

Nonprofit Advocacy

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Opening music

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WGVU's Jennifer Moss:

You're listening to Tilting the Earth's Praxis, a weekly discussion of important issues that impact civil society. With host Salvatore Alaimo.

Salvatore Alaimo

I want to welcome our guests for this week's episode of Tilting the Earth's Axis. We have Pat Libby. She's an author and consultant joining us from San Diego. She's the author of The Empowered Citizen's Guide The Lobbying Strategy Handbook in Cases in Nonprofit Management and has many years of experience, leading advocacy and lobbying campaigns. Welcome, Pat.

Pat Libby

Nice to be here.

Salvatore Alaimo

For a GVSU alumni, we have Adrienne Goodstall. She's the chief engagement and advocacy officer at Mel Trotter Ministries here in Grand Rapids, Michigan. And she got her master's in public administration focusing on nonprofit leadership and management. Welcome, Adrienne.

Adrienne Goodstall

Hi. Thanks for having me.

Salvatore Alaimo

Last but not least, we have Tracy Hamlet, executive director of MOCA, a nonprofit here in Grand Rapids, serving people with intellectual and developmental disabilities in West Michigan. And Tracy also got her master's in public administration here at Grand Valley with a focus on nonprofit leadership. Welcome, Tracy.

Tracey Hamlet

Thanks. It's an honor to be here.

Salvatore Alaimo

So I think we'll start with trying to give our listeners this. This current state of nonprofit advocacy. Pat, can you give us some foundational grounding into what you're seeing out there, the good, the bad and ugly of advocacy trends? What can you say about what's going on today in nonprofit advocacy?

Pat Libby

Well, I'm really sad to say that not much is happening. And if you look at the statistics, you'll see that today it's really less than 3% of nonprofits. And I'm talking about five of 23 corporations are actively engaged in lobbying and advocacy campaigns. And it's hugely frustrating for me. Which is why I wrote *The Empowered Citizen's Guide*. I think a lot of the reason why people aren't proactive is because they're embarrassed. They don't know how advocacy works. Say they're nervous about asking a legislator for anything. And if you think about what makes a nonprofit, a nonprofit that we're driven by service to community, to help people, to uplift the world in myriad ways, every single nonprofit, in my opinion, could be engaged in lobbying and advocacy. So there's not much going on. I look at and I was thinking about this the other day because from my April blog, I think I'm going to write a blog about how many of the social supports that Americans receive during COVID have now disappeared. So food stamps have decreased for people, the SNAP program and all kinds of other supports, health care supports. And it's crazy because the last time I looked, inflation is up. When I go to the supermarket. I can't believe what my bill looks like. So I'm really puzzled as to why most nonprofits in America, human service organizations, aren't beating down the doors of Congress, saying, stop, stop, stop cutting, stop cutting at a time when people need support. So I'm frustrated. But I'm always optimistic, too. And I guess that's why I've been doing this podcasts and book talks and trying to convince people that, you know, I always say you don't have to be a veterinarian to own a pet and you don't have to understand all the intricacies of the legislative process to, to lobby. Any person can learn this stuff. It's really easy. You just have to be passionate about your cause, just like you are about your pet.

Salvatore Alaimo

What are the implications for civil society if the nonprofit sector does not have a voice in the human experience in this country?

Pat Libby

Huge. I mean, you're literally talking about people starving. Look at the epidemic that we're having of people who are becoming homeless. And it's just it's just appalling. One thing, I'm out in sunny San Diego where I live, and I can tell you an uplifting story about we have an organization that's called Serving Seniors. They're fantastic organization. They provide social support and recreation. They build affordable housing. They do all kinds of things for seniors. And they worked with this local task force on the homeless, and they identified that one in five homeless people in San Diego are 55 or older, and they surveyed their own population that they serve. And they found that there were a huge percentage that were paying 50% or more of their income for rent. And so they went to the county and they got the county to agree to institute a pilot program where they would provide a shallow rent subsidy of 3 to \$500 a month to the landlords of seniors to make sure that seniors weren't playing bingo with the money. Right? So that should help 200 seniors, approximately. But the implication so writ large is that you're going to see many seniors, many low income families choosing between rent and food and all kinds of necessities in order to live. And that should not be happening in the

United States of America. So it's it's a real it's a huge problem for society if nonprofits are really embracing their missions by engaging in advocacy and lobbying.

Salvatore Alaimo

Yeah. So with that, let's, let's go to you, Adrienne, because I find it fascinating that advocacy is in your title. And I don't, I was telling Tracey this earlier when she came. I don't remember seeing that that often. So can you give us a sense of what you do at Mel Trotter Ministries within the space of advocacy?

Adrienne Goodstall

I can. And first, can I just give a plug to you? Amen. For saying all that you've said about the importance of the nonprofit's role to advocate for the people that they serve. Right? We are the ones who can share the stories, who have the data. That can be the resource for legislators that are making change. We need to be their resource. And so you're right, we don't do it enough. And homelessness is on the rise. So that's my little plug. Yeah, advocacy for us at Mel Trotter. We have been an organization for 123 years. We have served the homeless community for that many years. And in our in our Grand Rapids area, we've always done advocacy, but not with an intentionality. And I think what often happens when I talk to other nonprofits is this misnomer about the role of advocacy and nonprofits. Right? And I think that they feel that they cannot do advocacy work going and meeting with their legislators because it doesn't fit into the nonprofits that they might be in jeopardy of losing their 501c3 status in all of that. So I think that that's education is important for maybe smaller nonprofits to make sure that not only and I see this all the time, not only is it a role that we need to play, but we are the best ones to do the advocacy work. We're the boots on the ground. We are the ones that have a role to make change. And so, so that kind of came about at Mel Trotter, because I am very passionate about, you know, doing this type of work personally on my own personal social justice issues, but certainly professionally around homelessness and poverty. And so about three years ago, I presented an ideal role to the CEO and said, this is this is an arm that we're not doing. And I think we need to do it, especially as we're seeing in our community that homelessness has been on the rise for the last ten years and we only continue to see more and more barriers for people moving out of poverty and homelessness. So we have to have advocacy at every single level for those agencies that are working with the homeless community. And so I presented it to say, I want to take this on. Let me help build out what an advocacy arm and plan might look like so that we're again, it's about passion, but you have to have some strategy involved. You have to be aware of what's coming down the pipe for policy change. You have to be friends with your legislators so that you can tap them on the shoulder when things are coming into play and you can't do it alone. So, three years ago, we built this role and I lead our advocacy efforts. We have a really solid advocacy plan. We're not only do we sign on to letters of support from the state and local level, but we're also writing our own letters and having other agencies sign on for it. So it's important.

Salvatore Alaimo

You said, you said the key word plan.

Adrienne Goodstall

Yeah.

Salvatore Alaimo

So I'm curious. In addition to advocacy advocacy plan, is that connected to the organization's overarching strategic plan?

Adrienne Goodstall

It is, yes. I kind of lead that. There's there's it rolls up into everything. Right? Because you can't have change without advocacy. So when we have a strategic plan that says we want to help eliminate, you know, the housing crisis by adding X, Y, Z, or we want to help with the workforce development and stable employment, then that all, all of those strategic plan has to have the advocacy efforts that are pushing it from behind. And so that's really the role that I have. And, and again, I don't do it alone. I make sure that I'm connecting with all of our other statewide coalitions that are doing the work because there's more number and powers. Right? And I also do think really important, this is what we this it, in my opinion, where we lack when it comes to advocacy is we don't have enough lived experience at the table doing the advocacy work. I have not walked in people's shoes. I cannot tell the story the same way that somebody who has experience homelessness and hunger. And so we need to make sure that when we're doing the advocacy that we are bringing along those people that have lived experience.

Pat Libby

I want, I want to respond to one thing that you said. Everything that you've said is, is resonating with me. But one thing in particular that you said that I think is so important, and that is that most 501 C-3 corporations don't understand the legal parameters that they have for lobbying. And it's 100% legal for most 501 C-3 corporations, the ones that aren't religious institutions who engage in lobbying and advocacy. And I want to say, I have a lot of free videos on my website because this is what I preach all day long. And my website address is very complicated. It's PatLibby.com. That's what it is. And you can go on there and you can. There are videos about the rules. There are videos about why your nonprofits should engage in lobbying so that you can share them with your staff and your board and everything is free.

Adrienne Goodstall

That's great.

Pat Libby

All these resources are free. So have at it. Have fun. Go lobby.

Adrienne Goodstall

I will. I will send that along.

Salvatore Alaimo

That's great. Thanks for that plug. I'm going to go check out those videos. So, Tracy, with MOKA, I happen to know that you guys went several decades without engaging in advocacy, but something happened. Maybe you can tell us what the trigger was. What sparked MOKA to dive into the advocacy space?

Tracey Hamlet

Sure. We had a founding executive director, and he retired and we refreshed our strategic plan. And part of that was to deal with a direct care workforce shortage issue, because that's such a huge issue for our organization and for the people that we support. And within that new strategy, we learned that advocacy has really got to be a key part of that. We found ourselves sort of forced ourselves on to a state coalition that was advocating for wages. While they don't allow us to officially be a member, they allow us to help pay for the, the lobbyist and the PR firm and sit at the table and give our voice as a provider agency. So we are there every month giving our very, I think, very important voice around why if we advocate for that, that will cause a problem for providers to actually implement it because it creates barriers to implementation. And we're able to say that because I think, as Adrienne points out, we're boots on the ground. We understand how things work. We understand how legislation actually does affect, impacts people in a real way. So we have been really effective, engaging and numbers to get our voice across as well as strategizing with other people so that we can advocate more effectively, get to the right people, do it in a team because our resources are limited. As a nonprofit, we don't have, you know, a staff just for this. It's myself with a little support from our HR Director and we so getting with other people and doing a coalition I think has been really effective for us.

Salvatore Alaimo

Yeah. As Adrienne said, the strength in numbers, you know, so maybe we can make the argument a case that there are many, many nonprofits are small, most of them are small. Maybe they don't have the knowledge, skills or the resources to engage in this activity. But we probably could push on them and argue that at minimum join a coalition. Right? So at least you're having a voice with peer like organizations. You have common complaints, common issues, challenges. So I, I am aware of what you were saying, Pat, that, you know, part of it is this lack of understanding of what organizations can and can't do. I'm going to bring up another issue that I think is in the mix here that might be keeping it at that woeful 3% that you mentioned when we began our discussion. And I wonder how many directors and boards are afraid of what their stakeholders might think of them if they take resources and, you know, quote, divert them from the program and use them towards this activity, which may not show immediate results. Is that an issue or a problem? Is there a concern about what people are going to think about us if we engage in lobbying or advocacy?

Pat Libby

I think that there is a misperception that it's going to cost a lot of money. And the. And it doesn't have to cost anything other than your transportation to and from whomever you're lobbying and the time that your staff or your board spend doing the research or being actively engaged in lobbying. So, one of the things and, and I should go back in

time because sound knows I'm a recovering academic. So that's how we know each other originally. And my original books are textbooks. So, *The Empowered Citizen's Guide* is the first book that I've ever written for the general public. And so it's my favorite because it's, it's fun. I've been told it's very funny, which makes me happy when people tell me that. And it's just it's a really, really simple ten step guide. You can follow the bouncing ball. And I wrote it to walk people off the ledge of a fear. And I say, Yeah. And just I mean, a poodle could do this. A poodle could read this book and figure out how to do this. Not really. But anyone who owns poodles are

Adrienne Goodstall

Poodles are actually really smart dogs. They probably could.

Everyone

(Laughing)

Pat Libby

Yeah, exactly. So, yeah. So to me and there's a there's a case in the book that is it's really lovely. And it shows it doesn't cost anything other than your transportation and all the things that you've talked about, you know, your, your knowledge of the issue, your experience with it, or you bring people, if you're an agency director and you don't have direct experience yourself with a particular issue, like perhaps you're running a homeless serving organization but you've never have been homeless yourself. That doesn't disqualify you can bring a lot of people from your community, or if you are representing people who have a certain disease or, you know, disability or ability, you bring them along. So it's you know, she said it's part of a coalition. It's a community. It's everyone in it together.

Adrienne Goodstall

One interesting thing that I think we hear often with when it comes to lobbying, not necessarily advocacy, but it when it comes to lobbying, I think there's a fear and it's a fear because it's it's a lack of knowledge, quite honestly, is that there's a political piece to the lobbying. So when you start thinking about doing lobbying versus advocacy, then there's this automatic thought that you're taking one political side versus the other. And for us, that is kind of this, you know, how do we do more than just being passionate about an issue where we're kind of pushing the threshold of lobbying? I spend a whole week in D.C. and I would argue what I was doing was more lobbying. I mean, there were certain bills that were coming down, and I was advocating for rights specific things, but I was bipartisan about it. And so I think that that is one of the kind of pieces, I think, to, again, around lack of education. When people hear lobbying, they think political, when they hear advocacy, they think passion go for it. And I think non-profits and especially boards get a little bit gun shy when they think about the lobbying arm of the work.

Salvatore Alaimo

What about you, Tracey? Did you have to massage this into the organization culturally or convince hearts and minds. Was that a hard sell?

Tracey Hamlet

It was an easy sell.

Salvatore Alaimo

It was, ok.

Tracey Hamlet

It was I think that the board had been waiting for it. So it was an easy sell with the board. What the surprises for us were that a lot of our stakeholders engaged more with us when we were advocating. It was, it was another way to offer people to engage. And for people with developmental disabilities, learning to lead, learning to be their self-advocate is a really important part of their journey for just, just becoming a leader for themselves. And so helping those folks, it was sort of a natural transition to help them advocate but also were advocating. So doing that together has been really empowering I think for our whole organization. We've had we've seen a lot of value come back. Some donors actually donate more because they get excited that we're advocating.

Salvatore Alaimo

And how important would the three of you, how important do you feel that the grassroots advocacy piece is in terms of that basic old school, get out into the community, conduct outreach, educate your constituency, your community on the issues, on who you are and what you do. Is that something that your organizations engage in?

Tracey Hamlet

Yeah, I think it's essential. I think I think I think people want it and need it and engage with it. And if it's not grassroots, I don't think it's as effective.

Adrienne Goodstall

Not as authentic. I would agree with that. I think it's grassroots. I think. And I love that. Right? It's, it's you know, we often say as providers that we want to be the voice for the voiceless. And quite honestly, I can't stand that saying if I'm being truthful because everybody has a voice and it's how do we equip and empower people to use their voice? So I love that you said that this is actually, you've seen that this actually helps the people that you're serving become leaders in their own advocates.

Tracey Hamlet

It's fun to watch. It's fun to watch them grow.

Salvatore Alaimo

And it makes me think and Pat, I'd like you to weigh in on this, given that we're all drowning in information overload with 24/7 news cycles and social media, isn't it even more important to engage in grassroots advocacy to try to clear through the noise and clutter? If you're a nonprofit and get the message out to who you are and what you do and how you serve.

Pat Libby

Absolutely. And I actually think the whole process should start during a campaign year. So in other words, it doesn't matter if it's city council or state government. Non-profits should have candidate debates, which is perfectly legal for organizations to do, and they should bring people in the community together to hear what the candidates have to say about issues that are facing the people they serve and people in their community. I also want to mention a fabulous organization called Alliance for Justice. It's a national nonprofit, and they have something called the Boulder Advocacy Arm, and they provide this is my favorite word, "free," resources. So, if nonprofits are saying, gee, I want to know what the rules are for candidate debate, like what kind of questions can I ask? Or We want to send out a questionnaire to candidates. We want to publish the results on the website. And I don't know if I'm coloring outside the lines or I can do this. You can actually pick up the phone and call Alliance for Justice and a real live human being will answer your questions. Yay! We love them and they'll provide all of that support to nonprofits. So I think and just having candidates come and see, wow, there are 300 people who are all voting age, you know, adults who are sitting here tonight. Then when that person gets elected and you want to go and ask them for something they have in the back of their magnificent brains, oh, you're the organization that had that debate and I got elected and you're representing 300 people. One plus one equals two. What can I do for you? It really helps to smooth the way.

Salvatore Alaimo

And, and if legislators, whether at the state or the federal level, have helped our nonprofit organization or championed our cause, should we not recognize them? Should we not thank them? Should we not give them a plaque or invite them to our annual dinner? Isn't that part of the relationship building?

Pat Libby

Oh, yeah, definitely. Take photos. Put the photos on your website. Yeah. All that good stuff. I know for us we're really intentional about, you know, I think.

Adrienne Goodstall

And so we for all of our, we have a pretty new slate of city commissions here in Grand Rapids. And so immediately I reached out to every one of them, doesn't matter what party line you come from and invited them to come to the mission and learn about our organization and invite them right to our Meet the Mission luncheon. And I think that's super important because it is it's about and I see this, it's one thing going to their office, whether it's state, local or federal, but it's quite another to have them come to your office and to actually see the work that you're doing and then invite them so that they can be engaged, you know, invite them to the lunches, invite them to the dinners. And so we're really intentional about doing that. And it's made a world of difference. And it and it also shows to that it's not about a party. It's about a cause. I don't care what party you're from, if you're fighting for the cause that impacts the people that we serve, I want you to be in my corner. Right? So that's kind of how we approach things.

Tracey Hamlet

We've found a similar success. We've invited new legislators out to visit our group home and meet the individuals we serve because there's a lot of lack of understanding of what happens in our programs and the types of people who get services. And it's been extremely helpful. Then when you see them later, they really not just remember you and your organization, but they remember they feel you in a in a real way. So that's been extremely helpful.

Salvatore Alaimo

I want to go back to the obstacles and the fears and the trepidations of engaging in this activity. And one of them that I've read about is nonprofits, particularly who receive government funding, shy away from engaging in advocacy because they may feel it may come off as conflict of interest, or they won't to rock the boat or ruin the relationship if they're being contracted out for services or something like that. But I did read a study where the nonprofits that received government funding were the most successful in engaging in advocacy because the relationship was already established. And the government agency, whether it be state or federal, was interested in hearing the challenges and successes of that organization. So what do we do about that? How do we get the word out that if you get government funding, you still can do this?

Pat Libby

Right. I think you're right. I read that study as well. Sal. And I think it goes back to how do you fund lobbying and advocacy activities. And so basically, you can fund it through all kinds of ways. Private foundations can give grants that are for operating support that you can use that money for lobbying community foundations are similar to operating five or 23 corporations, so they can directly fund lobbying campaigns. Any kind of membership dues or donations or money from special events can go to lobbying campaigns. So the only kind of money that you can't use for lobbying is government money. And you know, you can't use money from the state to lobby the feds or the city or anything. So just government money is off the table, but everything else is on the table. So I think that that's where that misperception comes from. But just remember, you can't use government money to lobby and you're all set with pretty much anything else other than, you know, some foundations. And I'm really at a crusade to try to address this right in their letters to grantees, "None of this money can be used for lobbying." And the reason they do that, this is a really technical term, is because they're stupid heads. There's no reason for them to do that.

Salvatore Alaimo

Are we all aware of that? Have you heard stupid heads before that?

Adrienne Goodstall and Tracey Hamlet

(Laughing)

Tracey Hamlet

We have not.

Salvatore Alaimo

Okay, so that's a new technical term that we've learned today.

Pat Libby

Yeah. Okay. Yeah, because there's, there's no legal reason why they can't do that. And it's such an important money, especially the operating funds, to advancing any organization's mission.

Adrienne Goodstall

I think Sal, too, when you go back to kind of the civil society, I mean, for 100 years or however long it is, the government leans on the nonprofits to do the work that they cannot do. They fund it so they can do the work that they cannot do, which is the way that it should be. So I would imagine that the government, when we talk about civil society and how do non-profits and government come together to for social impact while they fund it? And there they would want the nonprofits to be at the tables to make sure that changes are happening. So the dollars that they're funding to make the impact actually has an impact. So, you know, I mean, it kind of all fits together when you think about it.

Pat Libby

I would agree. Right. Absolutely. And even after, you know, sometimes you're successful at passing legislation and it's you wonder if the it starts to get implemented and then you say, no, no, no, no, no, this is not happening in the way that we intended. So you've got to go back and talk to the administrators and say, can we interpret it this way or do we have to go back and have a legislative fix in order for the program to work properly? So those kinds of communications are really important.

Salvatore Alaimo

I want to build off that point and talk about the relationship between advocacy and direct service, because it strikes me that and I'm a disclaimer here, this is going to be a generalization and maybe it's unfair, but I detect that there's a service orientation with most particularly social human services, nonprofits, United States, where the goal is to serve and to serve sometimes as many as possible. And we're dealing with very difficult social problems that have been around for a long time and probably will be around longer than us. We're going to be gone and they're still going to be here so we can keep serving. And I'm not suggesting we stop that, but where are we really going to get systemic change by providing a direct service on a daily basis or changing policy? So I wonder if what I would like to hear your thoughts on that.

Tracey Hamlet

Well, MOKA was founded based on an some legislative advocacy that happened in in the sixties and seventies to help people who lived in institutions leave and be part of community. So our services are all community based and we would not exist as a community based service for people without legislative advocacy. So that history is still it still speaks to us today. We still need to advocate further. I think it's I mean, just to go

to your point, I, I think it's critical that we are advocating, but it's critical that I lost my train of thought. I just kind of drifted off.

Salvatore Alaimo

That's all right. Well, maybe, maybe this is where it was. Is, is there a symbiotic relationship between advocacy and service delivery? In other words, do they inform each other?

Tracey Hamlet

They absolutely do. And it really is like a movement that helps change and move it forward for the community and for us without the service for the people we serve, which is that frontline staff that provide that service, that advocacy has to be centered around that right now because that's the that gives a core risk to our services.

Adrienne Goodstall

So yeah, no, I agree with that. I think it's, it's kind of like the cart before the horse and the horse before the cart type of analogy. You have to have advocacy change to make the impact of the direct services that you're providing. For us, it's around affordable housing, and right now we're advocating for source of income protection because the people that we serve are not able to find housing with their housing choice vouchers because landlords discriminate against it. So that's a state level policy change that needs to take place because it directly impacts the work that we're doing of trying to move people out of homelessness. They kind of go and coincide. The issue, I guess. I don't know. It's an issue and it can be discouraging. At the same time, we have been working on the statewide coalition for almost a year and it was introduced to legislation twice before. So it's you know, any sort of change is like moving a boulder up a mountain and you have to stay committed to making the change. So I think that's where sometimes direct service providers go. Change is never going to happen. So I'm just going to give up on it and I'm going to keep doing the direct work, right? And it's like, yes, you have to keep doing the direct work because that's what we need to do to serve the people. But don't give up on making the change that will eventually hopefully make your work a little bit easier. So it's kind of these two pronged approach.

Salvatore Alaimo

And I think in in the culture, in a culture of instant gratification, right, we get food right away, information. We want instant results. I think you're right. I think that's an interesting dichotomy with the service delivery. It's more tangible. You could see it, right? You can hear it. You can feel it. Sometimes you can smell it. You know, it's tangible and it's immediate. But to your point, Adrienne, the, the fruits of the labor of around advocacy, you may not realize for years, but, but I'm hearing you say you still need to do it, though.

Pat Libby

Yeah, yeah. I want to challenge that, though. I want to challenge a couple things. When I was a professor and I was teaching students how to lobby, my students passed many, many bills in California in a single legislative session. And there were significant

laws. Everything having to do with increasing the dollars that foster youth could receive from 18 from age 18, when they termed out previously to age 26, they passed that in a single legislative session, increasing fines and fees on nursing homes that were and tightening up the liability standards they passed laws mandating background check on for any coach of any youth sports team. So financial and sexual abuse background checks on and on and on and on and on. I mean, I could go on for hours about all the laws they passed in a single legislative session. So sometimes it's a long slog and it takes several years, but other times it's not because it really makes sense. Now there are things like. Gun violence laws that seem like they never get passed. So, there are some things that can really drive you crazy. But other things you really can move the ball forward on relatively quickly. The other thing I want to challenge you on is this whole idea that it's principally a human service sector obligation or mission related thing because. Right now. I'll just give you an example. I'm working with dentists. And we had a meeting yesterday that talked about dentists in San Diego. And I don't know if this is all over California, but at least here are desperate for dental assistants, registered dental assistants. Okay. So for some reason, California has this law that if you are a dental assistant and you're in Michigan and you've been a dental assistant for, whatever, ten years, 15 years, five years, and you decide, I'm going to move to California because I want to be in the sunshine. So you move to San Diego. You have to do at 300 hours, close to 300 hours of basically pro bono on the job training experience before you're even eligible to take the licensing exam in California, which is different than the national licensing exam. And that makes no sense at all. Right? And I would bet you and I'm not a battered woman, I leave that to my husband. But I would bet you a dollar that as soon as the California Dental Association goes up to Sacramento and proposes that the law be changed so that the dental assistants in California can be recognized if they've taken the national dental certification exam. I think that will, that will pass and that will fly. So that's going to affect a lot of people's lives because it will affect the employment prospects of these dental assistants. Right? They won't be going to work at Target because they can't be dental assistants. It will affect the ability to provide care for people all over California. So, it will help the dentist from having a nervous breakdown because they don't have enough dental assistants, you know, to help them. So, it's it can go everywhere. You think about I always talk about, like, symphonies, you know...

Salvatore Alaimo

The arts.

Pat Libby

Sure. Symphony concerts, you know, everyone is basically, you know, Medicare eligible. Well, where is the next generation of musicians and audience members going to come from if this kind of musical education doesn't happen in public schools? So that's not a social service issue. That's an arts educational issue. So it really can't, when you talk about civil society, it's all over. It's it's every single aspect of society and, and and everything that nonprofits touch.

Salvatore Alaimo

So, I want to close by setting up, I guess, and maybe making the case and building off of the wonderful points all three of you made on our show today as to why nonprofits should really, seriously consider engaging in this activity of advocacy if they haven't. I read somewhere that at, uh, at the state level, for every state legislative member, there are nine lobbyists, 9 to 1 ratio. In D.C., it's 13 to 1. And we know that most of them come from the business world. So, if nonprofits do not step up to the plate and they remain on the sidelines, our legislative representatives are only going to be hearing from that audience. So, I think that kind of sets the stage for why, why we should do this. But moving moving forward here, what do the three of you see? Let's close out. What's the future of advocacy. Is it promising? Is it bleak? What do you what do you see as the things that we should be doing? What are some of the next steps? We'll start with you, Tracey.

Tracey Hamlet

I think that advocacy is necessary. I'm hoping that more nonprofits then 3%. I was a little shocked to learn that will understand that it's necessary. I do think coalitions are going to become more helpful to nonprofits because it does help you engage. You are pulled as an executive director in so many different directions. If you have a group of people you can work with, I think that's helpful. I think it's absolutely necessary. And I'm grateful for Pat Levy's work and, and for this podcast.

Adrienne Goodstall

Um, I agree. I think that I was shocked by the 3%, you know, because I think less than 3% nationwide. I mean, I think that, that's you know, I know that in maybe it's because of the role that I have. I see that there's more advocacy efforts that take place within my little bubble, if you will. You know, I in the last month, I have gone to three different events where it's a full day of advocacy efforts on the Hill in Lansing, and hundreds of people were there. And so, to me, I see it differently, but that's from my lens. I do think that a big piece of it and this is why I want your book, because I'm going to share it, is education. I think we need to those that are doing the advocacy work in the nonprofit sector or any other sector for that matter, need to be that kind of advocate for the other nonprofits to say, Hey, you can do this, here's your role, here's some resources, right? So we can rally around maybe some of those smaller grassroots advocacy or nonprofits that might not feel comfortable doing it. So to get start getting that 3% number higher. But I am encouraged from what I see on my end that there are people out there. And I would say I feel like even over the last couple of years there's been this shift of like, we're not going to be silent anymore for whatever cause it is that you are passionate about. I hope that it's done in a civil way, but I do feel, and especially the younger generation I feel, are not willing to sit on the sidelines and be quiet. And so how do we help to educate them, to do advocacy, even if they're I mean, regardless if they're part of a nonprofit or business, but on their own to do it in a way that's impactful and effective. And so I do feel like, you know, if we continue to keep moving that way, then we're in the right direction.

Pat Libby

Well, that's my hope. And it's really a hope is I want foundations to really start taking the lead on this and to start empowering the grantees to engage in lobbying and to run workshops that tell people how they can do it and to really empower them. So that's my that's my dream. I'm kind of like Martin Luther King. I don't know if I'm going to get there, but I'm going to work on something like that because I really want people to have the tools to do this. And to feel empowered by it.

Adrienne Goodstall

That's interesting. I'll just sub. Sorry. Just one last point. Like, that's really interesting, Pat, to think about putting kind of the, you know, the cart, if you will, in the hands of the foundations that are supplying or providing the money to the grantees that are doing the work. I mean, I think of our foundations locally and I'm thinking, Hmm, I don't know. Right. Like, if they're if our foundations would step up to that. I think every foundation is different. But, you know, some foundations just want to be the people who give the money and you do the work. And that is a heavy lift, I think, for the foundation. I think it's a great idea. So I am going to champion you to make that happen as your Martin Luther dream, because I think it's a great idea if we can really get the foundations to rally behind it.

Salvatore Alaimo

And I would say, at minimum, that foundations who publicly say on their websites they're for systemic or social change. Right? So they would be the low hanging fruit group to start with. Right. They're already saying they're for it. But we know foundation giving is limited. So what's the next step? And I think pad's giving us the clue. The next step is to start looking at systemic or social change through advocacy.

Salvatore Alaimo

Yeah. So I'll just we'll close on this other point, too. I want to build off something Adrienne said earlier, and I understand what you were saying, that this is political and people sometimes shy away from political stuff. But what I would say is the very founding of both of your nonprofit organizations was a political act. The very act of going out into the community and raising money and asking for money is a political act. This is just another one on the list. So with that, I want to thank our guests, Pat Libby, author and consultant. If you haven't already, consider reading *The Empowered Citizen's Guide*, *The Lobbying Strategy Handbook*, which I already have a copy of and *Cases in Nonprofit Management*. And we have Adrienne Goodall, Chief Engagement and advocacy officer for Mel Trotter Ministries, and Tracy Hamlet, Executive Director for MOCA. Thank you all for a wonderful discussion and thank you for being on our show today.

Adrienne

Thank you.

Tracey

Thank you.

Salvatore Alaimo

So, stay tuned and join us next week for another episode of Tilting the Earth's Praxis.

Closing music

WGVU's Jennifer Moss

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Closing music fades.