

Transcript: Women's History Day Panel

Virginia Kase Solomón: Welcome. My name is Virginia Kase Solomón. I am the CEO of the League of Women Voters of the United States. We are so happy to have you joining us here today as we celebrate Women's History Month. This is a great moment for our organization as we just turned one hundred and two. And as a one hundred and two year old voting right organization we emerged out of the suffrage movement but much has changed for women of color in particular during the past 100 years and so I'm here today with some of my friends to share with you some of our thought around what is important for voting rights, what is important for democracy and what is important for women today in the United States. And so, we are so happy to have you join with us. And my role as chief executive I lead the League in our affiliate network across the entire country to build power by engaging in advocacy, activism litigation and of course building power through organizing. And so, we are grateful for each of you for joining us for today's discuss. Again this is Women's History Month. It been a hundred and one years since women fought and won the right to vote in America and today we are power democracy like never before. In the wake of the 2020 presidential election American democracy is in probably its most vulnerable state since the Civil War. We are facing like we have never seen before but we have hope. We have hope because leaders like the ones in in the studio with me today and for all of you who are paying attention and who are watching us live trying to figure out what it is that you can do to help defend democracy and to empower voters. So, I'm really excited to get involved in this conversation um our panel discussion today is really exciting for me because we've been doing Zoom for such a long time and I actually get be in studio with so many of my great friends. Many of you may not know but really so many of the women in the fight today were actually friends outside of this. We've grown to adore one another because we've been in this fight, We've been in the trenches. Many of us have gotten arrest together. Um we're at rallies and events and we on the ground and so we wanted to enjoy for you to enjoy a conversation with us. So, think of it as a conversation among not only girlfriends but some of top leaders in the country today both in the women's rights movement and in democracy as a whole. During the next hour, we're going to discuss the inter of race and gen and we're also going to talk a lot about democracy but first, I want to start with introduction So, you know who in the room with me. Um first, I want to welcome Amanda Brown Lehlerman. Amanda is just an incredible, incredible leader. She is the CEO of SuperMajority. Um she's an organizer aimed at training and organizing women across age race, and background to push for women's equality. At the helm, Amanda has leveraged her experience as an organize to build a coalition of women who harness their collective power through last change. And she draws from her personal experience and her commitment to building a multicultural coalition of women that can enact major political change. So, Amanda welcome Thank you. Thank you. I would also add as the first Black woman to head super majority You had taken on this during one of the most challenging times in our country So I'm really excited about that and the other thing is we were just talking about baby heart. I know You know; you have a you have three little girls and so, being able to see you go to events and bring your babies with you and being able to see you do this work um you know, you bring a unique perspective as a working mom.

AL: It's true.

VKS: And so, it's really interesting before your time at SuperMajority you were the national political director for Rock the Vote Um executive director of the White House National Women's Business Council campaign director for our future and organizing director for the DNC during the 2018 midterm so welcome.

AL: I know. It's like can you keep a job?

VKS: Well, no. It like how impressive is that Um next to you, we have my friend LaTosha Brown. LaTosha is the co-found of Black Voters Matter I have to say she is also Glamour Women of Year in 2020. So, we are very excited about that. Um LaTosha is an is a thought leader in this country. You are a Harvard fellow Um you are an institution build a cultural activist. I would say an amazing singer. As well. Um and you're a connector. You connect people and bring people together in ways that so many people just don't have the ability to Um and so a really interested in learning more today for you about how you bring all of those skills everything that you are to the work that you're doing Um work at Black Voters Matter has really just blown up over the past few years and there probably a greater need than we've ever seen before in recent times, right? At least in the last 15 years.

LB: Oh, that's an understatement right?

VKS: Right And the initiatives that you guys are in really are boosting Black voter registration and term turnout but again, going back to this idea of building power Um predominantly in black and marginalized communities. Um you are obviously a national recognized go-to expert not only on Black voting rights but on voting rights and democracy as a whole. Um Black women empowerment and philanthropy because you also just started a new philanthropic organization to support Black girls and women in the south. Um your voice has really shown up the nexus of both the civil rights movement the Black power movement, and the work that Black Live is a Black Voters Matter is doing. So, really excited. Please welcome my friend LaTosha.

LB: Thank you.

VKS: And then we have last but not the least, my friend Sindy Benavides She is the CEO of LULAC which is the League of United Latin American citizens, the oldest Hispanic civil rights organization in the country. Um Sindy is Honduran American and she brings that experience of both the immigrant community but also how to achieve the American dream when so many people see it growing further and further away from them and devotes her career to public service ensuring that countless young people, women, and immigrants have the same opportunities. Before she was at LULAC she previous served as the COO and national director for Civic Engage and Community Mobilization for LULAC. She was the vice president of fields and political operations for Voto Latino and as a Northern Virginia political director for the twentytwo Tim Kane for Virginia Senator Campaign. This is like I feel like the accomplishments that you all have, it's like it's a really long list but Sin has also been national director of community outreach for the DNC and Latino Liaison and director of Governor Tim Kane among the many, many other things. Um but we want to jump into the conversation and I just want to say thank you all so much for joining I am sometimes you know, we read through or we hear our bio and it's like, wow I did all those things. Like it, it feels overwhelm sometimes right?

LB: We started young.

VKS: Right. We all started really but I think one of the things that I really appreciate about all of you is the depth of experience that each of you bring and we all did start really young. You know, so while what we started when we were ten, I just say but we all started really young in this work and so we collectively between us probably have seventy-five years of experience I mean, it's a lot of work that we been doing and so, I'm even more heartened It's it makes my heart so much warm to know that the expert the level of expertise that you all bring to this conversation really is important for everybody. So, I'm going to get started with some questions. Feel free to jump in because we want this to be a conversation but really where we want to start is the impact of what's happening today on women voters. Um for our folks on Facebook Live, we ask you to please post your ideas and viewpoints and comments in the section of the Facebook Live feed. Also please share this event with your friends on Facebook. We want everybody to be able to witness this important and interesting conversation among these incredible women. Um so jumping right in, I'm going to start actually I think I going to start with LaTosha because I'm really interested in your thoughts on this. You know, we made these great strides in the voting right movement Um across the board and then it feels like we've been backsliding right? Like, just state after state. It's hit after hit of these attacks on voting rights and that has increased our need to get into like the good trouble that we've gotten into You and I have been arrested together Um and so since the 2020 election that we've really seen these barriers increase and it requires deeper thought deeper commitment deeper solidarity Um but it nothing new right 100 years ago women were doing this to earn their right to vote Um what do you see women's role being in the next 100 years? What is the next phase of activism and voting rights for women?

LB: You know, I think part of when I think about kind of the voting rights struggle, when I think about how women and Particularly when I think about women of color sit at this intersection of race and gender and how we have been in the forefront for of this movement and even had to struggle within the various movements that we're in. You know, I think part of why we're in the in this moment right now is that let's think about what it is that we're address. It is white patriarchy supremacy. The bottom line, that we can trace every issue that we have to white patriarchy supremacy and so ultimately, better to address that than those who literally have an expanded idea around race and diversity in the world around a race analysis and a gender analysis and so there's a particular need because I think white patriarchy supremacy is kind of rear its head and try to put a stake you know, stake in the ground I think that we are uniquely prepared for this moment and so I think women are actually affirming ourselves but we need women in this moment. We this this this notion of leadership that's not just based on dominance but on compassion. If we just look at what's happening in Ukraine right now. You know what happens when you've got an out of control male ego that is rooted in this patriarchy kind of nationalist what's up kind of thought process. We see war and we see innocent people killed and we don't need to think that that's that far from what can possibly happen in the US that we're we disconnected from that. The bottom line is fundamentally what I think is holding this nation back Is this idea that we have literally these two sins that we've never uprooted Which has been rooted in racism and sexism and that literally it actually holds the development of this of this country back and fundamentally democracy. And so I think women you know what it what is beautiful is just as you said earlier That there's this kind of coalition This new coalition that's being led by women You know there a multi generation multi-racial coalition that we are like we're asserting ourselves and we're seeing things change We're and I think that even some of what we're seeing right now, this attacks, these attacks that we're seeing, you know I think of them I don't know if I think of as setbacks as much as I think of them as they're literally a

response to the fact that we're winning. Yeah. The truth of the matter is the attack are happening because we're winning and we're advancing not because we losing.

VKS: No, I appreciate that and one of the things you talk about a lot And I think it a conversation that doesn't happen enough is around what women bring in the form of love.

LB: That's right.

VKS: To this work. Absolutely. Right? It's deeply rooted in love. That right. My children Yeah. For our families. That's right. For our country. For the possibility for other humans. And Amanda I'm just curious for you because you know you're a mama, right? And you have little ones. I mean, so many of us are mom but when you think of your girls in the kind of country that you want to leave for and the women that you hope they are able to become. What are your goals for them for the next 100 years as we think about the future of our country?

AL: Yeah, just to even go the sort of women leading with compassion I think about even my own grand and the role that she has played which is not different from so many other black families of just you know, that matriarch figure who from the beginning of when I was a little kid, she took me to go vote with her She talked to me about the important of voting Um you know, we had a lot of kitchen table conversations about it. I remember when I first started to go work on the Barack Obama campaign She had a lot of feelings about that Um but she's been such a staple for me and our family. Also, you know, in her community. She's like the first to be registering voters at our church every year Um she asked my husband or I to go do a registration event once a year to everyone at our church and I think that the role that women play in our families because Sometimes when you're like up against the patriarchy or you're up against white supremacy I see it feels like you can't actually take those fights on individually and I think one of the things that's just really important is to remember women are innate organize Like we are so strong because we lead with love and because we can actually imagine that the world can be better and we can envision that and I think you know that's what it's like the one thing I can do for my children is help them understand that the world can be better, that the world should be better and that you know, there are reasons to stay vigilant, there are reasons to also stay hopeful and optimistic and there's nothing that we can't do if we are together, and like holding each other, and maybe that's also my strategy in life, Sindy and I were talking about this, and just having more babies. Yeah. So that they can like do this, you know, have this fight together, but yeah, I mean, I think the, the most important thing just as a mom as a woman in the movement is to help people reimagine what the future can actually look like and then you plot your way towards that every single day I would also say the issue with the presentation, right Yeah.

SB: We're seeing the first Africa nominee for the Supreme Court. Right. Right Like having children that can see us Sonia Sotomayor Mm hmm. See people of color and places of position is so important. Absolutely And I would just say that all of us are chief troublemaker in charge and that it you know that's so important as our children and even community members see the work that we do and they know that we are in the fight in the struggle. Right. Making sure that we're moving the needle. We are actively involved. Right? Absolutely

AL: We took our girls on Friday after school which was maybe a bad parent move But I was like we are going to the Supreme Court We are going to celebrate and yeah there are a lot of screams from the back and we had to stop twice at different friend's houses on the way from Tacoma Park to the Supreme

Court because of potty breaks and meeting of snacks. It's like a twenty-minute ride I know And I was like nature peas and that was like not good enough. Um but yeah I was like we will go celebrate that because I think to your point even for me watching my kids run around the steps of the Supreme Court. I'm like this is incredible. That's right. You know and it means so much to me but also for them.

VKS: And Sindy I think one of the things that you bring a really unique perspective on is that immigrant experience and the role that Latina are playing in this country. You know fastest growing population in the country. And your role at LULAC is so critical important because you're leading organization into the next century and also thinking about what life can be like for Latinas as you know the Latinx community becomes the majority in this country And so I'm just curious like that intersection and the role between for Latinos in America and what the future of democracy looks like. Especially as we have so many people from the immigrant community who have come here to create a better life and really can step into this moment in a way that's different because they know in many cases what a failing democracy looks like

SB: Absolutely and I would tell you as a Honduran American immigrant you know we see this and our countries of birth and you know, what a lot of people don't understand is the data I'm a nerd. I love number There's nothing like looking at numbers and we know that today, 18% of the population is of Latino origin. They are Latinos but in just 30 years in our lifetime That's right 30% of the American population will be of Lat descent. Yeah. Today every 30 seconds, a Latino in the US is turning 18 and they're eligible to register to vote What this means is that every single year, we have 1 million Latino eligible voters added to already our 32 million strong that are eligible but it's not enough to be eligible We also have to register and we also have to turn out to vote and I think, you know, when we looking at this moment and we're in 2022 right? I was looking at the pictures of LULAC I was, as I was heading here this morning and specifically, I was looking at a poster of LULAC fighting poll taxes. Mm. Wow. Right? Like, this is like the generation right before me and today in 2022, we're seeing Jim Crow era tactic and seeing in over fifty two pieces of legislation that pass in states that are voter suppress that are trying to take away the right of communities of colors and to your point it's because we're winning right? And part of that winning is suppressing on the other side but I think we also have to be very cautious to not go into this narrative of us versus them. Absolutely Because that has always been the narrative of America That's right. We are all Americans and if you're eligible we should be able to access our voting polls. That's right. And you know what we're seeing in Texas and I can talk about Texas day and night. There's other states like Florida But Georgia. This is a special. You know I and I say Texas because for LULAC one third of our members are in Texas We're involved in every single litigation that you can imagine as we won they try to purchase the ninety thousand naturalized eligible citizen LULAC was on top of it But for us, Virginia to your point about Latinos, I think it's truly thinking as Americans and understanding that the future of this country is integrally linked with our Latino community with our African community with our AAPI community, with our indigenous communities and we sometimes forget that there's this narrative in America where we did not write that history and therefore, that narrative that we can't belong But yet we have always been America.

LB: That's right Yeah. Yeah. I understand that. So much with Sindy said that I just I it just resonates with me and I think you know I think we also have to realize that the entire political landscape is being re And so part of our work can just be to respond to just in the moment. We've gotta do this thing. Just like you said Amanda We've gotta radically re Right Like what the possibilities exist Because we are getting in an e where what we're seeing is brown and Black people and Asian American folks. When we look at

communities of color that we're going to be the major of this country. Right. Right? And so, some of the suppress that we're seeing is oppression is being triggered by this demo shift but it's too late The babies are here We're here, right? And so, I think it is also an opportunity for us to actually reframe the entire political con not just about our presence but really create a kind of the kind of policy put elect more women, more women of color in public office So, we can literally have the kind of policies within themselves to the America that always say this, the America that we desire and the America that we deserve.

VKS: Yeah. And you know, it's so interesting and just to pivot a little bit one of the things that I think is really astounding in a lot of ways is the changes that we've seen as a result, a result of the death of George Floyd. Mm hmm. We saw people come across racial lines, across age across demographics, whether you were wealthy, whether you were low income. People came together in a different way and I think we're seeing that today as well voting rights and so a question that I have is what are the opportunities now that we see to expand the franchise? How do we expand voting rights today? We always look at the often times we think about the attack and what we're fighting. What are we advancing and how are we doing that? Especially in states like Georgia or Texas. Um and even you know in in some of the northern state We see the same thing and so Amanda I'm going to start with you and just hear your thoughts about what are some opportunities to expand the franchise today And how we can do it in a multi-racial coalition because I think that you're right in so many ways that it's so many of us have blended families and mix families and we have so it's there's a complexity that exists in this country. Right. That maybe didn't exist in the same way just 50 years ago.

AL: Yeah. Um that's a whole other element. Yeah right. Like you and I both are marriages Yeah. It would have been illegal. We wouldn't have been able to be married to our spouses And due to our loved one I know Cardi.

VKS: I know. But it's like we wouldn't have been able to be married to our spouses not that long. Not that long. And so, and there and so I think it's that being able to see that that the world is changing. Yeah. How can we work together to advance?

AL: I actually think that's one of like the greatest opportunity and honestly the greatest defense of our resistance is us all coming together because patriarchy white supremacy they work when we are just Black people. When we are just Latinos. When we are just women. Yes and when we are a united coalition against that, like, that's the only way we can start tear down and in fact it is the patriarchy that has put us into these silo so that we're not able to see the sort of shared, not that people have the same experience but we do have the same value and we have the same vision and again, I love how you said it, the radical reimagining of the world that we want, the world that we deserve even, and so, that sort of united front of our resistance, I think is, you know, the work that so many of organizations are trying to do to hold people across race, across background across even geographic line It's like we can fight the fight in Georgia. We can show up for our, you know, sisters in Texas and make sure that they're they have that support because they do, I also think when it comes to women you know, we're looking for that sort of like confidence and like just competence to talk about the issues and also community and particular right now it's such an isolated experience You can forget that you know sort of like be in your own struggle every day and there are so many people that are experiencing which is honestly one of the best things about even being with all of you today experiencing.

VKS: We're like actually live in person Yeah, I'm like, oh my goodness.

AL: Friends, right. Like, it it's really powerful to know that you you're not alone that you have other people and the ability for an organized community and organize coalition to you know, keep pushing, to stay vigilant to make sure that we, I think, you know, the sort of mass the collective power that folks have building on each of our own individual powers and then, recognizing the collective power, like, that's the most important thing.

VKS: But at the same time, I think, and, I guess, LaTosha I'll, I'll kind of move on to you on this part is that we did organize like we organize hard to pass the freedom to vote act organize hard to pass the John Lewis Voting Rights Act. So, the question that I have for you really is what now? How do organize, how do communities go beyond organizing to really take it to the next level and what do we do in this particular election?

LB: You know, I often talk about, I want us to shift our paradigm of seeing ourselves as units in a political system and I want us to see ourselves as we're part of humanity that are creating a political process to be able to distribute resources to be able to create public policy. We've gotta shift this paradigm that's very transactional Yeah. That we're just in elections or just a policy. We have to really recognize this is this is ours. Like we're elected officials. You work for us. Yeah. Right? This we have the right to shape even the constitution says and the constitution says you have the right when government no longer serve your interest then you can replace it. You should, it is your right to replace it, shift it, or even abolish it. We have to literally look in this space to really shift our paradigm of while we have because part of the where we are right now we've been complicit You know, the fact that we have not consistent participated, right When less than 50% of the population are engaged in election we have what we have now and so, I'm raising that because I think when we're talking about we did we work really, really hard in this last election cycle but we need to recognize the transactions around elections not enough. That we've gotta be far more transformative in our processes right? That we literally got to be engage in every single level of from the policy making. We need more women in office. The fact that here we are in 2022 and this is the first Africa American out of two hundred and thirty-three years Yeah. To go to the Supreme Court that here it is that out of the history of this country. This is the first time that we've had a woman, a woman of color, or a woman period, right In this in in as a vice president of this Well, we're 51% of the population something is wrong and so, I think it's an opportunity in this moment What I believe is an opportunity for us to reshift our paradigm of stop seeing ourselves just this is a political system and how can we engage. We've gotta literally start seeing ourselves shift from this idea that we're citizens in America that start seeing ourselves as founders of this new America. Yeah. This new America where progress whites or white people or Black folks regard of whether you are in the political spectrum right? That collectively, we all here How can we create a process? One, that we're centering the love of human that we literally are being able to create policy that works for all of us. Because I'm not one of those people that I think that the solution is all of us to be unified around the same thing. You know, I often say, I change my own mind with myself, right? In a week But I really think that it's important for us. I think part of what America does not know how to do is we don't know how to differ and really be able to respect and hold each other's humanity That's what the real work is. I think.

SB: And vote out old white men.

LB: And vote out the old white men.

VKS: but that's another thing Sin I think you know, a lot of people make assume about us about women as a whole, but also about our organization And one of the things that I think is super interesting is the

fact that we do this work in a non-partisan way. We represent voters individuals communities But we don't stand on the side of any political party. We're doing this work and that kind of leads me to the gerrymandering that we're facing So many maps that are being rigged to ensure that politicians to pick their voters And so now that those maps are being drawn and in many cases they're being litigated What would you I would love for you to talk a little bit about the importance of people really being engage in the redistricting process and how that connects to census as well because a lot of people chose not to fill out the census. Like do we even have accurate demographics And how can people at home really engage in making sure that we have fair districts so we can get the right folks elect That's right

SB: Well, you know I'm going to start with Texas as the example and you know with Texas part of the growth of Texas was because of the Latino community. So, they have two new congressional district and they're trying to make those congressional district go to a non-min elected official and so for us at LULAC, we see you, we see it clearly and we're definitely going to be disputing and even taking legal action. You know when I think of activism I really think about you know, not only what can we do at home but how else can we get engaged, right? Of my very first jobs at the tender age of twenty-three was to be a director of board appointments and get our community in Virginia to serve on the governor's board on every single issue that you can imagine And when we think about what can impact where I live in our community is getting involved in the redistricting effort which in every state is different by the way there's no one model that working in one state but we can get involved in those commissions. Be a part of the commission. Be involved and bring our voice the table I think more than that and as I think of what you were saying LaTosha in terms of how do we shift para We need to shift models. That's right. Right And when we you know like as an example even our education system, let's remember that we had to fight for our education system, for our children who are brown and black to be in our education system and this was over fifty years ago. LULAC was a part of Mendes versus Westminster in Orange County, California which led to Brown versus Board of education and today we still see the discrimination that's happening with our children of color and our own school system similar I would say Virginia, when we're thinking of our democracy and our voting model, how does it need to be transformed to make sure that we're just not putting a band aid from over 100 years ago, that we we're changing the model to make sure that our community a community that has always been present, has always contribute is at the table but I when I take this back you know, and just think of like my parents, me, my mami, papa at home, right? And how can we be involved? I think so many of our community has been fed This lie that we're just actors in the system. That right. But truly we're not That's right. And you know, when I think of even, you know, when I go to a Quince Nera which is like the Big Sweet sixteen in the Latino community you better believe that I am register voters at that big fiesta. But it you know, like, it's also what, what can we do at what can we do outside of her home How can we util our voice in this age of social media where we have Twitter, Instagram, TikTok and I think you know like LULAC is on all of them Yeah. Because we want to make sure we're capturing But beyond that Virginia how are we being strategic Right? Like how are we making sure that we're using technology as well to reach our community and always understand that we right now in this movement the money that is coming into actors who are pushing for vote suppression is want to say at least twentytimes higher than the fund that nonprofits are getting. Yeah. So, we are always Virginia creating miracles. We are mobilizing because we know that when you let our people vote oh there's change. Yeah. There is change coming.

VKS: People show up. Yeah. That's the other thing. I mean when you saw voter turnout in 2020. That's right. In spite of the pandemic in spite of the enormous amount of voter suppression people still showed up because they what was at stake. That right. And I think one of the things when you talk about the education system and we even think about civic engagement the League does a lot of civ engagement work People don't even know how election are supposed to work these days Right? They've cut out so much of the important pieces of important things to teach in school. Civic engagement used to civics used to be a require Right. Right. Now people don't even understand what the three branches of government are. In many cases. It's terrible. And critical race theory tried to change. That's right US History and say, well, we're not going to teach you as history it doesn't make us feel good Right. You know, and so, I think the question that I have is for all of you in some ways is in absence of having the tools that are needed to help people become educated in the school system Um what are you all doing with your organization to make sure that people have that information? Yeah.

LB: You know, there was something that Sindy said that I that I really want to just kind of go back to and drill down on. You know, we've allowed even political parties to hijack this notion of democracy. Yup. At the end of the day, which is why I said this this point of the issue isn't that there's going to be I think a robust the has a spectrum of political ideologies And it should. Yeah. The issue is how do we at least center this notion of that we all working for the best of humanity. Then we of course we will struggle but the way that we engage each other will be different. But we've actually allowed kind of this partisan context to take over the process it's like a football game. You're either on the red team or you're on the blue team right? And so, it is actually pulling away the fabric and the fiber of literally of terms of human beings and I think that part of what we're going to have to do is we're going to have to continue to organize and actually allow people to understand that they have choices and help people to understand that if we're going to shape kind of this system to be more responsive to us then, we going to have to literally be engaged in it. We can no longer have this kind of laisses faire kind of approach to it. I think it's going to require but I do believe that's where I think women come in You know, I think it's going to take children. I think we need to be talking about not just with our children We should be talking with children. We should be working with youth right now around how do we create this America that we're dreaming of? I think.

VKS: Yeah and SuperMajority really focus on that a lot.

AL: Yeah, I think we talk a lot about just the transactional nature of the political process which I actually think sometimes this brings me back to my like rock the vote Days. Sindy have organized young people and this idea that it the sort of onus on young people to know or like it's that sort of responsibility. I think does overlook the fact that we have to make sure that our politicians our policy makers candidate are also courting us and actually engaging the people, the you know, most marginalized among us to pull us in and give us a reason to participate in the process and that sometimes becomes I don't know, just like, isn't the way that it works, and, but yet, I don't want to, I don't want all of the responsibility to fall on us as voters, you know like, they also play a role in this idea we have to reestablish trust We have to take out the transaction of politics, we have to stop talking to people thirty days, ahead of an election, and talk to them year round, do that permanent organizing, which also is unfunded because it's expensive Um, but like that's the work that needs to be happening so that we can hold people through the ups and the downs, the highs and the low of this journey that we are on in organizing because I think also people get stuck in, you know, organizing really is a journey. It's not about one destination and you know we've gotta hold people in community, hold them close, and do that basic education show them

what it looks like to have a government represent you, show them, you know, how powerful that can be, help understand that so that they feel connected. They feel agency. They feel excited about voting and participating and that's what we have to like get back to Um I will also say as somebody that's done, you know, my like a career of work I remember even 12 years ago like coding Emails about how like this is where you go to get you know, these are your poll open at X time and that basic information. It is so hard to get now. You know, I think it's like a staple of all of the work that we do but in the landscape of mis disinformation voter suppress it has become so much harder for somebody to literally just know the who, what, where, when of voting Um and so to the extent that, you know, we're all doing that work as trusted messengers to different communities Um that alone is like as simple as it sounds. It's one of the most important things to be doing.

VKS: Yeah, for the legal in voters, we have vote411.

AL: Exactly which is incredible information website and I can stop coding emails.

VKS: But we got we had over six and a half million voters who came to us in 2020 and we're looking to increase that and that's why we started doing everything in Spanish as well and we're hoping to continue to expand the language access but of course resources are always you know difficult. I think Sindy you have been as an organizer and somebody who really has focused your time as not only professionally but personally in your life when we talk about voter registration when we talk about all of the things that are important to do, if you had something that you can say to every person who's watching today, what is one thing that every single person can do to make sure that they're supporting this midterm so that people are getting out there and actually having their voice heard?

SB: You know, when I think of that question, Virginia a lot of people don't know that for a large part of my I would say life here in the US. I was undocumented. Mm hmm. And that you know, like I've had to go through the entire journey and that you know, as a legal permanent resident, as a person residing in Virginia we are able to see, we're able to engage and provide information in some state register voters and we just saw the movement in New York. We now LTRs are even able to vote locally in elections but I think, you know, as I think of that question Virginia there's so much that can be done right? Like, there so much that our people can be doing and often times, we I think, to this narrative that we are not enough. Understanding this narrative that has been created especially against immigrants in America Uh but I think for us it's making sure that we put that aside and remember that we are capable That we are doing and that even when we walk through the valleys that we will see that change at the end of the road. And as an immigrant, a member of our community in in the US and you know one of my biggest desires to become a US citizen. I in that process You know god the day that I vote, I am calling all the media right? Like just letting them know I have been waiting for this moment. But in the mean I will be building that awareness educating my community and instilling that confidence right? Because there's this narrative of my vote does not matter. I am taking that narrative away That's right. Right Because your vote matters and that narrative exists precisely to make sure that you don't vote. That's right. Uh, but I, I think in terms of this coalition and women building Virginia there's still so much work to do, right? In 2022 you know, we're still seeing so many first, right? We're still seeing the first Supreme court justice. We're seeing Kamala Harris as the first Vice President woman. We're seeing Sonia Sotomayor but I think we also have to look at history and put everything in context. Mm hmm. And there was a time when our community could not even report a crime because we were hanged in a lynched. Mm. There was a time when our community had to fight to even get to the polling location even pay a poll

tax and we have to remember that there's a context continuity to this and it's not going to stop today. We're going to have to continue fighting and we're going to have to instill this into our children and making sure that they understand that not everything will be given and that there will be moments when we have to fight and this is the moment 2022 when we have to fight. That's right. We have to be in it fighting to make sure that everyone who's eligible to register and to vote is able to do that because is what a democracy is That is what makes America so unique. That is why so many immigrants come to America because we want to experience the freedom of being able to participate without persecution.

VKS: And that's why right now, right? It like they're being able to make sure that people have access is so important But when you talk about people saying my vote doesn't count, I think one of the things that has been disheartening for all of us and I think we're seeing this rise of mis and disinformation. When we see how bad some of the information is that people get through social media and other place Now, it's not the main problem Obviously, it's a symptom of a larger problem but I'm just curious for the three of you as you've been mis and disinformation. We have a project called the Democracy Truth Project which really focuses on civic education and really trying to make sure that we're combating mis and disinformation through civics education Um what are you all doing to make sure that you're combating some of that bad information because it often times I mean, I have a family member who you know, still believes that the 2020 election was stolen. They've gone down that rabbit hole and I'm just like, how is this even possible You know, Yeah. So, I just, you know, and look he's a man of color Like, he's not somebody who's just you know, the typical subscriber that you would think to the big lie and so, I'm just curious. You know, especially in I mean, the data on the Latino community and how the Latino community has been deceived through missing disinformation and so many in the Black community as well because we see this idea of trying to pit us against one another Latinos are taking people's jobs. Right. So, you need to vote for this person so that this and that and the other thing Or you see you hear Latinos hearing that you know Black folks don't like you because they think you're taking their job. There's all these different things Right? Lies that people put forward. Um what are you all doing in your organization to combat that? Because we really want people to vote in their own interest and also for us to be able to work across like we said racial, ethnic demographic lines to be able to make sure people have the right information to vote in their own interests

SB: I would jump in here and I would say you know we're working within the industry and what we doing is working with all the social media comes right? So, the meta Facebook Instagram Twitter, and so forth to make sure that they have policies in place and what we know for sure is that it takes them longer to take down information in Spanish than it does in English and so this information lives on longer in the Latino community but also for example even making sure that within our radio media outlet you know, we saw this specifically in Florida where we saw the big lies. Yeah. Occurring in terms of different candidates and even what was happening with our democracy So, it's making sure we're thinking strategically LULAC is a part of multiple coalitions We're typically also that organization that's knocking on the members of Congress doors saying, okay there needs to be a hearing on this because it's huge. We're making sure we're working with the FCC with the FTC but we also looking at what is coming next, right? The midterms are around the corner No doubt that we're going to see missing dis No doubt that we're already seeing this coming out of Russia And so for us, like it's really putting everything in con and being active involved And also just making sure that even our own elected official know what's happening, right? Like many don't know the massive disinformation in Spanish that's occurring and that

is still happening today and what's to come we are already like we're putting red flags every type of flag that we can imagine making sure that they take the steps now before it occurs

LB: you know for us I think part of what it goes back to organizing because the message matters but who trumps the message is the messenger. Yeah. Mm hmm. That trusted messenger can make a difference. Part of the way that we were able to come back You know of the mis and disinformation of course there were some and there are some. I mean, I guess you can't win em all, can you? Right? But there were, you know, we were able to combat that by literally having trust messengers building trust and community where they don't just see you in an election is around. Yeah. That part of what you saw even when I think about Georgia what Black Voters Matter and other organization you know, 2018 there was an election a gubernatorial election there that many of us, it was Stacey Abrams current Governor Brian Kemp and many of us felt like that election had been stolen right? Because of because it right Because of his he abused his role as Secretary of State. And so, I'm raising that because that was a significant loss for organizations that were doing work on the ground to actually see that even their choice It's one thing. Let's just duke it out and people make the choice but that their choice that they were actually denied this opportunity and so there was a and frustration Normally, that would be the thing you would see at the next election You would see this, you would see a decrease in turnout. What we did is we were able to shift that Misinformation disinform and really re refocus that a to actually the possibility of y'all we can win Yeah. Like we literally have to get engage and so what you saw is in 2020 you saw the largest turnout in the election ever in the history of the state Then, you saw ultimately changes even in the senate race Right. Because people normally in a runoff election Yeah. It's inch in a runoff election. There's a severe drop off. Mm hmm. This year, I mean, in 2021 the in the runoff election, there were more people that voted in the runoff that voted in the general election That is historic That is unheard of and so part of that I do think that there was this element of people understanding kind of the seriousness of the moment but part of it was literally based on community trust organization that were able to build out this ecosystem of community trust to be able to have a message to speak to folks that wasn't about a political candidate or political party It was literally around recent people saying that you have power and not only your vote matter because you matter. That literally shifting that paradigm I believe that that's what made the difference and that's how we continue to organize.

AL: Yeah, I also think this is like the special sauce for women. It's just like being an organizer is having these conversations, we do a lot of work to make sure that folks feel ready to take on those courageous conversation Um the Thanksgiving table is one of the best places to organize your family members and we the number of email that we get are like DMs to our Instagram that's just like, can you give me the talking points on X? I just want to make sure that I know because women also need to be perfect. I need I know exactly what to say.

VKS: We research, right.

AL: Exactly. All the bullet give me all the talking points so that I can go have that conversation with my uncle with my cousin with my, you know, daughter even and making sure that women are prepared for those courageous conversation The other thing that we doing at SuperMajority is sort of using all the ta of those maybe enemies against us or that they use and actually just like we have an online community of three and a half million people and they're protect from you know, in some ways I'm inoculate them from messages that they might be getting underwear by in a dominant narrative lifting up the you know, lived experiences, voices of women of color so that more even white people white women can sort of

see navigate that and that become pervasive in their in their own learnings, their own reflections but also in the way then that they show up in the world and that sort of inoculation I think is one of one of the, you know, one of our strategies for pushing back against the con the mis that happens in so many of the other online spaces that folks are navigating.

VKS: And I think that that's really interesting the idea around inoculation messaging because I think that's something that we all try to do is make sure that folks really understand what the information is that they need to know Right. To combat some of the missing disinformation.

AL: But I wanted to even know that it is Yeah. Like Right?

AL: We've seen so many people who just like it's so easy to hit that share button and we've all been victim of it at some point or the other I mean even with sometimes I'll see something on Twitter. I'll be like who died? because somebody trending And then you realize they're not really dead. I think the most recent one was like Queen Elizabeth. I was like no, not right. Right Not Queen Elizabeth. Right. So, and it was false obviously but you know, so, we're all we can all become victim to it in so many ways but when it comes to democracy yeah. It even more serious.

LB: It is right? I think that's why organizations matter. For example, if I see something that has legal women voters on it, I automatically that has a lot of credibility for me. Right? If I see other information I might not know those organizations but if I see LULAC and it's issue around what's happening in Latino community It carries a particular kind of weight for me. Right. When I see issues around gen issues and I see super major it carries a particular kind of weight and I think that's part of what even within the funding community why I'm constantly saying that part of our best defense around democracy I don't think it's the elected official I think it our work. Yeah. It's us. Yeah. Right? Organ that are actually on the ground working with people have built credibility and trust over time Yeah. Which is why I work needs to be funded at scale Yeah. Because oftentimes, we're the best defense Yeah. That people have against misinformation.

VKS: Now, you're absolutely right and this is a conversation I think that we have with a lot of funders is that they need to resource this work. Yeah. That's right. In a meaningful way because. Uh huh.

AL: Yeah. It's we mad though about how people have even learned from the Georgia story. I like, we did not win Georgia because you pumped like. Right. So much money into Georgia in the last three months. We won Georgia because LaTosha was organizing in Georgia and So many other. Yeah. Like I feel like people are sort of walking away with that. Yeah It's like the wrong thing and actually the lesson to learn is that consistent steady. That's right Like investment sizable investment into places. That how you win. You win when invest in people not investing in politician right?

VKS: Yeah absolutely and also because I think again, going back to the power that women had, let me tell you, Georgia, women did the thing in Georgia. Black women did the thing in Georgia and but one of the other things talked about Brian I was, there was a few good men.

LB: I got to raise. Okay. because my, listen my partner is Cliff. Right. We love Cliff. I don't know anybody that works harder than brother Cliff and others but women were absolutely.

VKS: Yes. No, I love You know I love me some Cliff. And you know, but one of the things going back to something you said earlier about the gubernatorial race in Georgia a few years ago and the role that

Brian Kemp played as Secretary of State and we saw this kind of continuum. We've been seeing the diminishing trust across the board for election officials That's right. And end of the day that is that should not be the case, right? It's not only about the process of voting but people actually need to understand not only how election work but what the role of election administrator are and so, how do we renew trust in our elections administration and how do we help combat violence at the polls or you know I mean, you've seen the Texas law, right? Where people can now be open carry, and poll observer things like that. So, it's there's an intimidation factor there for a lot of people and so I'm cur on your thoughts around protecting the po beyond protect our vote. We know we love Lawyers Committee. Right. Um. Right. But sometimes a phone call in that moment when people are feeling intimidated or when people are questioning after the fact trying to do these recounts and everything else. That right. How do we address that?

LB: You know I'll just say briefly. I do think that we really when I when I talked about earlier we got to our paradigm We have to move beyond the transaction of politics to this kind of transformative frame and I'm saying that because there's this third rail of organization like I there a pro-democracy movement that is needed in this country. Yeah. It can't just be about this legislation or this candidate It literally if we want transformational change and I actually believe we on the brink of it. Believe it or not I think part of this fight that we in right now is because things are changing Right? And the and we are in a defining moment of whether we go forward or not and because of that if we think of this kind of what bishop Barber always talks about the third reconstruct and we think of this as a reconstruction period right? And that means that we've actually gotta shift how we show up in in ways as well and so we've gotta have more people that we're literally in this pipeline of being young folks that are being poll workers, that are being trained I can tell you the difference of having somebody that knows the rules. Yeah. That are at the polls on the inside. As well as having advocates on the outside which is why we need woman power We need more woman power Um that's why you saw the bill SB202 in Georgia that says that organizations that give water and food Right. You know that it makes it illegal Part of that is in this kind of strategy that is always been undermining voting which has been I always talk about this with three point It's been about restrict access. It been about literally take the administrative process and weaponizing that against people and it's been about creating a culture of fear And I can tell you the difference in elections when people feel like they have a on the outside and that there's some people inside with integrity And so I do think that it's going to take this legal. So, we gotta keep suing And I know all of us are suing people right now. We love this. So, we gotta keep suing but we gotta keep organizing and we also have to keep building and we've gotta literally some of these processes. We can't just say oh this is what they doing. We've gotta take over those process We've gotta actually put people in office and in position and recruit volunteers to actually be a part of this process.

SB: I would just add Virginia that there's also federal pieces of legislation right? And we have to be consistent and we have to keep our eyes on that federal legislation which would cover all of our fifty states and make sure that the John Lewis Act that are yeah. That the different voting rights act that are in place that they actually pass and right now is that moment, right Like, yes, you know, we're saying we're going to going to see changes in the midterm We're going to going to see what happens, who's elect if there's a shift in the house and the senate. But I think we have to, this is why we have to make sure we're involved engaged and it has to start today, right Like, what can we be doing today to make sure that we see those federal pieces of legislation but what we're also seeing is that trend at the state level. How can we work with legislators at the state level to make sure that there's also voting pieces

that provide that accessibility to our community to all of our communities and you would think that it's common sense in 2022 but it's not. Right? And so, making sure that our democracy is still alive and keeping in mind that it's tumultuous times, right? We saw what happened January 6th of last year. That right. We saw how fragile our democracy is and why it's even more important that we're involved and engaged and then I would always put the plug We need to run for office. That right. Absolutely. Right. We need to have more women and women of color at the table because we know and when we look at women presidents of other countries There's just a different leadership style. We bring that extra sauce to the table and we know we New Zealand during COVID, right? I mean, come on now. She did it. But on top, Virginia you think of all the layers of hats that we wear right? Like executives who are mother with young young little ones, right? And the roles that women play in are already want to nurse when they have to do with thing. That's right. You always want that.

VKS: So, we're running out of time. Um we're down to about 3 minutes left But one of the things that I would ask each of you. Can they stick around I know. I don't know if we can stick around I hope we can do more of these actually because it's like the conversation is so good We're limited to an hour but first I want to say I'm going to have you all have the last word but I just want to say personally how much I value and appreciate all of what you all are doing And the sisterhood that exists among so many of us who are in this fight And we welcome everybody to come into this conversation with us. We want you to continue this conversation with your friends at home because everybody, every woman in particular has so much power in this moment to create the country that we want to live in and so we ask you to have this conversation at home with your friends. Talk to other people in your community about how you can be the change at home and how you can lead our democracy to a more perfect place. So, the question I have for all of you really is what you with one thing that gives you hope today and that you want women to be able to be hopeful for and for me, I go back to that word sisterhood because the love that I have for so many women who are doing this work and seeing us win together It brings me hope. I know I'm safe when I have Amanda, LaTosha, Sindy, and so many other women in this fight. So, you know just one by one. What do you have hoped for?

AL: It's working Mm. Uh we are winning Um and there are a lot of things that are in our way. A lot of barriers. A lot of obstacles Fights. Um but our vigilance our resilience and in fact the strength of women is a thing that will keep us winning.

LB: This little light of mine Let it shine Let it shine Let it shine. You know I believe that we all carry a particular light in us. And I believe what really gives me hope women. Like this is what gives me hope. Yeah. That the end of the day we have to really recognize. It doesn't matter where we are on the political spectrum It doesn't matter whether you grew up in the rural area or whether you grew up in the city We all want two things. We all want to feel a sense of power and self-determination and we all want to feel love And so what gives me hope as long as love is around. Yeah. I think there's a chance. Yeah. And so, I believe that this we have to really be able to reframe our political thinking around rooting everything we do in the love of humanity And I believe women are pretty darn good at that.

VKS: Yes and miss Sindy.

SB: You know, I think it takes me back to my undergrad days. I had the privilege to go to Virginia State University and there, I was exposed to Langston Hughes and there's a particular poem which is Let America Be America again. Yeah And you know when I think of the future, it's the opportunity that America as a country has when we are all included When we're all at the table and when we're

participating, that we still have not lift up to that ideal but that it lies within us and perhaps even this generation to make that happen

VKS: Thank you all so much. Thank you all for joining us And all I can say is let's keep it moving Let's win in 2020. Democracy will win and thank you all for joining us at home. Thank you.