

Will Huntsberry ([00:13:50](#)):

<Inaudible>. Hello. I'm Will Ferry. I'm a senior investigative reporter with Voice of San Diego. And these are your panelists. They'll get started in just a minute, but I wanna thank you all for coming today. In case you don't know about Voice of San Diego, we are a local news outlet. We do our very best to hold your public elected officials accountable. And we do our best to help you engage with your government and engage in politics. And that is what today it's all about. And these guys are gonna tell you about one of the most basic components of that, which is the state government. I would like to thank several people especially Cal Matters, our partner on this event for the first time. This is some Cal Matters people here for you. Now also we have a bunch of sponsors and they're awesome and they love civic affairs, and they are the College of Arts and Sciences at U S D A A

Neil Chase ([00:14:52](#)):

R P, Burnham Center for Community

Will Huntsberry ([00:14:54](#)):

Advancement, San Diego County Water Authority, the San Diego Foundation, Atlantis, California, American

Neil Chase ([00:15:01](#)):

Water,

Will Huntsberry ([00:15:02](#)):

Cox, the San Diego Housing Federation. There's

Neil Chase ([00:15:05](#)):

A lot of 'em. I told you. Burnham

Will Huntsberry ([00:15:07](#)):

Morris Center for Real Estate and Estate's,

Neil Chase ([00:15:10](#)):

Now School of Business,

Will Huntsberry ([00:15:11](#)):

Planned Parenthood,

Neil Chase ([00:15:13](#)):

Pen Development, climate Action.

Neil Chase ([00:15:28](#)):

Well, thank you to the voice of San Diego, this together. When you heard that list of sponsors just now, think about how diverse that list is. How many different kinds of organizations and people wanna see these conversations happen. Right? That's what Scott just said in there about these kind of conversations. I'm Neil Chase. I'm the c e o at Cal Matters. With me is <inaudible>, who covers the

capital and politics for us. And we're gonna talk a little bit about understanding Sacramento or Sacramento 1 0 1. And I wanna put up on the something Sam put together that walks you through a lot of this stuff.

Neil Chase ([00:16:10](#)):

We'll take a look at it a little bit. Just real quickly, my, in the past I was the editor of the San Jose Mercury News. I was a newspaper editor fighting the same battles that you all have seen going on at the UT and across the state and the country with some very, very good hardworking professional journalists in those organizations trying to serve you every day. And, you know, facing the, the, the financial challenges to hit the news industry. I've been, I've been lucky enough to be leading Cal Matters now for four and a half years where we're doing the exact same high quality work with a different business model, we hope gonna let more journalism thrive. And Samia joined us from the Los Angeles Times. A little publication up north you might have heard of. But Samia, I wanna start with your background, because how you came to know what you know is a big part of the conversation today. Just kind of talk through your, where you grew up and kind of how you came to be involved in your home.

Will Huntsberry ([00:17:02](#)):

Sure. So,

Sameea Kamal ([00:17:03](#)):

Can everybody hear me okay? Oh, I question. Yeah, there we go. Hello everyone. Thank you for, for coming. So I grew up in Southern California in the San Gabriel Valley. I my background is I'm South Asian. I came up in a community that was not super, you know, politically or civically engaged. And so you know, I had been in journalism and I had learned a lot, you know, through my own work. But whenever, you know, even now at Cal Matters, when I tell my family and friends what I do, I get like, these sheepish looks like, oh yeah, that's cool. State politics. I don't really know a lot about that. And the same thing was, you know, when I would try to talk to diverse sources I would try to talk to people who weren't normally asked for their viewpoints or, you know whose opinions weren't often sought out, but it felt like there was a little bit of a gap.

Sameea Kamal ([00:17:57](#)):

Like before you asked someone how they feel about a bill it felt like we needed to take a step and, you know talk about, well, what, you know, what is the state government's role? What is their job, you know, in what is the bill? What is the bill <laugh>? Yeah. How does the bill get passed? What, you know and what, what are the limitations? And so that's where the idea for the explainer came from was just setting a foundation so that we could all kind of be at the same place and give more people an opportunity to know what's happening and be able to give their their input on it.

Neil Chase ([00:18:31](#)):

You, you've worked in California public schools. How much of this did you learn in school?

Neil Chase ([00:18:36](#)):

Without training <inaudible>?

Sameea Kamal ([00:18:39](#)):

I, I don't remember which is the problem, like that. Yeah, I don't remember. There, there are just like things that I learned putting this together that were so interesting to me. Like the fact that, you know, we have in on the state level, the, the executive, the judicial, the legislative branch, but there's actually no requirement that we have to have those three branches. We just, you know, the state decides to model after the federal government. So things like that were very interesting, even for me to learn, even having been in sort of like some politics, reporting, journalism, civic engagement in some way. You learn every day,

Neil Chase ([00:19:11](#)):

Just find that out, create new branch.

Sameea Kamal ([00:19:13](#)):

Yeah.

Neil Chase ([00:19:15](#)):

Let's talk about state government versus city, county governments versus <inaudible>. What's the role of the state government? What state government, what does state government do? And maybe more importantly, what doesn't state government?

Sameea Kamal ([00:19:25](#)):

So the state government is kind of an intermediary between the federal government and the local level. So I think money is the most helpful way to think of it. You know, there's a federal government, they have their budget, they gives some money to the state. The state then gives that to local entities. But of course there's more than the money. There's, you know, actually passing laws and like deciding how and where that money gets spent. So I think what I learned through putting this together was the state is just so involved in the day-to-day in a way that, you know, I think we hear more about the federal government just in the news in the public. But the state's role is really, you know, impactful on our day-to-day lives. And what the state does do is make sure schools are running implements public health policies, protects the environment you know, enforces business guidelines. So those are kind of the big four.

Neil Chase ([00:20:23](#)):

And then what, what therefore then falls to the cities and county.

Sameea Kamal ([00:20:27](#)):

So really the day-to-day implementation of those things, you know, the state makes sure schools are running, but how, you know, those schools run from day-to-day. That's up to cities and counties. And I think we'll hear a lot today about, you know, the state versus local control and in a, in a state as big as California, how much conflict and how many, many differences of opinion there can be on that.

Neil Chase ([00:20:49](#)):

Exactly. Right. With 58 counties and 400, and I think it's 83 cities and towns all of which have very different perspectives. We've also seen times when the state government has to step up, right? Covid, the, the emergency being, being the most recent one. Talk about the, the powers the state actually has

that wants to step in and take over more than you notice, because there's a, there's a lot state can do that. It doesn't do day to day, but can, it wants to.

Sameea Kamal ([00:21:16](#)):

Yeah, I think the pandemic is a great example of that. The mask mandates the you know, that the rules on gathering, but we're also seeing that extended right to the house, stepping up more in, in housing policies and addressing homelessness. Recently, one of the things I reported on was about public transit and how they're facing, you know, the transit agencies are facing a lot of challenges trying to get riders coming back, you know, since people are not going to the offices as much, so the state had to up its role, you know, provide more money. But with that also comes some guidelines. So I think we are seeing the state amp up a little bit on, on, you know, what they're doing, how, how involved they're getting. And I think we're also seeing pushback on, on that from cities who maybe don't want to do things that way. But I think those are the conversations we hear a lot about specific bills and legislature, like, oh, what, you know, we'll, we'll pass this broad idea, but we'll leave a lot of options for cities or counties. So I think those are the conversations we hear.

Neil Chase ([00:22:21](#)):

And then the most extreme version is the cities or counties that say they want to see from California be a separate state or join Oregon, or all the five other ideas that are quoting around in there, which would be very difficult to execute. This, the concept count matters was formed to a couple different things. What is to inform Californians about the government that you run, that you vote for, that you pay for, that you have a voice in, and that not nearly enough of us understand well enough. Most of us who don't live in Sacramento don't think a lot about Sacramento. And that's probably an understatement. We could probably find it on a map, right? But it's, it's up there and out of the way and stuff happens that happens that is really important that we don't notice. This explainer format that we have is designed to give you a chance to take specific questions and kind of diagram them, right?

Neil Chase ([00:23:05](#)):

So this is what we were just talking about, which, which departments or which levels of government do which things. And of course, it's not clear and they're not a hard line. You can see the federal government, state government do some things that, that they share what the regional, local governments do, and each one of these little cards has some information on it. And a link where you can share it out and take distance card and share it with somebody. So for anybody who's doing educational stuff, curriculum, community events, whatever you, you can share individual pieces of these, the, the money, right? Is the big thing. Follow, and a lot of folks probably don't understand talk a where the money actually comes from and goes, right? Because not all of that comes from federal government through the state,

Sameea Kamal ([00:23:50](#)):

Right? Yeah. So we talked about the, the filter system of federal money to state, but as you can see, a lot of state funds just come from things like you know, fees state taxes, D M V, registration fees, things like that. And then they,

Neil Chase ([00:24:06](#)):

The DMV registration fees, <laugh>.

Sameea Kamal ([00:24:10](#)):

I think the interesting thing I've found out doing this research was that for every federal on federal revenues, California contributes \$1 of every \$6. So it, it works both ways. We get money from the government, but we're also all you know, our, our tax dollars.

Neil Chase ([00:24:30](#)):

Yes. Yeah. So one out of every six federal dollars comes from the state of California. One out of every eight people in America lives in California. So it's, it is not completely outta wh and it's always important. So as I raise money for journalism, some of the national journalists have under say, well, why would we just fund California journalism? Well, one out of every Native Americans lives here to start with. And of course, everything we do here affects the, the entire country, right? There's a lot of run over how do you, how do we think about California state government versus other states? Some states don't really wanna have a government. Some states have big complicated governments. Where, where, where does ours fall in that, that comparison?

Sameea Kamal ([00:25:07](#)):

So there are other legislatures that are only part-time. I think California meets for 200 something days of the year, whereas in Texas, I believe it's half of that. You know, other states, legislators are only part-time. It's not their full-time job here. They, they live and breathe <laugh>, you know, their work at the capitol. So we definitely have a, a bigger, you know, I guess based on the size of the state, it makes sense. But, but

Neil Chase ([00:25:35](#)):

Even a state as big as Texas, right? They mean for three months, every two years. Now they're in their second special session because they can't get anything. This is an interesting look, right? That the number of people represented by each person in the state legislation, right? If you're in Texas, you represent a lot fewer people in your California, so they're very different. How do you, how do the legislators get influence? How did they think about what, what goes on their agenda? What they, because what happens in the legislature, right? One, one of the things we have to understand as covering Sacramento is every person in that legislature came from somewhere else, right? You know, Senator Blake Spears here, she came from San Diego and Sanita, she didn't come from Sacramento. Everybody who's in the legislature is representing someplace outside of that building, bringing ideas to the floor that in theory will help their constituents if they're doing their job properly, which is something else we try to monitor what, what, what influences their decisions about what ends up actually being on the floor, the things that the legislature actually gets vote on.

Sameea Kamal ([00:26:34](#)):

I'll start with a less fun answer and then go to the fun answer. I like the fun answer. We'll get there, <laugh>. Alright. The last one answer I think is, you know, the term we all hear a lot, special interests, lobbying, you know, there are some powerful groups who have, you know, and in California it's I think it's interesting because when you hear special interests, you think like corporations, big money. But in California it can be a lot of things that are like human focused, you know unions and, and advocates for communities of color. You know everyone there's, there's big coalitions. There's a work and family coalition. I don't know if maybe some of you're from that <laugh>, but there's, there's

Neil Chase ([00:27:18](#)):

Obvious in the wrong

Sameea Kamal ([00:27:20](#)):

<Laugh>. So special interests can be wide ranging in California maybe also as well. And, you know, they, they're organized. There's, and there isn't a guidebook, but it's like a playbook that a lot of people have gotten savvy to, I think. But the, the fun answer, I actually spent some time at a district field office where a senator up in Sacramento, and I got to see how they, you know, how they process what they get from constituents. And so they do actually, they have a software where they, you know, read everything they get from their district members or constituents. They log it, you know, is it someone having trouble with the E D D or the D M V, can we intervene? Can we do something about that? Are they giving an opinion on bills? And that actually does shape, you know, what they might decide. And so that was kind of mind blowing to me because I think it's you know, maybe not something we'd expect.

Neil Chase ([00:28:11](#)):

One, one member of a, of a representative staff can fix a problem for one individual decision. How did it feel like when they got those complaints or those problems? They, they go, oh, I can fix this. I'm, I'm calling from the senator's office, I'm talking to assembly member's office. Or did they look at that and go, I we're not gonna be able to help? Was there a sense they're actually fixing problems and then getting things out?

Sameea Kamal ([00:28:31](#)):

I mean, the way they track it is, this is the case, was the case resolved? What that resolution looks like can vary, but there was a sense that we can at least put the pressure on. And I think sometimes that helps, like with all these e d D issues that were happening during the pandemic with people not getting their money they were able to successfully, you know, connect people to, to that money.

Neil Chase ([00:28:50](#)):

Yeah. Yeah. Which I think a lot of us don't realize, right? When you're having a problem with the state or state agency, the people in your assembly member or senator's office have access to those agencies, like through direct connections that you don't have. My daughter works as an intern and a member of Congress's office, and when you got a, a problem from a veteran trying to deal with something with the va, they would call the number at the VA that only members of Congress have for their constituents and get resolutions faster than any of us could by calling the 800 number of being on poll. Yeah.

Sameea Kamal ([00:29:18](#)):

That

Neil Chase ([00:29:18](#)):

Just, it is, it's all about influence, right? But that influence can help you, and that's the person, by the way, that you or majority of the voters in your district elected and sent to Sacramento to represent you. It's actually been job, I think lot of missed that, that function. Talk about the reason that you decided to do this explainer. It's awfully basic, right? It's Sacramento one oh ones. It's, it's how a bill becomes law if anybody remembers the old video. So what's, why do we need this?

Sameea Kamal ([00:29:45](#)):

One was just, it was my collection of notes that I was keeping for myself. I came to Cal Matters almost three years ago. And so, you know, state politics was new for me. And so I thought if I have been living and breathing this stuff and I don't know it, then I bet a lot of other people don't know. But yeah, I I think it's almost like a, I thought of it as a guidebook for civic engagement. You know, like we talked about so many people, those, those case numbers that the state senator had of people who had contacted him for, for these issues, it was so small compared to the number of people in his district. And you know, things like that. I think people don't know what, what their lawmakers are there for, what they can do. Aside from, you know, the speeches and, and the big like press conferences that we might see yeah, I think, I think those were the inspirations and

Neil Chase ([00:30:32](#)):

There's some data that we have right, about pulling data about what people really understand and how understand how much people actually know, right?

Sameea Kamal ([00:30:39](#)):

Yeah. So this was a uc, Berkeley Institute of Governmental Studies poll from back in July. And it was of likely voters. So voters who had who had voted in the last five of the last seven elections, and the statistics were just very far from representative of California. I believe it was over 70% were over 50 years old. Over 70% were male. Significant majorities were college graduates, homeowners, and that just, it doesn't look like California. And the other question that they asked, not just the likely voters, but in general, like why, why didn't people vote? And the biggest reason was that they didn't feel informed enough about the issues or the candidates. So, you know, I think understanding state government is like step one to getting people to have a say in their lives. Yeah.

Neil Chase ([00:31:30](#)):

And we voiced San Diego and lots of other organizations try really hard every election to make sure people are informed as much as possible about, about the candidates at, at Cal Matters. You know, we look at the number of people come to our website every day, and it's a pretty steady amount, a million or so people a month, most months of the year, next October, when ballots are sitting on people's kitchen tables, it is gonna be like 5 million. And this is the one time every two years when everybody is asking, what am I voting on? Who's that person running for? State senate judges? Why do we have to vote on judges? Why, how do I even know what judge to vote for? Really, dialysis is on the ballot again, right? All those question ballot propositions. I mean, we know how confusing the ballot proposition where yes means no and no means yes, then there's two next to each other that will offset each other, but only if one gets passed and the other one doesn't.

Neil Chase ([00:32:16](#)):

They're super hard to understand. And it is, unfortunately, it's, it is a combination of intentional and, and, and malpractice that we, that those things are so hard to understand. But we try to break those down very clearly, and we do it with our partners at places like Voice. You'll see a lot more of that this year in the voter guide that our team's putting out. That'll be available on, on the voice side as well as on our site. One of the things that we try to share and help people understand is who actually represents you, right? And I'll pick on Senator Blakes spear because she's here and we'll see that she's a former journalist, but if you know the person who represents you or you type in your address and you go to this director, you find the biography of somebody and you start to understand that the members of the legislature are not faceless generic, you know, just, it's, it's not a jury, right?

Neil Chase ([00:33:12](#)):

A jury's supposed to be like a bunch of your peers pick somewhat randomly to go sit in a box and make a decision. These are people who all have a background, a business experience, educational experience political experience. This one is a, a former mayor. They all have funding for their campaigns. You can see that the, the party, the Democratic party has been the, the biggest funder of this legislator. And then you start digging in how to contact the person, right? If you're in Encinitas from the district office, where they were born, where they lived their age, how they voted on all different kinds of legislation, this legislator wasn't in the last session. So we don't have that yet. Campaign contributions almost all from the parties, some from unions, some from the candidates themselves, what committees they're on. The committees are really, really important, right?

Neil Chase ([00:34:01](#)):

What committee you're on determines how much influence you're gonna have your ability to bring up an issue, get that issue talked about, have big input on that issue before it goes to before the legislature. And so the committees somebody is on, represents a combination of what the party leadership wanted them to be on and what they wanna work on. And you can imagine a former mayor would be interested in some of these committees this represented the senators on. And then we look at travel, we look at gifts received. This person got a 270, 6 \$50 value gift of a tickets to Padres game from one of the tribes. Does that influence how they vote? Are they that petty? No. But when you see somebody's history over time, you start to understand the next level of this that we're working on is that we are taking all of the data you can imagine about a state legislature, how they voted, where they get their money from, what gifts they've received, what trips they've taken at, at, at somebody else's expense, how they're rated by every different special institute in the country, all this information, what, how, what they've said on the floor of hearings and, and and legislative sessions.

Neil Chase ([00:35:04](#)):

All this information together. We're gonna make that all available starting in January about every member's legislature. And then don't be scared. We're gonna use artificial intelligence, which some people love. It freaks out some people not to write stories about 'em, but to look at the data and to find the interesting story ideas. Why did this person change the pattern of their votes? Why did they always vote this way? Now they vote that way. Why did they all of a sudden get a bunch of money from somebody? I guess that means that interest is trying to influence something this legislator's about to vote on. All the different things we can learn from that data will be turned into story ideas, not stories. And the story ideas will be distributed to our reporters and to the voice of San Diego reporters and anybody else in the state, any other journalist in the state that wanna use them so that we can start to give you more accountability about the people that you're electing in sending to Sacramento.

Neil Chase ([00:35:53](#)):

And that's, that's what we think is part of our role, is to inform you, part of our role is to hold those government officials accountable. Let's talk a little bit about the influence. I'm gonna take your questions in a minute because this is help you understand what's going on in the state government, the effect of California on national politics, national election, right? There are, there are new services that cover California and sell the news about California for very high prices to corporate lobbying interests in Washington and in Europe in capitals across the world, right? That's a big business that our friends in Politico are in. A lot of folks follow what happens in California, the, the air legislation, right? The air

resources, the, the pollution legislation of, of, of decades ago with one of those places California's land. But there's a lot of other stuff we do here that gets national, national, right?

Sameea Kamal ([00:36:41](#)):

Yeah. And I think these last couple of weeks alone have these last couple of weeks alone have really emphasized the importance of California on the national political scene. You know, after the, the death of Senator Diane Feinstein the ousting of the speaker of the house, Kevin McCarthy, both from California but also, you know, there's other ways related to national politics are primary got moved up. So California has more of a influencer, you know adds to the snowball of the presidential election. I was also just at the California Republican Party convention last weekend.

Neil Chase ([00:37:24](#)):

That <laugh>

Sameea Kamal ([00:37:26](#)):

It was, it was, I learned a lot including that.

Neil Chase ([00:37:31](#)):

Let me, lemme ask the question. What's that snarky way? <Laugh>, when you're the party that doesn't have a lot of control in Sacramento, you know, remember right? In any blue state or red state, the majority party maybe has atmos 65 or 70%, right? In California there's at least 30%, 35% Republicans in Nebraska, there's at least 30, 35% Democrats. It's not we, we talk about ourselves being a blue state because the legislature has a majority, and how that's how the voting happened. But how do people in the California Republican Party think about what's the party's role at a time when they're not gonna get statewide office? But they're, a lot of people in California identify as Republicans.

Sameea Kamal ([00:38:06](#)):

That's kind of, so

Neil Chase ([00:38:07](#)):

Them are confused about which Republican party, they're part of

Sameea Kamal ([00:38:11](#)):

The that's the existential crisis basically, that I came across where you know, there's the desire by some in the party, more moderate members to like revise the platform. That effort failed, but they wanted to update the platform to remove specific opposition to abortion or same-sex marriage. And so that effort failed because the more conservative wing, you know, feels like they shouldn't compromise the party ideals. And you know, that's, that's not why people come to that party. They come for the, for the ideals. So, you know, it, it is interesting to see in California because we're so used to the, the blue dominance. But I think if you look at national party registration, the, the disparity, the gap between the parties is not as big. But you know, we're talking about the ways that California leads and I think that's, that can be hard to gauge. I was trying to see like, are we, you know are there bills that we're leading on? Are there, I I think energy and climate is kind of the big and obvious one, but there are other bills actually in front of the legislature that we're still waiting to see and possibly are coming in right now, <laugh>. But for example, I've been reporting on,

Neil Chase ([00:39:24](#)):

Those were passed by the legislature. They're sitting on the governor's desk waiting for his signature by a deadline of

Sameea Kamal ([00:39:28](#)):

October 14th. 14Th,

Neil Chase ([00:39:30](#)):

Right? So he's got many bills, 700,

Sameea Kamal ([00:39:32](#)):

About 700 bills,

Neil Chase ([00:39:34](#)):

700 bills up. He, he complained in the middle of the summer. There's 2,600 bills in, in the assembly right now in the legislature right now, California really have 2,600 problems. <Laugh>, right? There's a lot more bills than they used to, but there's still 700 bills sitting on his desk to be signed or vetoed in the next week, basically.

Sameea Kamal ([00:39:49](#)):

Yeah. So one of 'em is the bill to ban cast discrimination to add that to the state's housing and employment laws that would make California the first in the nation. But it's, you know, drawn some concern from members of the South Asian community, especially in the Bay Area. So, you know, things like that. I think there are less clear cut ways where is it important for California to lead and be the first, or, you know, does this policy make sense for the state? And I think that's one of the considerations. Yeah, other ways, just, I'm thinking of the bills that I've been following the session and others, the legislative staff union the legislature passed a bill that would allow staff to unionize, but we wouldn't be the first Oregon and I think Washington have already passed bills like that. So

Neil Chase ([00:40:36](#)):

You didn't know about that, right? How many people would assume that the staff of the California state legislature doesn't have the right to unionize in a relatively pro-union state, right? That's one of those things where you Wow, they don't, and now there's a, a fight over the bill to do that. It's,

Sameea Kamal ([00:40:49](#)):

Yeah. And one of the big arguments for that was, you know, they work these really long hours and they don't get paid overtime. So yeah, you know, I, I think that's ways that California's leading you know, there are some not so great ways that we might be leading ways like homelessness and some of the issues, but I think in such a big state, it, it's hard. It's hard for us not to be be the leader on something

Neil Chase ([00:41:15](#)):

Good or bad. I mean, one of the things California has to admit sometimes is that we're not always better than every other state, which I know is hard to take <laugh>. Many people came from other states. We sent a reporter to Texas to go to Houston, San Antonio and Dallas to look at how those are advanced solutions that are working there. So homelessness that we're not trying here or haven't worked here,

would they all work here? Is the legislative climate the same? Is the, is the the cultural climate the same? Like maybe the same fix doesn't work different places? We did a story a few years ago about food stamps, right? If you're eligible for, for food benefits here's called CalFresh, but 'cause you're below a certain income level, 72% of people who are eligible in California get it. So 28% of the people who could get food help from the government don't get it.

Neil Chase ([00:42:02](#)):

If you go across the border to Oregon, 99% of they're getting. And so if you just believe that you'd like people to have access to event that they're entitled to, the problem in California is all 58 counties handle food stems differently. The process is really hard. Sometimes you have to go to step six after step five and step six requires you to be someplace in a certain hour when you have to be at work. All kinds of crazy stuff. Whereas other states have made it easier. And if, even if you don't have a strong feeling that you want those people to get the benefits, there's \$2 billion, a billion with a B in federal money that doesn't come to the state of California sitting there in the federal coffers that have been authorized that could be spent and come to California and go to individual people in California who would then spend that at food stores in bodegas and, and places where they can buy food in California, \$2 billion into the California economy.

Neil Chase ([00:42:50](#)):

We don't get, because we don't help those people get those benefits. So no matter what your motivation, you might wanna see that happening. So yeah, I wanna talk about something else we've looked at, which is in a state that is 64% people of color, many people from many different places, you know, not a majority white, like once used to be how much the legislature looks like the state of represents. And if you talk a little first about just what this is, right, the mechanism of this chart, we can walk through a couple examples, but then what it shows and what it tells us about the legislature and how much it represents the state, it literally covers.

Sameea Kamal ([00:43:28](#)):

Yeah, I I think starting with the idea that, you know, ideally your representation reflects the state but for a long time that hasn't been the case. We are seeing over the past couple of years, the legislature is growing more diverse this after the past election we reach parity, which means sort of proportional representation of L G B T Q lawmakers reflecting about 10, 10% of the legislature, which reflects 10% of the state. Sorry, that's mouthful, but hopefully, hopefully the point gets across

Neil Chase ([00:44:03](#)):

There. There's a number actually up on the screen, right? So 12 outta 120 people versus one eight, you're saying that's about the right percentage compared to the states?

Sameea Kamal ([00:44:10](#)):

Yeah, so we looked at all these different you know, measures gender, race, party age to see how much the legislature does look like California. And it is changing. That's partly because a lot of lawmakers we had during the great resignation that I think a lot of just workers in general were going through. The legislature also went through, so we had a lot of open seats, seats a lot of opportunity for newcomers.

Neil Chase ([00:44:35](#)):

Nine people were born in another country, right? By party. I think we're not surprised to see that breakdown, right? Age is an interesting one. Most of the people who run for a legislature tend to come out of, they've been on a city council county board of supervisors. They've had a career in business or something. So they tend to be older, but we're starting to see some, some younger folks as well, right? The forties is the dominant age group.

Sameea Kamal ([00:45:01](#)):

Yeah. And so representation is kind of part one, like just getting, getting enough law makers. But the other thing that we hear a lot is, you know, it's not just about representation. It's not just about getting in the legislature. What about leadership? Leadership plays a role. Neil, like you said, committee membership, committee leadership is really important. And so the legislative staff union bill that came up that was introduced by a former staffer assembly member, Tina Kinner, she used to be a legislative staffer. And after she was elected, she was named the chair of the public employment committee, and that's the committee where this bill had died, I think two or three times in the past. So it was really significant that she was in a role that allowed her to move that bill forward. So that's kind of where, you know, why representation matters. It's the first step to leadership and to more influence.

Neil Chase ([00:45:53](#)):

Yeah. Yeah. Let me ask in the audience, how many of you have called your legislator's office, your state legislator, state assembly member, state senator's office to register your thoughts or complaint or something? What about written a letter, sent an email, gone to Sacramento to testify about a bill, done something else to rattle the legislature and get their attention? Does it work? Do you feel heard? Do you feel somebody have an example of something that you did that you actually, that you were, you were pleased with the effect, please?

Speaker 6 ([00:46:24](#)):

Well, not my local senator. Another senator. Yes, I know a staff person.

Neil Chase ([00:46:31](#)):

Grab, grab mic. Yes. Here I go. Go an audible on the q&a. Thank you.

Speaker 6 ([00:46:37](#)):

And talking about Snap, my son was on it. They're doing research pandemic. He did a verbal, they said he was reapproved, then he gets, his letter gets denied, he got verbally told he was approved. So then we tried and every time he had an appointment was working, so I had to call the senator office and a staff person contacted the county and his research,

Neil Chase ([00:47:15](#)):

And since it was a positive outcome. Who's senator?

Speaker 6 ([00:47:18](#)):

Brian Jones. Okay.

Neil Chase ([00:47:20](#)):

Thank you. Somebody else?

Speaker 6 ([00:47:28](#)):

My name is SIM

Speaker 7 ([00:47:30](#)):

17. We put a report on funding of healthcare and in June, the support that supported that payer, mostly when we contacted legislative people, because it wasn't in line with the governor and the speaker of the house, it wasn't discussed, the decide the newspapers were not interested. And the feeling was it's all subjects that distinction

Neil Chase ([00:48:06](#)):

Between

Speaker 7 ([00:48:06](#)):

Party depending on what your district is, then if you're from a different party, you may not get the same results. That's interesting.

Neil Chase ([00:48:15](#)):

It's funny when you say the newspapers weren't interested, right? The, there was a time when the newspapers had more people on staff maybe chase some of this stuff down, and some cases there they're not interested. In some cases they just, is there one, one more example of this or an unsuccessful approach to your legislator, your senator? Okay. Let's talk a little bit about what people can do to get heard, right? What do you, if you do have an opinion, you wanna get out there, what, what are the ways to, to get in touch and, and make yourself heard?

Sameea Kamal ([00:48:44](#)):

Yeah, I would say for a very loose roadmap, using, if you don't already know your state lawmakers, using our district lookup tool to, to get that information. And maybe learning a little bit about your lawmaker and understanding the, you know, the committees that they're on, what power they do have, you know, what what they can do. But even just, just to know who they are and to contact them. Like we talked about, committees are very important. Anyone, even if you're not in Sacramento, you can call in, you can, you know, give public comment and you can email right to your lawmakers, all of the above. But I think, you know, what we're hearing is it may not always be successful. You may not always get the outcome, but it is your government and it is your right to, you know, give your opinion and be heard and have that on the record.

Sameea Kamal ([00:49:35](#)):

And you can also subscribe to our newsletter to help keep you informed. I think just keeping informed is probably like the building block of it, because it's hard to know, you know, for example, what stage a bill is that it, it goes to, I, I was gonna bring a prop with me, but it's such a, you know, it's not just, it goes to one house, it goes to the other, it goes to the governor. It's a very like back and forth process as things get amended. So, so keeping informed, reaching out to people you could ally with other, with the org organizations that, you know vibe with what you're, what you're looking to get done. And yeah,

Neil Chase ([00:50:15](#)):

If you if you go look up a particular bill, right, you can search for that bill and, and look it up in the California legislature's website and you can see there who has already registered that for against it. And you might wanna reach out to one of those groups to get involved. You can also write your own perspective and register that as a, a position for against the bill for it or for it if it gets amended this way against it or against it amended this way. There's another great way to share your voice and our voice editor, community Voices editor Yus is in the room in the back, wave your hand so people would say hi at the end. Yusef, if you, if you think about the newspaper, the editorial page and the op-ed page, right? That op-ed page had room for a couple of pieces a day.

Neil Chase ([00:50:58](#)):

Our opinion section, our California Voices section Yusef is the curator of that looking for people around the state to share their thoughts about issues related to California. And as you might imagine, we get a lot of submissions from people who are very much engaged in lobbying, very much like they're the ones who run the opposition or the, the group of poor against certain organization or certain bill. They speak up a lot and they send in a lot of opinions. We don't get as many opinions from other parts of the state, from people who have a different perspective on that topic and why that bill passing or that issue being addressed would help or hurt somebody. And the more those issues that get surfaced, the more the people voting on these things and the people debating it. So share your thoughts early and awful. What questions do folks have about all the stuff we've talked about or pretty much anything about how government works? And we'll ask our handy volunteer here to get the mic to you quickly. Thank you. Start here and back. Hi,

Speaker 6 ([00:51:56](#)):

I'm a resident of Imperial Le and it seems like all of San Diego is really behind the Tijuana Sewage River crisis and doing something about it. And it feels like we can't get the federal government to do more until California state emergency. And how do we get past <laugh> to Sacramento? It's very, it's very frustrating. It feels like c is doing what it can do and

Neil Chase ([00:52:22](#)):

Sacramento's not doing its part

Speaker 6 ([00:52:24](#)):

To help. Yeah,

Neil Chase ([00:52:24](#)):

Right. Anything specific that the, the, the, this conversation about taking an issue like that and going to all the different ways you can get in, right? So, and you know, Wendy Fry, who covers, has been covering San San Diego for a long time, is on our team. If you got other specific ideas about this one need to scale out there are organizations right, that are working on that. When you reach out to those organizations and you ask them, what's your legislative agenda? Who, who in the legislative, if you know a group that's trying to get this done in Sacramento, and we do this as reporters, right? We reach out and say, who's working on that story and who is trying to get something done in Sacramento? And whose attention are they trying to get? Who are they lobbying? Who are they talking to?

Neil Chase ([00:53:06](#)):

And if you reach out to them and say, how do I help? They will say to you, you live in such and such legislators district, you should write a letter to them. You should call their office. You should call or email this person in their office who we know is voting on that bill. Somebody else who cares about that issue might know exactly who to talk to, who's actively involved in that or in, in the governor's office. But finding out who thinks like you and might have already done some of the research can shortcut your path to, to reaching the key people. But going to your legislator's website and finding out how to either call them or email them to register your thoughts, they, they do, like Samia said, the guy tracking system, they do track everything going to your neighbors, getting a few more people.

Neil Chase ([00:53:44](#)):

Remember, you're, you're a member of the, of the the state senate represents a million people, right? You're a member of the legislature represents about a half a million. One person saying something does make a difference to them. 5, 6, 8 people saying something. And maybe not with the exact same form letter, but in the same, you know, actual thoughtful comments that you share. It doesn't take a lot of people to have an impact. People bring a bus, they'll, you'll have somebody run a bus and take 40 people to San Diego up to Sacramento for the day to testify on something. 40 people overwhelms a hearing room makes a huge difference. It doesn't take millions of people, because remember, most people don't raise their voices on these days. So if you get a few people together and you all maybe go together to the district office of your legislator, you'll probably fill the waiting room of their office with about five or six people and everybody on staff will go, uhoh, what? Those are my constituents. That's five or six of my votes right there. And they all seem to care about the same thing and they don't have an appointment, so we should really figure out or make an appointment if you're, if you're so inclined. But let's figure out what they care about it. Don't underestimate the, the, the amount of influence one person

Speaker 6 ([00:54:44](#)):

Can,

Sameea Kamal ([00:54:44](#)):

You can also do what you just did, which is let a reporter know <laugh>, we can guarantee an outcome, but sometimes we can put the pressure on through our reporting <laugh>.

Neil Chase ([00:54:54](#)):

And I'm guessing Wendy, Arnie knows all about the, the smell of the Ana River.

Speaker 6 ([00:54:57](#)):

Yes, that is correct. I also, I mean that stand up just because you know something. So Alvarez, I've also been see kind of the infrastructure there. And <inaudible> I know is, you know, on this side of the border infrastructure project starts and there's a change in political administration or, you know, there's a term, usually those infrastructure projects continue, but that's not always the case. California. So we take course money into starting a treatment plan or upbringing treatment plan that they have there. When an election comes along every two years, sometimes the politicians hands and sometimes doesn't the next administration. And so that's one of the issues that the federal government has <inaudible>. But yeah, it is something that I cover critical in a borderline where it's not really street policy, state policy, but there's all these different, apparently it's, it's right.

Neil Chase ([00:56:24](#)):

You know, usually the photographer tries to kind of hide in the corner and just take pictures. But Adrian, our photographer has also covered the sew issues and, and you're welcome to share some thoughts if you want or just sit there and take pictures. It's all good.

Speaker 6 ([00:56:35](#)):

No, yeah, I covered a lot. I used to work at West San Diego years ago and I covered it a lot with Mackenzie.

Sameea Kamal ([00:56:42](#)):

Thank you.

Speaker 6 ([00:56:43](#)):

Mackenzie, I is the current leading environment reporter, so we did a lot of trips to <inaudible> back like 2019. So the fact that this still happening we on it and other people on it. I think she wrote a story about saying why, you know, and I think another reason that it gets so complicated is because dealing not only with local officials and local jurisdiction, you are dealing with federal, yeah. The jurisdiction, you dealing with state jurisdiction, you dealing with the Mexico local jurisdiction. So we are really in a unique place and having all those different agencies involved in this, I feel like it's clogging up <laugh>, it's clogging up the, the progress, I guess

Neil Chase ([00:57:42](#)):

It's clogging up the progress on the, on the unclogging of the problem <laugh>. Yeah. And, and you know, California, this is a international jurisdictional thing, but California has never shied away from getting into international politics. Of course, it's either as Texas in a different way. But you know, you may, you made up another, you brought in another important point. This is the voice of San Diego's event, right? There are a dozen plus journalists that voice working on these issues every day. Like, first of all, donate to them, give them money so they can do their job, and then stay on them about what you think is important, make sure they, they question back my name's. So what I understand is we're in the middle of the cycle right now, and you got ideas for legislation you bring to your representative they're looking for, and they're usually, you know, back home in the district more during that time because they're not in session, but in theory they work all year, so they should be available. My question is when you go try and it's frustrating because representative, and I'm wondering if that's feedback.

Neil Chase ([00:59:01](#)):

Yeah. You know, that's a good question. Do all the members restrict their comments? You know

Sameea Kamal ([00:59:10](#)):

I think some of 'em, just to ask you, they don't restrict it, but they will ask you your zip code so that they can verify. And, you know, I, I think the, the other side of that, for example, that cast bill that I was working, working on, there were legislators who were saying, well, a lot of people in my district are opposed to this. But when we kind of pushed further on, you know, what are they saying, who are they? It turned out there was a lot of international opposition or people outside of California. So that's one of the reasons that I think they restricted is so that they can make sure that the decisions they're making are actually, you know, based on the, the will of their constituents. I think that's where social media,

which is, you know, not an easy way to get in touch, but I think we do see a lot more interaction that way. But

Neil Chase ([00:59:54](#)):

We would never suggest that you go look up the zip code in their district and use that to identify yourself, because that would be wrong. But also, you know, the they all, the, the, when you call on the phone, right, you have a little more chance to explain and they are looking, certainly, they, they, they have a group of voters who voted for them. They wanna serve those constituents, but legislators have told us time, and again, they're looking for expertise, right? They, we had a legislator come to one of the, we do events in Sacramento all the time, and the state senator came to one of those events and said, afterwards, you need to do more of these. And I'll get more people, more people in the legislature to come because we we're voting every year on all kinds, like 2,600 bills voting.

Neil Chase ([01:00:30](#)):

And all of them are expert on something. Whatever they did for their career, whatever, maybe they, they have a experience in some of these issues. None of them are expert on everything and they're dying to learn more about it. So if you're calling to say, I'm a voter in your district, I want you to vote this way in this bill, that's one thing. And even if they're not the sponsor of the bill, they, you should record for them how you want them to vote when it comes up. If you have some expertise to offer, I'm not in your district, but I just did a speech about this, or I'm a researcher who works on this, or I found this paper that you should read, or whatever. They're dying for an input, and that's where, at least for the phone call, you get to talk to somebody. And make your pitch. If there's a form that blocks you from, from filling out or put in a, you know, a different zip code, but then explain why you're doing it. They, they do want, they know, they don't know enough about everything they voted on. They can't, so what they really want is not just, you know, anger and, and cheerleading, but actual information.

Speaker 6 ([01:01:36](#)):

I wonder how state government, responsible government, I might call on Wendy

Sameea Kamal ([01:02:00](#)):

Again for a lifeline, but Yeah,

Neil Chase ([01:02:03](#)):

It's a fascinating question, right? And it, I think it, what I've seen is it pops up in different ways. You know, when the governor was first elected, somewhere on the first few months of his term, he made a trip to Latin America. And we went with him on the trip and, and covered it, and it was about commerce issues. But there are immigrating issues too. The governor's going to China this month, next month to sort of directly build the trade relationships between California and China, given all the tension between the US and China. You've seen what the state of Texas is doing with its international relations right now, which is kind of scary. But, but Wendy, just leaning back on your expertise or any or anybody else from our team in the room or the voice team, what are some other examples of, of the, the interaction between the state and federal government and how we deal with the fact that this is really a multinational metropolitan area?

Speaker 6 ([01:02:54](#)):

I think what's super interesting about it's very anding me about it, is that the two federal governments, and you have state governments, right? So the US and Mexico and California, <inaudible>, California are not as involved as the local you know, here on ground. We know Connect Diego are. And you know, so many of our residents support their lives, you know, that, you know, live on one side, on the other side, work on one side, homes on the other side, go shopping here, you know, so many. And, and she and so, and you know, the same so far from, so close to, so close to God so far, no. So

Speaker 6 ([01:03:43](#)):

It's so far from Mexico City so close or something. But you know, the, the, the idea is, you know, we're too, we're so close here, but yet our, that our government that, that, you know make a lot of the policy don't understand how the policies impacted on. And so that's again, where sort of the advocacy, you know, I know <inaudible> yeah. This week to so they try statements of important and then again, always be a lot coverage go back and forth, special challenges that journal states in Mexico of not being able to co fix, expose everything that's

Neil Chase ([01:04:43](#)):

Without significant personal risk, without

Speaker 6 ([01:04:45](#)):

Significant

Neil Chase ([01:04:48](#)):

Which one? Written extensively

Speaker 6 ([01:04:56](#)):

Graph,

Neil Chase ([01:04:57](#)):

Great t-shirt,

Speaker 6 ([01:04:59](#)):

<Laugh>. Yeah. Usually showing you that representatives in California state government represent more people in

Neil Chase ([01:05:08](#)):

Other states.

Speaker 6 ([01:05:09](#)):

We seats the federal seats in a long California.

Neil Chase ([01:05:22](#)):

It's a good, it's a good question. The place we've seen that play out the most recently is in Los Angeles, right? Where the, the county board of supervisors has five members, between each of them represents more than 2 million people, which is more than any other local legislator in the country by far and more

than some governors, right? Even a US Senator or sorry, a US member of the House of Representatives represents seven 50,000 and then in the LA City Council, right, where they had their very public meltdown almost a year ago now, and everybody's asking why there's such a small group of people on the LA City Council representing such a big city where Chicago has like 50 people on its city council. New York has, I dunno, 40 something and LA has 15. I don't, have we heard any proposals to do something about that?

Sameea Kamal ([01:06:07](#)):

The thing that I hear is it would, I think it would require changing the constitution, and that's something that people really don't feel like taking up. Not just this, but other issues as well. It feels like a really big uphill climb, and so people shy away from, from doing things, but part

Neil Chase ([01:06:26](#)):

It goes back to this, right? Does the legislature represent the people in, serves not just a number of people, but in general? You know, you can, this, this, this graphic lets you go the other way. You know, here's, here's how I describe myself. Who in the legislature looks like you, represents you? It's awfully hard to represent 39 million people from so many different places, so many different backgrounds. Speaking so many, there's like 13 different languages in California. There's spoken by at least 150,000 people. So there are giant groups of people who are probably not represented by anybody in the legislature who speaks their language or understands their situation. And so, interesting idea, if you wanna write a proposal for that, I know a commentary editor would love to entertain that. And and one of the ways you get a conversation like that started is to get it out there, right? And then start talking about it and and, and again, what a great shirt.

Neil Chase ([01:07:19](#)):

Sure. Keep us on time. There's a, yeah, one more. While the constitution, when they overturn over Facebook constitution, there is a I'm curious about, just take on the majority Democrats and how that really affects the ability of the average person to get because now you have 2,600 bills. And I see things sometimes that sometimes you just see that because it is so one sided that nobody wants to go against anybody else. Everyone money's coming down. He also change his mind a lot. So it's actually hard to, sometimes it's hard to kind of fall in line with them. Again, don't underestimate power of one email or phone call to your representative, and one you vote for who doesn't hear from thousands of people they hear from dozens of people about something specific that you wanna register your, your thoughts about that staff person will note that and will look at, gee, have more than a couple people call one of these issues and give it to their member.

Neil Chase ([01:08:37](#)):

These members are also, they're accessible. They go to community events. They come at, you know, there's, there's a couple here today. You can walk up to them afterwards and, and talk to them. It's, it's surprising how human they are when you actually finally meet some of 'em. And, and it's, it's, I, I just wouldn't underestimate the, the ability of one person to say something to somebody that that makes a big difference. But that idea that you write an opinion piece that doesn't have to be with us. You can share it with voice or, or the t or somebody else, but get it out there, right? And do share it with us. We need it. But the, the idea that you can get your voice out there, get a few people together, sometimes it's a conversation in a coffee shop, right? That that makes a difference. We're unfortunately outta time. We'll hang around if people wanna talk about stuff a little bit more. As, as Samia said, we do have a

newsletter every day called What Matters. If you go up to the Cal Matters org website, click on where it says newsletters, it'll invite you to put in your email address, pick ones you wanna, if you believe in the nonprofit journalism and the need for the community to support this kind of work, please do some. San Diego please. Also, accidentally,

Neil Chase ([01:09:40](#)):

And mostly thank you all for coming out and being willing to talk about

Speaker 1 ([01:09:58](#)):

Hi question, you know, to hospital. I echo, I thought you coming from, I didn't know was such a big deal until this I guess you have, you have that data in our, we're trying to, we're this year, if we get the tech people voice out, we're trying to make our voter guide much more flexible so they can put it on their website as well.