

## You First Podcast - Your Voice, Your Vote! Episode 4: Understanding the Disability Vote

**Keith Casebonne:** You're listening to "You First, the Disability Rights Florida Podcast." On this episode of "Your Voice, Your Vote," let's talk with voting and election experts to better understand the disability vote.

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**Keith:** Hi, I'm Keith.

**Maddie Crowley:** And I'm Maddie.

**Keith:** We're the hosts of You First. On last week's episode, we talked with Jazlyn from VoteRiders about intersectionality and the various obstacles folks with marginalized identities face when trying to vote.

**Maddie:** On today's episode, we're going to further focus in on the disability community and their access to vote, what barriers are up against the community's civic engagement, what trends we see in disabled voters, and what efforts are being made to make elections more accessible for all.

**Keith:** This is such a great two-part episode, first starting with insight from our guests Lisa Schur and Doug Kruse from Rutgers University, who do disability voting research. Then after that, we'll hear from Commissioner Tom Hicks from the Election Assistance Commission. We really hope you enjoy the episode.

**Maddie:** Hi, Doug. Hi, Lisa. Thank you so much for being on the podcast today. Why don't y'all introduce yourself, tell us a bit about what you do, and how y'all got into this work?

**Lisa Schur:** Hi. I'm Lisa Schur. I'm a Rutgers professor. I've been doing this work for over 30 years.

**Doug Kruse:** I'm Doug Kruse. I'm also a Rutgers professor. I just happened to be married to Lisa.

[laughter]

**Doug:** She's a political scientist. I'm an economist, but we manage to have a happy marriage nonetheless.

**Maddie:** [laughs]

**Doug:** We do a lot of work together on disability issues. We got into this because I actually have a personal experience. We were hit by a drunk driver, just after I'd started at Rutgers. That gave me a spinal cord injury. I'm a paraplegic now.

Lisa ended up switching her dissertation topic to disability and political participation. I did and now do a lot of my work with Lisa on disability and employment as well as vote participation. We've managed to do a lot of research on those topics. It was motivated by personal experience and really opened our eyes to a lot of issues faced by people with disabilities.

**Lisa:** Coincidentally, the year of the crash was 1990, which is the same year that the ADA was passed.

**Maddie:** Wow.

**Lisa:** Things were happening. When our eyes were opened to disability issues, it was like, "OK, we need to look at the ADA. We need to look at political participation. There are so many issues that are important."

**Maddie:** It sounds like all of this, how you got into this and y'all's history together, it all coalesced at the same time, which is pretty interesting. Could you talk a little bit about some of the research that you do, some of the focuses of your work together at Rutgers?

**Doug:** As I mentioned, we do a lot of research on disability and political participation, especially focusing on voter turnout. Really, at the time that we started on this, no one was doing research on disability and voting. It was just not a topic that any political scientist or anybody else was paying much attention to.

We're really glad that now there are a lot more people and a lot more researchers involved in this, political scientists and others. We're also glad that it's getting a lot more attention. We started, the politicians were really giving pretty much zero attention to disability. Now there is a lot more attention.

**Lisa:** When I first started and I was a young professor starting out, I would send in articles to political science journals about this. I kept getting rejected. They kept telling me, "Well, this is just this little niche. It's a niche thing. Maybe you should send it to a rehabilitation journal, but this isn't something that political science, the profession, is interested in."

That has changed. I'm glad about that. [laughs]

**Maddie:** Yeah, definitely. It's interesting. It's wonderful and long overdue that politicians and political science folks and just the United States at large has given more acknowledgement of the presence of folks with disabilities.

It's around 25 percent of Americans identify or can potentially identify as having a disability. It's not this niche community or niche topic that I think folks without disabilities may not realize.

I know you were talking about your work with voter turnout and things like that. Could you speak to the value in understanding marginalized communities' voting processes, voter turnout, their engagement, especially with your focus to the disability population?

**Doug:** It's very evident, at least to us, that it's extremely important to understand the perspectives of marginalized communities. One factor here is that the disability community is quite large.

[crosstalk]

**Doug:** ...as much as 25 percent of the population. We estimated, in 2020, that there were 38.3 million people with disabilities who would be eligible to vote in that election. One interesting thing about the disability numbers is that they're going up as the population is aging, on average.

Age is associated with disability. Those numbers are just going to get larger in the next couple decades.

**Lisa:** People with disabilities have been called the largest minority group in the United States. It's interesting, because it's a very heterogeneous. There are all different kinds of disabilities. There are all different ages, types, any kind of, cuts across race, gender, ethnicity, all of that.

People are starting to think that maybe there are some common issues that unite people with disabilities.

**Doug:** Then I'll just mention that, talking about being marginalized, people with disabilities have clearly been marginalized, well, heck, for thousands of years. Literally, thousands of years, and we've written a bit about this. In the past couple centuries, especially in the 1800s, there was a lot of pity of people with disabilities.

There was charity, but let's take care of them. Let's put them in institutions where we can take care of them. It really hasn't been until the last 50 years -- even 40 years -- with the rise of the Disability Rights Movement that people with disabilities are seen not as objects of pity or charity, but as full-fledged citizens, deserving of the rights that everyone has.

**Lisa:** Democracy doesn't work if people can't participate. If you're a marginalized group, often there are barriers to voting, and politicians can just ignore your needs. That's one reason for understanding people with disabilities and their voting, is because we want people with disabilities to be heard.

We want their needs to be recognized. We want politicians and the system to be responsive to people with disabilities.

**Maddie:** I hear you speaking to the importance of folks with disabilities being able to be civically engaged, being able to vote, be involved in the democratic process, and like you said, having their needs met. When thinking about that, what are some of the needs and things that folks with disabilities are being motivated to or by in order to get to out to vote?

What issues are mattering or matter most to the disability community that are getting folks involved with being civically engaged?

**Lisa:** Healthcare is an enormous issue. That is something, again, that cuts across people with all different types of disabilities, all different class backgrounds. The need for affordable healthcare, drug prices, having security in knowing that you're not going to be destitute if you have certain medical conditions.

That is something that really motivates people, a lot of people with disabilities, to get out there and vote. Another issue is employment, because people with disabilities have consistently had

low employment. There's issues like discrimination and other things that we don't have to get into in this podcast.

That is something also, people with disabilities tend to want a greater role in our government in helping people with disabilities secure employment and making it easier.

**Doug:** I'll just add to that, that as Lisa said, people with disabilities appear to be more motivated by healthcare and employment issues than other people, but a really interesting fact about the disability community is that the partisan split and the liberal-conservative split among people with disabilities almost exactly matches the split in the general population.

It's not that people with disabilities are all Democrats or all Republicans or anything like that. In fact, in their political preferences, in their voting, they really match very closely. We often make this point when we're making presentations on this, that that means that both Republicans and Democrats have an interest in turning out people with disabilities.

This is not a partisan issue. If you make it easier for people with disabilities to vote, that doesn't mean that it's going to favor one party or the other. It might favor having more people vote.

**Lisa:** More democracy. I just want to give a shoutout here to the Election Assistance Commission, because we've worked a lot with them and with Commissioner Hicks and others. That is a bipartisan commission that is dedicated to making it easier for citizens to vote, including citizens with disabilities. They funded a lot of our research.

**Maddie:** In your efforts to understand the disability community, you've come to the conclusions that it's very representative of the rest of the population, that they have interests that are similar to nondisabled folks, and you know a wide variety of things.

Can you maybe speak a little bit more to some trends, or observances, or other? I know you mentioned intersectionality and other identities that might be playing into the disability community.

Can you speak a little bit to or expand upon some of your research and some of the things that you found about the disability community and their voting participation and engagement?

**Lisa:** Despite the ADA and other laws like HAVA, there's been this stubborn gap in political participation and voting between citizens with disabilities and citizens without disabilities. This has gone on for as long as we've been tracking voting among people with disabilities.

However, one encouraging finding is that in 2020, there was a real surge in voting among everyone. It was a very salient, important election. The surge was slightly greater among people with disabilities. It isn't that people with disabilities aren't interested in voting.

In fact, our data has found, our studies have found that people with disabilities say they're interested in politics and they follow politics at greater numbers than people without disabilities. One of our questions is, what is preventing people with disabilities from voting at the same rates as people without disabilities?

One of the big things found are inaccessible voting systems, whether it's especially in polling places, for example. One trend, though, is that things became better in 2020, largely due to COVID. State made it easier to vote by mail, for example.

**Doug:** As Lisa says, we see that people with disabilities are just as interested in politics as people without disabilities. Still, there is this stubborn gap of six or seven percentage points in [inaudible 12:44]. One of the things that may be going on here, that appears to be going on is the barriers to voting.

In a survey we did sponsored by the Election Assistance Commission in 2012, we found that 26 percent of people with disabilities who voted encountered some difficulties in voting, whether it was getting into a polling place, or operating the equipment, or a whole variety.

We have a whole list of difficulties that people could have faced. That number was 26 percent in 2012. The good news is that we redid the survey after the 2020 elections. I should say these are both national surveys with over 2,000 people over sampling people with disabilities.

We found that that 26 percent figure had come down to 11 percent. That's a testament to a lot of the good efforts by the Election Assistance Commission and by election officials in general. That's good news. The bad news, though, is that 11 percent figure is still one out of nine voters with disabilities.

That number is twice as high as the number among people without disabilities. Among people without disabilities, it was six percent who said they had some kind of difficulty in voting. We're still seeing a gap there that's very important and very concerning.

**Lisa:** I want to mention something quickly here. One of the factors is lack of access to the Internet. [inaudible 14:15] there's this digital divide. People with disabilities are less likely to use computers, to have computers in their home, to have access to the Internet.

A lot of counties and states now are presenting voting information via the Internet. That can exclude people who don't have access there.

**Doug:** About one out of six people with disabilities don't use the Internet.

**Lisa:** It's not just older people. It cuts across all ages.

**Maddie:** Talking about that huge change from 2012 to 2020, yes, it's improvement. Yes, it's folks like you all are keeping track of those changes, folks like the EAC dedicating time to creating accessibility and more accessible elections. Again, there's still more work to be done.

Are there any other results from your research that maybe surprised you or other exciting changes over time like that decrease in voter inaccessibility, anything like that you could maybe speak a bit to?

**Lisa:** I don't know if this is so much a surprise, but it stood out because that one voting system does not work for everyone. Some states have said, "Let's just have everybody vote by mail and that'll solve the problem." That doesn't work.

While it's great to vote by mail if you have a visual disability, maybe voting by mail makes it impossible for you to vote independently and confidentially. There needs to be multiple ways that people can cast their vote, and we need to work on all of those.

**Doug:** That's one of our conclusions is the more, the better. One size does not fit all. We did see that there was, as Lisa said, there was a greater expansion in turnout among people with disabilities than people without disabilities from 2016 to 2020.

Some of that is probably due to the increased access to voting during the pandemic, as mail voting became much easier, expanded registration periods, early voting periods, and so forth that helped make it easier. That's a fact.

We are a bit concerned that some states are trying to roll back some of these policies that making it harder to vote. Frankly, we believe it should be easy to vote.

**Lisa:** It's very concerning that states are making it harder to vote early. They're expecting [inaudible 16:54] and making it harder to register. We're voting by mail, get assistance. They're restricting who can assist a voter in a [indecipherable 17:03]. That is very concerning and needs to be [indecipherable 17:08].

Barriers that can be annoying, for example, long lines, or not having access to water on a long line, for example, which can be annoying, where people without disabilities can be insurmountable barriers to a lot of people not just [inaudible 17:24]. We need to combat that and be very aware of this.

**Doug:** Again, as we said before, this is not a partisan issue. People with disabilities are evenly split between the parties, just as the rest of the population is.

**Maddie:** We're seeing, over the course of this past decade improvements. Hopefully, these voter restriction laws don't continue to impact voters with disabilities. They don't dig their heels in in how our elections work in the future.

I'm curious, what are some of your hopes for the future of accessible votings, and maybe where do you see your research tying into this? Do you see, potentially if voting becomes more accessible for folks disabilities, how may you see your research foci changing, and where do you hope to see your research go in the future?

**Doug:** One thing that makes us hopeful is that we do see this stubborn turnout gap, but it may be narrowing. Actually, we just completed a survey this last spring for the Election Assistance Commission, a national survey about the digital divide and access to information.

We asked a question at the end, "Do you plan to vote in 2022?" in the elections coming up in just a couple of months? We found that actually 54 percent of people with disabilities said they would definitely vote. That's actually slightly higher than the 52 percent of people without disabilities who said they plan to vote.

That's a hopeful sign, and we sure hope that continues on in 2024 and beyond.

**Lisa:** Looking at future research, one thing I'm really interested in -- and I think we're both interested in -- is looking at the impact of groups like Rev Up and your group as well. What difference does it make if a group reaches out to you and encourages you to vote?

We found -- this is classic political science -- that if somebody recruits you, that increases your chances of voting. That's something I really want to see. Groups like Rev Up have targeted specific even counties. Comparing a county, let's say, where Rev Up has been very active to a county in the same state where it hasn't been and looking at voter turnout there, it's tricky, obviously.

Seeing the turnout among people with disabilities when Rev Up and other groups have been active, I think that's maybe the next stage.

**Doug:** Yeah, we didn't really get into the factors explaining the disability gap, other than to note that it [indecipherable 20:04] barriers. Another factor in the lower turnout of people with disabilities is social isolation. They're much more likely to live by themselves, to not be married, to not be employed, as Lisa said.

That means they have fewer contacts with friends, family, coworkers, others. That in itself, political scientists have found this for the population in general. We've found that, for people with disabilities, that social isolation is an important factor.

To the extent that groups like Rev Up and Disability Rights Florida, and others can reach out and make connections with people with disabilities, they will be much more likely to vote.

**Lisa:** Another factor is psychological feelings of not being able to make a difference, or that politicians don't listen to what you have to say. They don't care about you. If you go to vote, and you encounter an inaccessible polling place, not only does that physically make it harder to vote, but it also sends a message that your vote doesn't matter.

We don't care if you vote or you don't vote. That can be very discouraging to people. To the extent that both polling places and the mail-in ballot process becomes easier, I think that sends a more positive message that your vote matters, and your vote counts.

I think people with disabilities looking less discouraged about the process.

**Maddie:** Definitely. Efforts by supervisor of election offices, poll workers to be more inclusive, more mindful of the needs of folks with disabilities, while also creating a space that is empowering for them to attend and vote. Again, going back to something you mentioned earlier, it's not pitying or viewing folks with disabilities at the polls as inspiration.

They're just citizens trying to vote. I think your point about recruitment, engagement, and outreach has a huge impact on not just folks with disabilities but all of us to feel like our vote is important. Having organizations reaching out, recruiting, engaging, and having dedicated outreach efforts has a huge impact on not just all of us, but folks with disabilities as a whole as well.

Folks with disabilities don't necessarily feel represented when they look at their representative officials. Folks that are making these decisions on their behalf about quite literally their livelihoods, the things they have access to, and the resources that they need.

Like you mentioned, it's going to be very interesting to see your future research and the ways in which programs like Rev Up, Access the Vote Florida, and other disability voting coalitions to see voters with disabilities, activists, voting activists with disabilities.

Folks in office with disabilities, folks that look like you and are getting you the resources you need and trying, seeing an effort made for your behalf to be involved in the election process is huge. It's exciting, just like anybody else who would be reached out to and encouraged to vote. I really appreciate y'all mentioning that.

**Doug:** One other thing I'd like to mention is that there may be some difference between younger people with disabilities and older people with disabilities. Younger people with disabilities are often called the ADA generation. They came of age since the ADA was passed, and they've grown up with the expectation, "Yes, I have rights."

Whereas a lot of the older people with disabilities grew up in an era where people with disabilities didn't have rights and faced a lot greater stigma, prejudice, and so forth. We did find that, between 2016 and 2020, the increase in the turnout among people with disabilities was highest among people age 18 to 34.

They had a much bigger increase than people who are age 50-plus. That's another sign of hope that younger people with disabilities, this cohort of people with disabilities, I think takes their political rights much more seriously.

**Lisa:** If I could just...I keep thinking of more things to say. [laughs]

**Maddie:** No, it's wonderful, wonderful.

**Lisa:** One thing that I've noticed that I find really encouraging, too, is that disability groups are forming coalitions with other groups, such as the AARP, for example, and Black Lives Matter organizations. I think, if we're really going to effect change, we need to have these coalitions. To see to starting to happen, it's exciting.

**Maddie:** Definitely. You speak to an issue that's just generally broadly in activism and advocate spaces of folks with disabilities have been left out of mainstream activism movements, unfortunately. I think, as we think about our ADA generation of folks with disabilities or folks that have come up through the ADA, and thinking about Gen Z, and how they're much more politically active and interested in rights work.

It's interesting to think about the ways in which disabled folks, youth are going to be more so involved in those spaces and more in intersectional coalition spaces.

**Lisa:** Yeah. I find my students are very interested in these issues. I teach students in mostly 18 to 25, around there, and they're great.

**Maddie:** As a Gen Z myself, I must say, we're pretty great.

**Doug:** You are.

[laughter]

**Maddie:** I appreciate y'all giving some insight into your work and the ways in which you've seen the disability community grow in their voting engagement and just general civic and political participation over the years. I know you have great research. I know you're going to continue to do great work, and you're very involved in the disability community and in that space.

How can folks listening learn more about you both and your future work?

**Lisa:** We are the co-directors of the Program for Disability Research at Rutgers. We can provide our email, if anyone wants to reach out to us directly. Yeah.

**Doug:** The Program for Disability Research does have a website. We're glad to provide the link to that, which has not only our disability and voting research, and also research on disability and employment. We've got a whole lot going on there as well.

**Maddie:** Awesome. We'll definitely include those links, and if you're comfortable, email in the show notes of this podcast. I know folks with disabilities and folks without disabilities will be very excited to get more involved in the work that you're doing.

**Lisa:** Great.

**Doug:** That's great. We welcome it, and we welcome the questions and interest. Yeah, absolutely.

**Maddie:** Wonderful. Well, thank you both so much for being on the podcast today. We really appreciate y'all being here.

**Lisa:** Oh, thank you.

**Doug:** Thank you.

**Maddie:** Thank you so much, Chairman Hicks, for being on the podcast this morning. It's such an honor to have you here. Please introduce yourself and your work for our listeners.

**Commissioner Tom Hicks:** Thank you, Maddie. I'm Thomas Hicks, Chairman of the United States Election Assistance Commission, and our goal is to help voters cast their ballots and work with states so that they can administer elections. We came about after 2000 with the Florida election. In October of this year, we will be celebrating 20 years of the Help America Vote Act.

**Maddie:** Wow. That's incredible. Well, thank you so much for being here. It's going to be really exciting to talk with you and learn a bit more about your work and the work that your commission does to help not just voters with disabilities, but all voters, in making elections more accessible and approachable for all Americans.

As you mentioned, it's just helping voters be able to access voting in a more accessible way that works for folks and making elections more attainable and approachable for folks.

One of your main efforts so far with your voting access work has been the creation of a pocket-size voting card that serves as a guide for voters with disabilities. That's been a huge success for the commission. Could you please tell us a bit about that and the impact that it's had for voters?

**Commissioner Hicks:** The card came about when the EIC was reformulated record for 2015. One of our founding goals in our legislation says that we are to help voters both independently and privately, regardless of ability. We decided to come up with this pocket-size card that people can keep in their wallets, or their purses that says what their rights are.

Those rights are seeking assistance from the workers at a polling place who've been trained to use accessible voting equipment. Every voting location should have at least one piece of voting equipment that's accessible. You can also bring someone to help you vote as long as that's not a union rep or your boss.

You can also request your local election official to tell you about voting aids, voting assistance, and absentee procedures that are available. It's also available because we were hearing from people saying, "This is great, but I'm blind. I can read Braille."

We did it in Braille, and we also did it in large print. It's available. You can request it from our agency. You can email us at [listen@eac.gov](mailto:listen@eac.gov) and request copies of it.

**Maddie:** Awesome. Before this call, I went ahead and looked into it a little bit more. I'll be sure to include some of those links to your website that talk a little bit more about the card. You talked about assistance in all of the different opportunities and options available for folks with disabilities, but also just the general public of how they can benefit from accessible elections.

I was hoping you could speak a bit to how making voting accessible for folks with disabilities will make voting better for all voters. Can you maybe speak a bit to what those changes to make elections more accessible or to teach folks about their rights, etc. can positively impact everybody?

**Commissioner Hicks:** I have two really quick stories. One I heard a number of years ago in that if we live long enough, all of us will have some form of disability. Whether or not that's needing to have hearing aids, or needing glasses, or having to walk with a cane because we are not as mobile as we used to be. At some point, we will have some form of disability.

That means that when we have polling places, we should have those places to be accessible for all voters. One of the things that I also learned when we had a hearing a few years ago up in Boston with a disability rights organization, one of the gentlemen talked about curb cuts, and how curb cuts were put there to allow for people who have wheelchairs to be able to access the sidewalk.

People all use those curb cuts in terms of whether or not they have a luggage or a stroller or bicycle or other things like that. That's something that was made for people with disabilities, but benefit us all. The same is true with elections in terms of we want to have this one accessible voting equipment piece inside of a polling place.

I believe that now, and this is my own feelings, with 2.0, the Voluntary Voting System Guidelines that we voted in February of 2021 to basically improve the process for voting that companies are going to build towards better equipment that is more accessible.

Hopefully, we'll be able to take that one piece of voting equipment out and have it all be uniform, in that all the machines will be, and that's my dream. That we will be voting on one form of voting equipment in terms of in that polling place. Not around the country, but it just elections are decentralized. That's a whole separate topic. [laughs]

**Maddie:** That's how exciting that prospect is. One overarching theme of what you're talking about is this concept of universal design, and how when we make things accessible for folks with disabilities, it ends up benefiting everybody in ways that you didn't really expect them to before.

Like how you mentioned with curb cuts. That wasn't a thing in the past and all of these non-disabled people had to make do or say their luggage or strollers or whatever it may be to navigate the world.

In making the world more accessible, it's made their lives easier, and it's really exciting to hear you also get excited about how voting and accessible election machines can really make such a huge difference in just creating such a better election and voting space for all folks.

One thing I guess that's coming up for me as we're talking about this is this question that a lot of folks bring up when you start to talk about accessible elections and making things accessible for folks with disabilities and election equipment is this. You have to weigh the scales of accessibility and security.

I was hoping maybe you could talk a bit about your work abroad, whether that's work with overseas voters and requesting and returning their ballots. Also, if you could touch a bit on how the US shapes up in this space versus other countries that might be maybe a little bit further in their efforts to make things both accessible and secure, and what efforts can the US do to get to a similar space?

**Commissioner Hicks:** First of all, 45 days before the election, when that happens, election officials are supposed to send out overseas in military voting ballots. One of the things that we heard in 2018 was that those folks who are overseas were not able to receive their ballots and they will email their jurisdictions and not be able to get that.

That's because of what happened in 2016. A foreign government trying to interfere with our elections. A lot of jurisdictions would identify foreign IP addresses and block those.

**Maddie:** Oh, wow.

**Commissioner Hicks:** What we did was we talked to a few in states and they would allow for some of those foreign IP addresses to still be linkable to the US and that's the way that we worked to ensure that people overseas could still get their right to vote. We also tried to work with the voting of the Federal Voting Assistance Program that tiles out of DOD.

I myself go and talk to Americans overseas as many times as I can about their voting experiences overall as well. In terms of how the US shapes up, we still have a long way to go, but we are still leading the world in some of the things that we're doing.

When I was in India in 2016 for a disability conference actually or voting, they talked about how if someone is not able to get to the polling place, they will bring the voting equipment to them...

I saw a wonderful film recently called "No Time to Fail," which was a documentary showing election officials going from the primary in 2020 through the general election and through certification at the end of the election cycle.

One of the things that I thought was incredible there was we were in the middle of COVID-19. Some people were homebound, unable to come vote, unable to receive their ballots in timely manner, because they had COVID, and they're not supposed to be around other people.

What the election officials did was they personally drove those ballots to the voter and put them in their box. Now, I'm not saying that we're going to be able to do that for everyone, because there's not enough election officials in the country to do that.

I think that could be something that we do on an emergency basis. If someone becomes home-ridden, and they had intended to go vote, but now, they're home, you can have, maybe possibly contact your local election official and have them bring the ballot out to you, cast that ballot, and have it sent back.

I would say that this is usually done in bipartisan teams so that people can't say, "Well, you're favoring one party over the other," or, "I'm giving my ballot to this person, and they're just going to throw it away." It's the working in a bipartisan manner to ensure that those who are eligible to vote can cast their ballots and have those ballots counted accurately.

**Maddie:** Yeah, certainly. One thing that's really important to note here is we recently talked to Doug and Lisa from Rutgers about their disability voting research. One thing that was really interesting, but I shouldn't necessarily be surprised, is that the disability population reflects the general, non-disabled voting population in partisanship, whether that's Democrats, Republicans, Independents.

It's important to not make disability and accessibility in voting about partisanship, because folks with disabilities follow the same structure and partisan outline as non-disabled folks. I know you've worked with them. Can you talk a little bit of how you've partnered in their research and use it to advocate for accessible elections and future change?

**Commissioner Hicks:** I'm really happy that we came together in a bipartisan manner to authorize that study to be done by Rutgers. I think it's going to be useful for years to come to say, to give us exact numbers on the number of people who are disabled out there.

Like you were saying, disability has no partisanship. It has no race. It has no gender. It has no age. It could affect us all. Learning from that study, I think that we will be able to build better voting equipment, we'll be able to make it more accessible for people to cast their ballots. I think

of it also in that, if you don't understand the issues that are in front of you, how do you move forward with it?

I think that, with this study, it helps us to understand the issues that are out there and to move forward with it. I know that there have been other studies that were done, other studies by the EAC in the past, but I think of it as this is more updated.

One of the things that we also learned is that this was the highest turnout for people with disabilities ever in 2020. We hope that continues on.

**Maddie:** Yeah, that's incredible. It just really shows the power of using research and policy and an organization and a commission like yours to really do such good work. To end on such a wonderful note, recently, you were able to speak at the Access the Vote Florida elections accessibility summit.

You really stressed the importance of working directly with voters and hearing about issues that they're facing. If you give voters with disabilities advice about what you've learned over the course of your career in elections work and accessibility work, what kind of advice would you share with them?

**Commissioner Hicks:** Be involved. Be involved. If you can, serve as a poll worker, because I believe that one of the things that can be incredibly helpful for other folks with disabilities is to see someone with a disability in a polling place serving as a poll worker.

I understand that not all disabilities are visual in terms of you can see them, but I think that still can give a positive aspect for folks. Another thing is know your rights. People have died for this right to be bestowed upon us. I think of it as, if it only takes me an hour to fill out a form to cast my right to vote, that's a lot more than people standing for hours on end in a line to do so.

That's more of me saying protesting, protesting for this right to vote, or just basically not being able to do it. It's something that I think is vital for us to exercise because it's where we're all on the same footing. Donald Trump and Joe Biden have the same power that I have when casting about a vote, one vote. That's for everyone. If you're eligible, cast your ballot.

**Maddie:** What a wonderful send-off. Thank you so much for being on the podcast and sharing your wisdom and your experience in this space. It's been truly great to have you on today. We really hope to continue to be connected to your work.

**Commissioner Hicks:** Thank you so much for having me.

**Maddie:** Thank you to Lisa Schur, Doug Kruse, and Commissioner Hicks for being on this episode of "Your Voice, Your Vote!" It was great to chat with them and learn so much in our conversation.

**Keith:** Definitely. Be sure to tune in next week for the fifth episode of Your Voice, Your Vote!, as we talk about running for office with a disability. It's going to be a great episode.

**Maddie:** For sure. Our podcast comes out each Thursday morning, so make sure to subscribe to the "You First" podcast to be alerted when new episodes drop. We're on Apple Podcast, Spotify, YouTube, and almost anywhere you get your podcasts.

**Keith:** For more information, visit [disabilityrightsflorida.org/podcast](https://disabilityrightsflorida.org/podcast). Thank you.

[background music]

**Announcer:** The You First podcast is produced by Disability Rights Florida, a not-for-profit corporation working to protect and advance the rights of Floridians with disabilities through advocacy and education. If you or a family member has a disability and feel that your rights have been violated in any way, please contact Disability Rights Florida.

You can learn more about the services we provide, explore a vast array of resources on a variety of disability-related topics, and complete an online intake on our website at [disabilityrightsflorida.org](https://disabilityrightsflorida.org). You can also call us at 1-800-342-0823. Thank you for listening to You First, the Disability Rights Florida podcast.

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