<https://macshieldonline.com/46756/online-exclusives/levin-finds-their-voice-in-the-fight-for-abortion-rights/>

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Hello, and welcome to the Real Talk Podcast. I'm this episode's audio engineer and host, Ingrid Smith, and today I'm talking to junior Cassidy Levin about the power of teen activism and fighting for abortion rights in Texas after Roe v. Wade was overturned. Let's get into it.

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So Cassidy, tell me how you feel about the state of abortion rights in America right now. What laid the groundwork for your activism?

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It's a scary time. It's a turning point because we have two options: we can protect abortion rights, we can have a constitutional amendment or pass legislation or do whatever we can to protect it, or we can just not. And then as individuals, we also have a choice, we have a choice to just let it happen and maybe post something on Instagram, but not actually do something, or you can get up and do something.

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You said this is a scary time. Tell me why it feels scary.

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People’s experiences right now and what they're going through, it's horrific. The idea that you don't have the right to your own body is awful. And if you're in Texas, like if you get an abortion, you could face the death penalty. That's not very ‘life,’ you know, that's very ‘death.’ It's about control. And I think that fact in and of itself [is scary]. It's about control, it's about getting votes, it's about making people angry so they'll show up to vote Republican and it's about controlling us and forcing us into what they think we should be, like stay-at-home moms and that type of thing. That is terrifying.

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I want to hear about the origins of your advocacy. When did you first hear about the issue? When did you first feel compelled to take action?

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I mean, I've known about it my whole life. But I didn't start helping organize stuff until Roe was overturned. Because, I was going to protests, I was so angry, I started doing sit-ins and then eventually some people with a larger group reached out to me to organize some joint stuff at the Capitol, which we were able to do. And then I got involved with them. But mostly it was just anger and despair. I didn't know what else to do, so I just did something. And then I heard people's stories, and I kept doing something.

Why does it matter to you?

Because bodily autonomy is such a fundamental thing. Like, so many other things are based on the fact that you have the right to your body and no one else does, so many other rights. All this stuff is built on the idea that you have the right to privacy and your own body. We've had that right stripped from us.

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Some people would say that going to the Capitol and protesting might not be as much of an effective mode for change as writing to legislators. What do you think about that?

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I've written letters to people while standing in the Capitol, and people will organize letter-writing campaigns at events and at marches. It's not mutually exclusive; you can do that stuff together. And the group I work with takes a lot of inspiration from the Green Wave in Latin America because having mass sustained protests in the streets– historically, having a sustained presence in the streets is combined with community building, in every instance of social change that has been there.

What kind of community have you found in these people?

I mean, at the beginning, I think we were all grieving together. I mainly protest; I feel like it's the most impactful thing I can do. But I think it's a combination of all of these things: voting, pestering our representatives, protesting, community building, it all has to work together.

03:26

Who are you fighting for?

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I'm fighting for the people who can't be out there fighting, the people who aren't able to be in the street protesting, people who are at a higher threat of violence from the police or have disabilities that don't allow them to be out there. Those are the people who are hurt most by abortion [bans]. Those are the people who are going to face the brunt of it. If I need an abortion, I can go out of state to get one, and my parents will support that, but so many people can't and that's what I'm fighting for.

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Even after the Supreme Court overturned Roe v. Wade, you're still going to these protests. Why haven't you stopped?

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I think because they want us to stop. Because if we stop showing up and fighting then who's left to fight?

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So let's talk a little bit about the other side. There are a lot of strong voices that criticize abortion rights. How do you respond to them?

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Yeah, I mean, I do understand that a lot of people truly believe that abortion is murder, right? Like it hasn't ever been about life or babies or any of that stuff. If you actually want to, like, stop the amount of abortions, there are better ways to do it. Have comprehensive sex education, provide free birth control, provide free child care, health care, education.

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Is there a big misconception people tend to have about the fight for abortion rights?

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I think people think that we, that we’re overdramatic because we wear like bloody pants and stuff. But it's not overdramatic, people are dying. A couple of weeks ago there was somebody in Texas in a coma because she couldn't get the care she needed. Abortion is healthcare, it's not overdramatic to say abortion bans are killing people because they are.

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Do you have people close to you who are on the other side? Can you coexist with them?

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I try my best, but it can be difficult. I mean, we try and be supportive and try and reach out to people and try and have constructive conversations whenever possible, but it can be really difficult to co-exist. And I definitely don't think it's something that should be tolerated or ignored. I think you shouldn't just like shut up and stay quiet to keep the peace, like that's not going to do anything.

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I want to hear more about the environment at these protests.

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There's definitely a sense of community, we take care of each other. You know, we’re very careful of making sure that we have medics and safety officers and making sure that everybody's physically safe, but also mentally safe.

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Is there anything you've learned from the people you protest with?

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I've definitely learned a lot about the history of the anti-abortion and the pro-choice movements. But I've also learned a lot from their bravery and their perseverance. I mean, there are people that work full-time jobs 40 hours a week, and then protest another 40 hours a week, like it's a full-time job for them. They have been doing this for months, or years or decades, and they're still doing it, and they inspire me.

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What is your main goal?

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More in a cultural sense that we can de-stigmatize abortion because it’s healthcare. It's not something shameful. I don't know, I'd like to see more kindness and less violence.

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In your ideal world, what would reproductive rights look like?

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I'd like to see a future with no stigma around abortion, and federal protections. I'd also like to see more support for young parents and I'd like to see national free health care. I'd like to see– childcare and education, it all ties together. I would just like to see a better world for the actual kids.

07:09

Do you think that as a teen your voice matters?

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I mean, it's my future, right? Like, I'll be here longer than some old dude. I also think that people who say like, ‘You're too young to have an opinion,’ well, then should I be too young to have a kid? All of our voices matter. And if you believe something, you should speak up for it, and you should go fight for it no matter how old you are or anything. You should fight for what you believe in no matter what.

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I want to hear more about your drive to take action.

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I mean, I think anybody who tells you that you don't have power as an individual just doesn't want you to use that power. You do, you do have power. For me, once I started, I couldn't stop. Once I started and got involved with the people, it was hearing people's stories for me, one person in particular’s story, that one story is what always keeps me going back out.

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For you it was about realizing your own power?

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Yeah. And then also in-person hearing somebody crying while telling their story in front of the crowd, like having to share this… it was a lot. And it kind of, I don't know, it made it like how could I stop? I'd rather be out fighting every day than not doing anything.

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Do you feel like it's your duty?

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Yeah, especially as a person with a lot of privilege, and I’m financially privileged. I'm white, you know, and I have a supportive family. Like, I have the privilege to be out there fighting and if I don't use it, then I'm just complacent.

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Do you have a message that you want people to hear?

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Whatever you can do, whatever that is for you, if it is as simple as like posting stuff or if you want to get involved in leadership or anything in between, if you don't do it, that's dumb. Do it. Like there are so many people, people I know, people I love, that care, but they don't care enough. I think it's about empathy. You have to put yourself in other people's shoes, and you have to try and imagine what they're going through.

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How do you see things like the overturning of Roe v Wade affecting your community at school?

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You know, I don't see it affecting the community enough. I'm honestly disappointed with how little I've seen it affecting the community. I feel like we should be mad. All of us, we should be mad. We're in Austin, we’re the capital of Texas. We're like a 10-minute drive from the Capitol at McCallum. You know, we should be mad because these are our lives and our future.

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So you think that we as teens have a real ability to make change?

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We have so much power, especially as we get older, like as we become able to vote we get power that way. But also we have power as young people, as people who are able to– we have weekends off to go do stuff, like we have so much power just in our time and our abilities to walk long distances. We don't have any less power than anyone else just because we're not legal adults.

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Do you have any closing notes about why people should care, especially high schoolers?

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It's not just about abortion. I mean, if it was just about abortion, that'd be bad enough, but it's not. It’s about building the future we want. And that future should include bodily autonomy, and it should include whatever you want it to include. You have so much time left in your life that you need to fight for what you want it to be like, what you want the world to be like, and not just for you but for future generations. It’s our responsibility to make a better world.

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That's it for this episode of Real Talk. Thanks for listening, and I hope you tune in next time.