of the voters in our precinct that we actually took over the control essentially there. And that then gave us an opportunity to get people on the County Central Committee, to elect somebody to the State Central Committee. So this is a longer answer, but this is really critical to where we are kind of in the evolutionary process because part of it is just that participation. But if we really mean to then have an impact on – and I guess I'll just highlight three.

One is on the party platform, right, which does have an influence back on what elected officials who are a member of that party do once they get into office. So if we mean to have an impact on that, we only can have an impact if we're participating or part of the structure, all the way from the grassroots up. You know, the other part is actually having a realistic shot at getting our candidates into the pipeline, you know, particularly in New Mexico, because we have a lot of places that really – you know, the Democratic majority is so significant that the key election is the primary election. It's not the general, it's the primary.

And so if we don't have folks involved in the party process such that we can get our candidates placed and supported in that, well, then it doesn't really matter how many native people we have running, we'll have a hard time – or how many people we get to turn out in the polls. You know, it'll – they'll have a hard time, whether it's access to – whatever it might be that makes campaigns successful.

So we're building – we're not building. We're reinforcing and strengthening that infrastructure. And I've seen it really improve in the last, you know, four years since we created the caucus, and particularly over the last year. And again, because this is supposed to be nonpartisan, I'll at least say this much. You know, we have 17 natives running for office this year – 16 are Democrats, one is a Republican. But the Republican would be the first Native American elected to a district judgeship in New Mexico if he gets elected as a Republican.

So, you know, even though my politics are pretty clear, we also can't afford, frankly, the kind of huge pendulum swings that have been characteristic of the federal tribal relationship. So if there are folks willing to work the other party the same way, you know, great. Like I said, it won't be me. (Laughter.)

MS. WILEY: I wanted to ask, one of the things that you both have spoken to really does go to the issue of, you know, what I'll call civic engagement, but this notion of how people actually participate in problem-solving, right, for their communities, because a lot of what we're talking about in terms of why voter suppression is a problem is also about how it excludes people from actually participating in solutions.

And so some of that is governance, as you said, Genaro, and I think to a lot of the points you raised, Alvin, about really organizing and pulling together and alliance building early with some clear strategies to what enables people to govern, which really means to be able to address and solve their own problems.

So I was wondering if you could speak a little bit just to what you think is most energizing and galvanizing to the constituency base that you work with on that kind of governance and engagement, because we've talked a lot about voter suppression, but, you know, the point is – you know, I think also to Scott's point, what gets people engaged? Because the more they're engaged in being able to govern, the more they're engaged also in fighting, I think, these fights that are working to keep them from begin engaged.

MR. LOPEZ-RENDON: I mean, I think a simple one is talking to folks. I mean, what we found when did the work in Hondo is, like, nobody had ever gone and knocked on people's doors, nobody had ever gone and told folks that their vote was important, nobody had ever gone and said, like, I want you to register and come out. You know, so I think that was just a simple thing that – I mean, when you look across Texas, you have hundreds of small counties that nobody's doing any of this work.

So the status quo continues to dominate and to run that space. And that if somebody does break the mold, then you're one out of five. Like what power do you really hold in this process? Are you going to have a budget to work with? Are you going to be – you know what I mean? It's like that kind of thing, so I think it has to be a long-term strategy. You know, and for us as an organization, organizing is at the core, that we have to be able to build leaders that continue to work for the long haul, whether you're – whether we're winning one year or we're losing the next year. That – it's going to – we're going to have to take a lot of bumps and bruises to do that.

But what really energizes people, I think, is just understanding the process as well. And the redistricting piece – we actually worked with the community for a year before we got to the redistricting process that was going to happen. So by the time the commissioners were going to be voting on that, like we had our own maps, we had two dozen people that could go in and, like, actually school the commissioners about what redistricting is, because they had no idea. They were not commissioners over 10 years ago. This was their first redistricting process. They had a small PowerPoint training from a firm that they hired from Austin, where our people had actually had a dozen meetings, developed their own maps, understood the language. And because of that, we beat them. We beat them at the game of redistricting that if we wouldn't have done that, those Latino districts would have ended up where they were – they were proposing for them to be. And would not have an opportunity to really win any of those districts until the next redistricting process.

So I think that, you know, small organizations like ours – (inaudible) – there's really an emphasis that we need to put on the census and redistricting process, because if we're not setting up the groundwork and the framework, then it's not going to make a difference once elections or suppression comes around. Our folks are not going to be in those spaces, and we're going to continue to blame each other.

MS. WILEY: Alvin, anything to add?

MS. WARREN: Sure. So one of the pieces of research that I wanted to share with folks – I don't know if anybody here has heard of Jennifer Green at the Analyst Institute, but I heard a –

MS. WILEY: Oh, yeah. I know her.

MR. WARREN: Yeah, you know her? So she did a presentation for something called the Strategic Leadership Institute, which several of us are part of in New Mexico, and she said this. So if you haven't heard this, I think you'll find this very interesting. And this is proven by their research, and so I think it should be guiding all of us, especially who are doing any kind of calls out to kind of encourage – or door knocking – and that is, you know, that the strategy we think of – and then us, we've tended to use this in our native communities – is, you know, your people fought so hard for your right to vote; you should go vote. But that's actually not going to be the most effective message out there. And so here's what has been proven to be effective and we should test it out – four pieces. Public records show you voted in the last election. So public records show you voted in the last election. Everyone else is voting, so you need to vote, too –

MR. : Right.

MR. WARREN: -- or some variation on that, right? We see that you're the type of person who votes, and what is your plan? So do you plan to vote too early? Do you plan to vote by mail? You know, those kinds of pieces as part of an outreach to individuals are proven to be effective by the research. So if you hadn't heard those, those are ones that all of us should be using.

Now specific to tribal communities and those engagement strategies, one of the key pieces for us is tribal leadership. You know, we have 22 federally-recognized tribes; each of them either has a governor or president. We've seen that when those individuals are directly involved and excited and they're sending that message out to their community, not just sort of a perfunctory you should vote, but really excited about it, that has a huge ripple effect, you know, in people being really engaged, because they also tend to put people in place who are willing to actually do the voter registration, GOTV stuff.

The second one is having native candidates – and I already talked about that – finding that key issue that actually hits the ground. In Mexico, this happens to be in – and Secretary Shendo knows this – is infrastructure. So in a lot of urban areas, you would never think about this. You take it for granted that you turn on the water – you know, the faucet and water comes out. You flip the light switch, electricity comes on. We have a number of native communities in New Mexico that have no running water, no electricity, no sewer, no passable roads. And so going out there and saying, because of your act of voting, because of your elected officials, we can actually say X number of millions of dollars have gone to tribal communities and will continue to flow for these types of projects. So that's it.

And I think making a positive message is what we need to emphasize: You can make a difference. So we can point to the fact that during the administration when Benny (sp) and I

served, 70 pieces of positive tribal legislation were enacted by the governor and the legislature. And that's directly because of native voter participation in the process.

MS. WILEY: Yes, please.

Q: Hi, Jon Gould from the Children's Alliance in Washington state. Alvin, you cited research that I was not familiar with, but it was exactly along the lines of the question I wanted to ask – (inaudible). My question is about that interaction at the door, when you're door-knocking, and the reality that I think in this election we're going to see a huge amount of targeting of underrepresented communities, and not always a messenger who's from that community.

So you know, with respect to the great organizing that you're doing, in many low-income and communities of color we're going to frankly see this sort of influx – (chuckles) – of folks from the outside and who are not necessarily from that community, and who I believe need to be really trained in the sort of sophistication of what happens in interactions at the door.

One of the things that I've heard from folks who know more about this work than I do is that a compelling message in low-income communities and communities of color is to collectivize it and not to focus on, you should vote, because that's very pedantic and very top-down; but rather to say, communities who vote in high numbers get resources. And that's a reality.

So you know, you point across town and you say, those folks who have better schools, better books, better sidewalks, better community facilities, get those because they vote in high numbers. Your community needs you to vote so that this community gets resources. So you're invoking this, do it for your community – because people like to help their neighbors. People see themselves as part of a community.

And so I'm asking both of you – and Maya, you as well – would you add that to that list of four tips? Do you think that is compelling? And I really don't know if it is or not, but I think we vitally need to get away from the – I'm convinced that we get – need to get away from the, you haven't voted before – (chuckles) – so you need to vote, because that's very negative. So what are – what are your thoughts about that idea that – so the, do it for your community and do it so your community get the resources that other communities have historically gotten?

MR. LOPEZ-RENDON: Yeah. And I think the other thing that's very valuable is people from the community telling their folks from the community that. So the parachuting issue – yeah, I mean, I think that's a problem. Texas is not a swing state, so we don't get all the parachuters. But now Texas is gaining some kind of momentum out there in the world as a place that can change and shift, so that could be an issue.

But yeah, I definitely agree that if you can relate to where you live – I mean, one of the communities that we work in is around Kelly Air Force Base – (inaudible) – huge pollution problem in this community, big health problems. And the community has come together to organize around that issue. So yeah, I mean, I think that's something that they could relate to.

But I think the real importance of it is, like, who's giving the message at the door is very important.

MR. WARREN: Yeah. I'd agree. I think what I shared from (Jennifer ?) is probably the best response. But what I would add to it is, I think that message is effective if you couple it with the individual actions, because unfortunately what I would see happen – my community, others – is if you overemphasize that a community that votes, you know, in high numbers, X, Y, Z, you might lose folks who say, oh, well, OK, others are going to do that. You know, yeah, that's true, but that – I don't need – I don't necessarily need to show up because other people are going to show up. So I would couple those two.

MS. WILEY: Yeah. I do think what's important to what you're pointing to – I agree with both comments, right? It's messenger matters, and the legitimacy of leadership – (chuckles) – matters a lot in engagement. I think what's important to (lift up ?) that you're suggesting is, it's important for people to see that there's a positive outcome to their engagement, right?

So part of what you're saying is, you know, if people see some actual movement that they might get from participating, that actually changes their willingness to participate, because a lot of times the conversations – and this is true even in my own neighborhood – is why should I vote? It won't make a difference. Right? And you know, frankly that is people's experience. You know, so there are people who do vote, and they don't see change.

So that was part of my question about participation, because I don't think it's about just showing up on voting day, right? So to the point about organizing early and – (chuckles) – thinking about what kinds of things people want to get, what kinds of solutions are important – whether it's water and sewer or – you know, or just having someone who's going to represent the interest of the community makes a huge difference, too. But it's solutions-oriented. It's solutions-oriented. So I do think the solutions part does matter. If it's – if it's solutions that comes in the form of, if you just do this the whole world will change for you, nobody of color's going to buy that. (Laughter.) Because we've been living on this planet a little too long for that.

MR. : Thank you.

MS. : All right. Well, I want to thank you all. We're over time, but I appreciate the participation of the audience. And I really want to appreciate the panel. Your work is fantastic. And I think we're all appreciative. (Applause.)

(END)