



Season 7, Episode 3: Student-Community Initiatives

Host: ESF President Joanie Mahoney

Guest: Spencer Berg, Executive Director of Policy and Student Relations
for the SUNY Student Assembly

[music]

Spencer

I had this moment where I realized that climate change was a lot closer than I knew. I was under the impression that climate change was a polar bear and an iceberg in the Arctic. I never connected the dots that climate change would be a thing that I would deal with right away.

The people who know they want to do environmental work get here, and usually the people who know they want to do environmental work are empathetic. They're hard-working and they're science based. And I think those are really good characteristics work that community.

The way I found myself just that went through the SUNY catalog. I had never heard of it before. I saw environmental, and I saw the photo, the nice photo, the use of gateway. And I was like, I should look into this.

ESF is not well known, but it is known well.

Joanie

Welcome to season seven of Campus Conversations for the podcast. I'm Joanie Mahoney and I have the honor of serving as SUNY ESF President. This season, we're working to explore the engagement of our ESF community beyond our campus. Today, I'm excited to welcome Spencer Berg. Spencer is part of Oaks Vote, and that group applied for and was awarded money to coordinate on campus voter engagement and voter registration. And that's where we've spent a lot of time in the recent past, because we are today recording this podcast about a week after the election of 2024.

So, Spencer, I will tell people a little bit about you, but I'm hoping you'll introduce yourself. You're an Environmental Studies major with a minor in Landscape Architecture. You are the president of the Environmental Studies Student Organization, known as ESSO. Chief Academic Officer for the Mighty Oak Student Assembly, and an R.A. in our dorm.

So let's start at the beginning. Where are you from, Spencer?

Spencer

Thank you, Joanie, for having me on the podcast. I've listened to a couple of episodes before. I think the one with Silas especially, that's all the way through. That was absolutely phenomenal.

Joanie

It was fun to do with Silas.

Spencer

He's a really fun guy.

Joanie

If Silas is listening to this, we miss you, Silas.

Spencer

We do miss. He visited recently.

Joanie

Oh, sugar. I met his mom and dad. They came to campus after Silas was gone. I think they were helping him finish moving out of his apartment.

Spencer

Are they as tall as him?

Joanie

They are tall.

Spencer

Well, so I'm. I'm from New York City. I'm from the Lower East Side of Manhattan. And I came to ESF. It was my early decision choice, I think I visited it actually right after a climate conference at the United Nations. And I came here and I was feeling really good about myself, but really anxious about the world. I come to ESF. I first visited Syracuse since it was cloudy and rainy, and then I come here and literally the clouds part and the sun is shining.

Joanie

And we did that on purpose.

Spencer

There's a there's a joke that, that SU people have that, yes, that ESF people control the weather. And I had I do think it's true. And it's it's just absolutely I knew that that was the place I wanted to be. I totally, I went to a lot of the sessions, but really what stood out to me was the culture of ESF. And ever since I was I'm happy. Really happy with my choice.

Joanie

That's fantastic. So how does a kid at the time who grew up on the Lower East Side of Manhattan, how do you generate an interest in nature and the climate and end up at a UN conference on the topic?

Spencer

Yeah, that's a really good question. I think, of course, cities are places where you lack nature, but also there is the pockets of it here and there. I think when you're in a city, you start to look towards nature even more. If you think about it, if you're in the suburbs nature is sort of the background and maybe you sort of take it for granted.

But I think when you live in a city, you start to really look for these, you know, oasis away from the hustle and bustle. There is a park near me called the East River Park, and that's always where I went to escape. Or we played soccer there with my friends. But really the moment was in 2012 or 2011 when hurricane Sandy hit. My entire neighborhood, or lots of it were completely flooded out. Someone died. 40 people died across New York City. And New Jersey was absolutely, brutally hit. And I think that was a moment of reckoning for me and my interest. I always cared about the environment. I was always drawn to nature. But then I saw how my community was, devastated by this hurricane. Frankly, if people forget this, it wasn't a hurricane when it hit New York City. It was it was a tropical storm. It had downgraded, but it was so ginormous that it completely devastated it to us. And I do have to say right now is that we've been really lucky that there has not been another hurricane Sandy in the last decade. And frankly, I'm really afraid of what happens next because the city is not taking the actions it needs to do, but that was one piece that the rest of it is that in 2019 or 2018, when they released the special report 1.5°C, the UN report about climate change, I read the whole thing.

I had this moment where I realized that climate change was a lot closer than I knew. I was always under the impression that climate change was a polar bear and an iceberg in the Arctic. I never connected the dots that climate change would be a thing that I would deal with right away, even after Sandy.

I thought that was crazy. Like that was really unlucky. That's probably climate change. Probably had something to do with it. But I never thought that I would have to do something, right then and there to work against it. So after reading that report, I kind of went into like a depression a little bit and then came out of it through activism.

And that's how I ended up at the UN organizing protest that ended up here.

Joanie

Spencer, that is one of the most clear explanations of how climate change has affected you. And I'm sure that students listening to this can absolutely relate. And it's interesting that you said polar bear on an iceberg, because I participated over the last year with the Aspen Institute, and they were preparing a climate activism report for higher education at large, and that was brought up 2 or 3 times where we missed the mark when we first spent marketing dollars trying to get people's attention on climate. We did things like showed the polar bear on the iceberg, which resonated with us. Right? We all felt bad for the polar bear on the iceberg, but it had the effect of making it seem like a problem that was so far away from us. And then the way you describe hurricane Sandy and the fact that it brought it right home to you, and you've got to be one of only a handful of young people that read the entire U.N. report.

But I hope you've had the experience then coming here to ESF that other students have described to me, because students don't think it's funny. By and large. I mean, nobody's all the same, right? But this narrative that people my age have where, oh, that'll just be your problem. You're going to have to fix that, you know? Ha ha ha.

Not funny. As a young person growing up on this planet. So the sentiment that students have described, and I've tried to repeat it to people considering where to go to college, is that's not how it is here. You come here and you meet people that are my age and older, that have spent their entire professional careers tackling this topic, studying the planet, every bit of nature and working on solutions.

So, you come here as a student and you're working with people who don't make that joke that we're just leaving it all to you. And I think that's been reassuring to students who come here to say, okay, it's not as bad as we thought. There really are smart, hardworking people that are finding solutions, and it's a relief to work alongside them.
Is that a pretty good characterization?

Spencer

100 Percent. I mean, before I came here to ESF, I was doing the youth climate activism, and I don't know if you recall it, back in 2019 when Greta Thunberg was doing her climate strikes, that she still is doing that the way a big narrative at the time was this generation divide. And I think it was it is a true narrative. I mean, you look at the people who care about it, and because this joke that keeps getting made about, oh, you guys, you kids are got to deal with it. I, we believe in you. It's almost it's pretty annoying. They're like, you guys will do it. You give us faith.

But that was a huge narrative and it was really a discouraging narrative because the people in power are those older people, and they didn't really care. And that brought the youth together. You know, we were organizing school strikes and that was a uniting force. Ultimately, challenging authority is always what youth really like. And so it was helpful. But it's really hard when you actually get into the room and try to get things done. And you're already under the belief that no one who's older than you cares about what you're saying.

So coming to ESF, you're 100% right. You come to a place where everyone's on the same page and everyone's pushing in the same direction. And I think that's a big reason that I felt so much better about climate change. Also, some of the policies passed, you know, federally from the last administration or this current administration, but it's really seeing the work that professionals are doing now.

And it made me realize that there are thousands, if not millions of scientists and professionals all around the world who are on the same page. Maybe they're not the ones in power yet, but they're influencing the ones with power.

Joanie

You know, I had the benefit. I've mentioned this before of having an uncle. My father's brother was a climate scientist. He got his PhD in meteorology at MIT, and he was studying acid rain in the Adirondacks in the 1980s. And I thought he was so smart and just I, I so enjoyed listening to what he said, but he seemed so far away from the mainstream.

And there was an interview on television where he was talking about what they were seeing with the acid rain up in the Adirondacks, and then they were showing this reaction to that from others.

And to a person. And they were, you know, kind of condescending about the whole notion. And this idea people have that we're full of ourselves thinking that humans are affecting what's happening.

And you joked around about Syracuse University students thinking we control the weather, but you know, as crazy as that sounds, there were people in this last election, elected officials that were tweeting about us controlling the weather. And it's so frustrating because on one hand that seems silly, but on the other hand, these are the people that are saying there's nothing we can do about it. This is just nature. And it's it's like, well, if you really think there's an ability to control this, let's look at what those levers are and, you know, try to control it. So I don't know.

Anyhow, I'm going off on a little bit of a rant, but it does bring me to the topic of your activism. I think it's really cool that as a young person, you were, made to feel a little bit more empowered by getting engaged in what the UN was saying and what you were able to do in your community.

And that's translated here at ESF. So where did the Oaks Vote come from?

Spencer

Sure. So Oaks Vote came from. I've always been a very vocal person on this campus, and I was a senator in the Mighty Oaks Student Assembly our student government last year, and the head of academic standards, Anthony Chefalo, he worked for the Board of Elections, and he did board work previously. And he found out about this grant through a grant program called Ask Every Student.

And that is a national program to fund voter registration on campuses. And so Anthony was looking for someone to help him write it. My name came up pretty quickly and I agreed to help him do it. So we met starting last semester, that meeting over the summer, creating a structure and then a program idea. And it really came down to my belief that you would need to be paying a set group of students to really get committed to talking to every single person who can't. creating programming, creating content, going to classroom and looking at the data.

You would be surprised to know 83% of college aged students are registered to vote. The issue is really not registration, it's registering in the right place because a lot of students are registered back at home. They are the most inundated population with reminders to register to vote. And it does connect. It does work. but they don't know that they can register where they go to college because to them it seems wrong. They don't live here, even though when you think about it, they're here more than they're back at home. But so many students, especially the freshman and sophomore, this is a place they're visiting. Now, I'd say as a senior now, this feels more home to me than back home. And I think that's just a matter of perspective.

Joanie

And you do have a right to participate because the issues that are day to day for you like getting to and from school safely and whether the trash is picked up in the streets are plowed and all of that is local government. And you live here. So, I do think that people feel the way you describe about I don't live here, but while you're here, you're very much a resident of our community.

Spencer

You're 100% right. And I hope more people can start to see that perspective, that civic engagement is not just voting, which that's that's Oaks Vote's focus was voting. So that's that is what mattered at that point in time to get people registered to vote. But I think especially after this most recent election, there has to be a big reckoning with understanding of how especially SUNY schools engage with civic conversations and talk about civic engagement.

Not only is it important that you recognize your rights in the community, it's also important to understand what the city is doing, what the community needs, as well as what resources are available to you. If you know your local councilor, or if you know your county legislator, or if you know your state senator or assemblyman, those all mean different things. They can provide different resources.

And this is something that actually I worked to highlight last year, we, I worked to get essentially a county legislator, city councilor, state senator in the deputy mayor, all on a panel, and Assemblywoman Pam Hunter. Yeah. So we had Rachel May, Pam Hunter, and Councilor Corey Williams all at a table. I said the deputy mayor wasn't able to make it nor was the county legislator.

But the point is, is that they were all able to discuss what their office provides, and it was all unique. Corey Williams was able to provide support and resources connecting you to certain housing protections, because Neighborhood Office Development controls the rental registry under Syracuse. Rachel May and Assemblywoman Hunter, their work is a little more state level. So that has to do with some SUNY operations.

So it's some issues with funds, but ultimately their offices, I really think about them, are the most helpful places to get directed in the right direction. They'll connect you with the people that you need to talk to at the federal places. And they'll also help you get to people in the local places. And I and I did work for state Senator Rachel May in her most recent campaign. And I would definitely encourage, if anyone ever has a problem, to reach out to them. I've never heard anyone be upset with the answers they've got from her office.

Joanie

Right. I don't think people understand that. You can just pick up the phone and call your representative. That's what they're there for. And if you have an issue, for instance, I am affiliated with the Thruway. If somebody has an issue with the Thruway and they call Senator May, she will get in touch with the people at the Thruway to help.

That's what their roles are. But, Spencer, you are so far ahead of where I was when I was your age, and I know all those things now and would love for young people to understand the tools and the levers that they have available to them. But you're outstanding, and I don't want to take away from how unbelievable it is for me to meet you and think about myself at your age. And how undirected and, you know, I just didn't have a plan. I didn't know as much as you do. But I will say our students are more like you than they are like I was.

We describe ESF students as really focused. I was not focused. I did not know what direction I wanted to go in. I ended up going to law school, in part because I, I didn't have a plan for what I was going to do when I got done with college.

It ended up being a great move for me, and I would highly recommend it as an education to everybody. But it wasn't this passion or focus that our students come here with. And I'm curious, like, do you have brothers and sisters? Do you stand out in your own family in terms of your level of maturity and engagement?

Spencer

I think I'm really lucky in my family and that we're all pretty outstanding. And that's that's feels a weird.

Joanie

No, no, no, but I tee'd you up for it. But I mean, you're all different.

Spencer

We're all definitely my sister. I have a twin sister, actually, and she goes to UVM, so it's kind of a sister school in a way.

Joanie

Yes

Spencer

She's doing social work and she also works as a EMT and she's also working eight jobs. So she has my mind set in that regard.

What I would say is I think a large reason for, for me specifically. And then I can also talk about why I think ESF is this way. Is I have gay parents and really when I'm growing up and keep in mind, I was born in 2003. Gay marriage wasn't legalized nationally until 2015. Gay marriage has been legalized for less than half of my life, and my parents weren't able to get married in New York until 2012.

So I witnessed my parents and was very conscious about my parents marriage at nine years old. And then I knew that their marriage wasn't going to be recognized legally until I was 12 years old. So at a very young age, I immediately became really on top of understanding the levers of power and the injustices happening in this world, because I saw how my parents were not being treated as equal. And that's something I had to grapple with.

From there, I think coming to ESF, that's what got me involved in politics and under and caring about the world around me. Then I came here and I'm suddenly surrounded by everyone who does the same, or at least cares about the environment, has some passion for it. You know, some people might be here because they want to do forestry, and maybe it's about taking advantage of the environment.

But at the end of the day, there's a mutual respect and appreciation for the natural world. And I think when you're surrounded by peers that also care about the same thing as you and want to do it professionally, you're all elevated. I think it's I don't want to talk down about about Syracuse classes. I do I do love Syracuse classes, especially the policy ones. But you go there and you notice the same thing. You're talking about the lack of focus. And I think the lack of passion for the work. You do it as a means to an end. But here, this is the experience.

Joanie

This is what you're doing.

Spencer

This is what you're doing. And it's exciting. And I've come up with a bit of a phrase that I, ESF is, is not well known, but it is known well. As in, when people know us, they know us for really good work.

Joanie

That is a great way of saying it. And it's so true. People who know ESF, they gush about it, but otherwise I have to explain to them where we are and you know how we're not Syracuse, right?

Spencer

And I think it really gets the point. But we're a hard school. We do a lot of hard work, and I don't think we lead anyone out because you have to know about ESF to come here and knowing it's we're a little bit hidden in a way, and maybe that's a little unfortunate, but what ends up happening is that the people who know they want to do environmental work get here, and usually the people who know they want to do environmental work are empathetic.

They're hard working and they're science based. And I think those are really good characteristic for a good community. And in a group of people that want to work together and also a group of people that want to get the work done right.

Joanie

So how did you learn about us? Because we are kind of hidden in the Lower East Side of Manhattan, has not been fertile ground for us here at ESF. Have you met anybody here that came from your neighborhood?

Spencer

No, every single one. It's frankly shocking. New York City is the largest municipality in New York state. And downstate. Incredibly, Long Island is where most people from ESF are from. I'm pretty certain of it. And then maybe Hudson Valley and then New York City and upstate. The way I found ESF was just going through the SUNY catalog. I had never heard of it before. I saw environmental and I saw the photo, the nice photo, the use of gateway. And I was like, I should look into this.

Joanie

Okay, so it was the SUNY materials that said, here's all of our colleges across the state and a little

blurb about us. The fact that we're called environmental, piqued your curiosity. Yes. And then you came up here and you said you visited Syracuse University and you visited.

Spencer

Yes.

Joanie

ESF.

Spencer

I was mostly here for ESF. My sister was more interested in Syracuse University. Frankly, I think seeing Syracuse University was a good precursor because I saw their dorms, and then I saw our dorms and I realized...

Joanie

Our fabulous dorm!

Spencer

Yes, yes. Now an RA of and I get to benefit a lot from, but I think it's it was a lot of positives.

And I know now we do a lot of advertising as well, like a lot of ESF advertising. So maybe some kids will or some students might find us through other means that.

Joanie

Yeah, SUNY has given us extra marketing dollars this year. And so if people are seeing a little bit more in their social media feed, that's where it's coming from. And we had a meeting yesterday with all the SUNY presidents across the system. And the Chancellor said, don't cut marketing. Don't cut marketing like it's hard when budgets are tight.

But he used the analogy that that's like a farmer saving money by not buying seeds. But I do hope that we continue to shake that hidden part of our moniker. But I'm glad that we found you. So how long have you been an RA?

Spencer

So I've been an RA for two years. I lived in Centen my freshman year, and then my sophomore year. Then I applied to be an RA. Actually, I didn't. I applied to my sophomore year. I didn't get it till my junior year, so I've been it for two years. It's hard work.

Joanie

What do you do as an RA?

Spencer

So as an RA, I plan programming that, I'll start with the easy stuff of programming, such as last night we had rock climbing night and we took, people from the building to go to Barnes to rock climb.

I've done other events like a clothing swap. We did a thing called Shark Tank Night, where people brought their ideas for activities and then if they want, they got a, stuffed shark.

Joanie

That's cool.

Spencer

That's that's the more fun stuff. Really, as an RA, I provide support for my residents, as we call them. I do my best to look out for them and maintain respect in the building. That's something that I always touch on when I have to, you know, someone's being loud. That's something I emphasize that it's not I'm not talking to you because it's you're breaking up rule.

I'm talking to you because you're not being respectful to your neighbors. And that's a big thing for me. I think being from New York City and being from a building especially, and being from such a small community, respect is very important. And I think that often if you're young and you're new here and you're just get out of high school, you might not understand yet that you're a part of a community now.

And that means having shared respect for the boundaries and respect for the space. So roommate mediation as well, that's that's a big thing. And again, respect is a very important part of that conversation.

Joanie

You just seem so wise beyond your years. You are, you're in a good place. So let me ask you what are you thinking. You're a senior. Is there more school in your future? Do you want to get out and try that working world?

Spencer

That's a good question. So this summer, I worked for State Senator Rachel May and her campaign for reelection.

Joanie

She raves about you. And did you actually meet her by just knocking on her door in the Capitol?

Spencer

The way I first met her was when I invited them all to to come to SUNY ESF's campus to do that panel, and she was actually the one I think she might have. She appreciated how I and the panel, she's like, you know, there's always work in the campaign, so you should talk to Zach. So I did, I did I reached out to him and we talked. We talked downtown in Hanover Square and we barely talked about the job we talked about. We ended up clicking really well. It's actually he's amazing. About urban policy, about bike lanes and biking and environmental stuff. And that's when I realized that I'm in the right place.

Spencer

Senator Rachel may, she's phenomenal. She's an ESF Alumni.

Joanie

I know. I was gonna work that into this conversation. We are very proud of the fact that she's an ESF alum. So as Cory Williams.

Spencer

Really?

Joanie

I didn't know that either. But our local Syracuse city councilor who represents the neighborhood ESF is in, is it ESF alum? Wow. I went and had coffee with them after I heard about that.

Spencer

That's fantastic. We should get each level to the ESF alumni eventually.

Joanie

Oh, I think that would be fantastic.

Spencer

And so that's how I first got involved from. Aand that we she won. She won fantastically. We did a really touch relations. Thank you. We did a great you know there is this rightward shift across the state in the country.

Joanie

I have read a little bit about that last week.

Spencer

Spencer, but we outran the right word shift by about nine points. I think that's in large part because she's very likable. But I would also like to say, I think it's because of the good work that the campaign did. From now, I'm not sure. I'm also doing work with the SUNY Student Assembly, and that's a statewide organization. And what I'm doing for them is their policy platform is actually the student.

The 50th anniversary of the SUNY Student Assembly. And we're having our big conference this weekend where I'm going to be presenting that platform. And really what it is, is outlining the budget priorities for SUNY students. What we're gonna be doing with that budget is bringing it to the governor before she releases her executive budget. And hopefully we can get a couple of things in the.

Joanie

State of the state.

Spencer

That would be great. I don't know if that's going to happen.

Joanie

I think it's a good goal. And the fact that you even know how it works is decades ahead of where I was when I was your age.

Spencer

It's been a big, big four years of learning. But anyway, that's that whole process has been incredibly fascinating. Meeting with shooting SUNY students, meeting with officials from SUNY. I've talked to, of course, Senator May about that, as well as staff and the lieutenant governor's office where they visited. And I'm really excited to go from here.

And we're going to be lobbying for that. And also probably on behalf of ESF in my personal capacity.

Joanie

That's great. Chancellor King has been a remarkable advocate for SUNY, and Governor Hochul has put money in the budget for SUNY the last couple of years, to an extent that we haven't seen, in the system in a long time. But the actual understanding of on the ground why ESF deserves more state resources is hard.

I mean, there's a lot of Assembly members. There's a lot of senators. It's a lot of work. You walked around the Capitol, but I think that if you know ESF as a state senator, Assemblyman, you think of us the same way you think of Cortland or Oswego or Geneseo or maybe Binghamton. But what we have at ESF is truly unique, and it is more important now than it ever has been on the history of our planet for us to be educating the people that are coming up with these solutions and going out into the working world to implement them.

But we're all STEM, which is the expensive part of a college, right? So if you have, SUNY Oswego or SUNY Cortland, their budgets probably reflect that it's more expensive to deliver a physics degree or a chemistry degree or, you know, chem engineering, landscape architecture than it is in English. Your history degree. Not more important, I won't even say that, but just more expensive.

Yeah, our classes have to be small. We have a lot of field experience. We give undergrads a research experience, and then we have this relationship with Syracuse University where somebody like you who said, I'm enjoying my policy classes over probably at Maxwell, right. Access to all of that. And that is something that ESF pays for. Syracuse has been very generous with us, but it's not free.

And I think if I had five minutes with each of the Assembly members in each of the state senators and explained, you know why the one size fits all funding model that we have doesn't work for us.

The other thing, because I'm going to take advantage of you being here because I know if you're advocacy, but the reaction from a lot of members of the Senate and Assembly and Rachel May certainly not one of them is if I look at SUNY, they have a big fund balance.

And so why are you getting money to do everything you need to be doing at ESF? It's because those fund balances belong to the actual colleges. So Stony Brook has a fund balance in Albany and Buffalo and Binghamton, the big university centers, maybe some of the others. But when ESF falls short, we have to actually borrow money from them.

So, it's not for a lack of effort on the part of some of our representatives. It's really just there's so much to know, and ESF is a part of it. And I think if people had the depth of knowledge necessary about ESF, we would be funded like we need to be funded, right?

I mean, you as a student, I'm sure you feel it. You have some of the best living accommodations in Centennial Hall, but you see that some of our buildings are in need of renovation, and we don't have the money to be, you know, putting on the conferences that you bring to us that you want us to be doing. Or to be sending you to travel. I just, you know, I think we do good work here, but our finances are, are holding us back a little.

And your job advocating on behalf of my college, advocating successfully, I mean, you did a really good job of educating people the way I'm saying I hope they will be. And that relationship that you formed with Senator May has been hugely beneficial to us here at the college. So it's a long winded. Thank you. You really have been remarkable.

So I interrupted then your plans for what's next.

Spencer

It's a really hard question to answer because there's so you can't really be picky in the current economy. So I'm not I'm not sticking to anywhere. And I think where I'm with, with grad school is I have to take a break. I can't do four years at school.

But but we'll, we'll see, you know, a few years down the line when I feel like I would love to stay in Syracuse, I found a true love for the city. I worked for the city government, I worked, I stayed here all summer. It's a really wonderful place and I wish I'd gone out more. I'd love to work for one of the local legislators.

You know, I know, Senator May. The thing about her office, everyone loves her. They don't want to leave. So I was there, unfortunately. But maybe one of the new senators I know, Senator Chris Ryan. He was just elected. So maybe maybe they're I think ultimately now is a really good time to enter the legislature because of the context of the recent election, I think there's going to be a lot of people pushing in the right direction and sort of out of touch about what you were just talking about.

A lot of my work right now, in my knowledge, has been about SUNY, and I think SUNY is this really unique problem. Well, problem is it's not a problem. It's facing a lot of problems. It's in a really tough spot. It has a bunch of deficit from a bunch of buildings. It's the most buildings that have any agency in the state.

It is the highest operating cost. It has 64 campuses and that's a lot for anyone to deal with. It has so many moving parts, each campus, its own governance system, its own economics, its own auxiliary service corporations. It's really complicated. As I've unboxed ESF, I realize we're a small campus. This must be even like bigger at a place at Stony Brook.

I definitely would be interested in going into the state legislature or the state government in regards to SUNY, possibly, but I'm very open. I care about cities. I care about city planning. I'm from New York City, and that's, I think, really what drove that. So anywhere where I can work to improve my community, I really think it's what it is, improve my community, whether that be through legislation and working to create laws that are able to change things in a positive way, or if that's doing initiatives and planning and hosting meetings, we are able to take an idea that the city might have and, and make sure that it's being implemented the right way. And it's see, through that implementation. And I've been able to play with each of these things. And now I'm at a point where I have to decide. And that's a really hard thing, especially with, with everything which is just happen.

Joanie

I'll give you a slightly different perspective on that very last point. You said you have to decide. One big benefit you have over the generations ahead of you is your generation switches jobs. Most of the people that I know have done the same job for 30 and 40 years. Your generation and the students are who are just a little bit older than you.

They're showing a propensity to move.

So if you do make a choice and you don't love it, it wasn't the fit you hoped it would be. You're moving . There's not a stigma to that moving around in your career that there might have been. You know, people used to look at a resume and say, oh, they only stayed there for a short amount of time. There must be something wrong. And that's not the case.

I do think that that while it's difficult to decide, you just make your move and then take it from there. You know, I would very much like to help you with that plan. You know, I come from that world. And I come from Syracuse. And so if there's anything I can be doing, I mean, whoever gets you on their team is going to be really lucky.

I will make that known to the people that I can. Do you see yourself in elected office?

Spencer

Maybe one day. I think that's always something I was interested in doing. Now that I've got here, I've realized that as great as people are, people are also really annoying. I that's maybe not the best way to put it.

Joanie

You don't want us all to call you because our trash didn't get picked up.

Spencer

I oh, my God, I went to a lot of the local TNT meetings, today's...

Joanie

Tomorrow's Neighborhoods Today.

Spencer

And people are very, very vocal. But sometimes the answers that you give as a bureaucrat or an elected official will never make them happy. And that's something that I think I'll need to grapple with. It frustrates me when I feel like I deliver something in the most perfect way, and it's not received. So I think maybe eventually run for office, maybe city council.

Go from there. Go step up, step up, step up. But only when I feel like I can properly represent the place I am. Like running for office in Syracuse. That still feels a little weird. I don't I don't know, this place. I don't, I'm not from here. But maybe one day. Yeah. We'll see.

Joanie

Yep. You know, the world will be such a better place. Certainly the United States government, state government, local government, if people as willing to learn about issues and sincere and authentic as you start taking some of these roles. Because I would imagine and they don't want you to name any names. But when you go to some of these meetings and you hear some of the other elected officials, the platitudes are overwhelming, right?

But I have found in my political career that if you do your homework and you do the right thing, communicating that as best you can is really all you can do. You're not going to make everybody happy. You're going to sleep well. But most people, even if they don't agree with you, if they hear your reasoning and they know that you have taken the time to understand the issue, you know most people will come along.

But I would hate to discourage somebody like you from being in elected office because it would be fantastic. So when you decide to throw your hat in the ring, I will volunteer for your campaign.

Spencer

And knock some doors and do some phone banking.

Joanie

Yes, exactly. So will we have an opportunity to meet your twin or your family during these commencement opportunities?

Spencer

Oh, 100%. They'll be great and you'll be able to see the whole Berg family together. I think you'll see that there's definitely a commonality between us of being loud and caring.

Joanie

That's fantastic. I look forward to it. I know I will see you because I look forward to handing you your diploma when you walk across the stage. But I look forward to meeting the rest of your family. I want to thank you for everything you've done here, including this interview, because you've done

a really good job of explaining why somebody might come to ESF, which is a big part of what I'm trying to do with this podcast is tell people more about ESF, but also, almost all of the student events that I attend. I see you, so thank you for everything.

Spencer

Yes, and thank you for having me on this podcast. I really find it to be a great idea, and I've listened to a lot of episodes, and I hope that this is another, another great one. So thank you so much for that.

Joanie

Thank you, thank you. Should we mention Mariam to which should we say that we miss her.

Spencer

We miss Mariam. Mariam is the, the main organizer of Oaks Vote.

Joanie

And she could.

Spencer

Actually phenomenal.

Joanie

She couldn't be with us this morning. But we are thinking about her fondly. So Mariam, wherever you are, thanks for your work on Oaks Vote.

Spencer

Yes, you are amazing and I hope to see you soon.

Joanie

All right. Thanks Spencer.

Spencer

Thank you very much. Bye bye.