

Episode 63

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SPEAKERS

Jason Duff, Susan Manchester, Ethan DeLeon

S

Susan Manchester 00:00

I think the best legislation is the one that has the most collaboration on it. Now, sometimes you get too many cooks in the kitchen, as with anything, but, but to your point, when it comes to getting something done legislatively, you want to have stakeholder engagement and involvement.

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Ethan DeLeon 00:19

Welcome to the Small Nation Podcast, brought to you by Coverlink Insurance, where people are more important than policies. On this show, we unpack lessons from entrepreneurs, break down development strategies, and do deep dives on small town success. Our goal is to provide value to our listeners by hosting conversations that teach, inform, and inspire. Hey everyone, my name is Ethan DeLeon, and I'm here in the studio with the founder and CEO of Small Nation, Jason Duff. Joining us on the show, we are honored to be hosting the state representative of the 78th District of Ohio, Susan Manchester. Susan, welcome.

S

Susan Manchester 00:53

Thank you so much for having me. I'm thrilled to be here with you guys.

J

Jason Duff 00:56

Susan has been a dear friend and someone that I have really admired watching her help so many people in our community and not only from her background of growing up around a family farm and family business, but now on the public servant side. So just excited to have you in the studio today, Susan.

S

Susan Manchester 01:16

Yeah, well, I love podcasts, so this is sort of a dream. So thanks for fulfilling a dream, Jason. I think that's kind of what you do at Small Nation, right?

J

Jason Duff 01:25

Yeah, there you go. So Just on that note, tell us, Susan, about growing up in Waynesfield, Ohio.

S**Susan Manchester** 01:35

The bustling metropolis of Waynesfield.

J**Jason Duff** 01:38

Just to give people context, I've shared my background. I grew up in Huntsville, Ohio, and town 200 or 300 people, but just right up the road, not too far away, is Waynesfield.

S**Susan Manchester** 01:50

Correct. And it's a town, I believe, about 800 or so. But obviously, it's part of a very rural community, the Wayne Goshen townships, if you will. And so I grew up in the country just outside of Waynesfield on my family farm. I am the 6th generation of that family. Yeah, so it's pretty exciting. And, you know, growing up in Waynesfield, I don't think I fully appreciated what I had. That small town, just the idea that the people you go to church with are also the people who are your teachers, who not only know you as a student, but know you as a whole person. They know your parents, which maybe wasn't always a good thing. Oh, good or bad. Yeah. I mean, but having that interconnectedness in a community, I did not fully appreciate how beautiful that is until I was outside of something like that. And so I'm grateful to have that background, not only in a small town, but also on the family farm. Both were very, very instructive to my growing up.

J**Jason Duff** 02:51

So you did graduate and kind of leave and go off to college for some time. Tell us about that.

S**Susan Manchester** 02:57

So I graduated with a class of 50 people, which I think is something that many people can probably relate to. And, you know, You know, it's the same kids that I was in kindergarten with all the way through high school. So that again brings some unique experiences. But I did want to move away from home and try something new. So I went to Ohio State, studied psychology and political science. And it was actually while I was a student at Ohio State that I did an internship in Washington, D.C., which is where I got started in public service.

J**Jason Duff** 03:26

Wow. Can I ask, how did that opportunity come, come about?

S**Susan Manchester** 03:30

So Ohio State has an incredible program. It's called the Washington Academic Internship Program, where you go to Washington for— at the time we were on quarters, so you would go for a quarter semester. You do an internship and also take a class, and you would ultimately get an entire credit or an entire quarter's worth of credit just by your time in Washington. So I knew about it through Ohio State and just some advertising that they had done, and it really was hands down life-changing for me. And I've since done a lot of alumni work with them because I'm such a strong believer in that program.

J**Jason Duff** 04:06

Yeah, super cool. And then the person you were interning under, I guess we actually had him on the podcast, Jim Jordan, Congressman Jim Jordan. So, um, yeah, talk to us about your experience there. Like, what kind of work were you doing and what did that teach you?

S**Susan Manchester** 04:18

Yeah, so Jim Jordan was a fantastic boss, and I have to give both of you a lot of credit. I've heard him speak many times. I worked for him ultimately for 4 years, I believe, and I heard him tell stories I've never heard him tell before on podcast. So that was really fun to listen to because, as you know, he's just a very down-to-earth guy, and that's how he was as a boss as well. And I think the biggest takeaway I had when I was an intern, I was doing very basic stuff. I was answering the phones, I was sorting through the mail, and he would come into the office and I'd be sitting there at the front desk and he'd say, all right, what are people saying on the phones? Like, what's going on back home? How are people responding to what we're doing here in Washington? And that's something that really stayed with me in that I was taking phone calls from people in Bellefontaine and Lima, even Waynesfield, and hearing about how the federal government was impacting them. And then to work for someone who actually cared what those people were saying, that was, that was really important.

J**Jason Duff** 05:17

Yeah, very cool. And then from there, what was your journey into the work that you're doing today?

S**Susan Manchester** 05:23

So I did end up returning to Congressman Jordan's office to work full-time after that internship. And while I was in Washington, I was surrounded by a lot of politicians that I think got there and lost sight of who they are, where they came from, and the people who elected them. I saw people like Congressman Jordan doing the job very well. Then I saw some other not so great examples. I think the more I became familiar with the legislative process and what it actually was like to represent a community in another state and then be in Washington representing those views, I really felt like this is something that I have an interest in. And at the time, Ohio was really struggling with the opioid epidemic. And I felt like I want to come back home for a number of reasons. I knew Washington wasn't ultimately where I wanted to be long-term. But then I saw some issues that were happening in Ohio, and I thought, I want to be a part of the solution. I don't want to just stay here in Washington and be separated from all these things. And so I came back to Ohio and actually started working in the nonprofit sector with Big Brothers Big Sisters in Lima, which was really great. And then the seat for state rep came open in 2018, and I ran for it.

J**Jason Duff** 06:41

What does it take to have the courage to put yourself out there, get on the ballot, and go door-to-door to connect with voters? Like, for a lot of people listening, like, you just make it seem pretty easy, like, to like make that jump. Just casually get on the ballot.

S**Susan Manchester** 06:56

You know, I just decided, let's do this. And yeah, I was, it was a long-term decision in that I knew it was something I ultimately wanted to do. Like when I moved back to Ohio, I knew, okay, when the opportunity comes up, this is something that I want to go for. But when it actually came into focus that this is something you can do now, it takes a lot. So I was the one who decided I want to do this. I wasn't asked. You know, I think a lot of people have this vision of being consulted and asked to run for office, like, you're the one, you're going to make all the difference. And that never happened with me. I just decided this is what I want to do, so I'm going to do it. But the key was talking to people who I knew I would need their support in order to be successful and getting the green light from them. So I will say in those conversations, it wasn't necessarily always, oh, I'm— yeah, I'm definitely supporting you. I'm behind you, Susan. Sometimes it was just, yeah, I think you should go for it. And that's all I needed. So I think you just have to be willing to put yourself out there first and foremost and understand that there's going to be some risks that come with it. But you have to put yourself out there because that's ultimately what the job is.

J**Jason Duff** 08:18

Having the idea to get confidence or gaining in your confidence. We've interviewed a lot of entrepreneurs that are— they've always had the idea or ambition to start something, but they felt that they didn't have enough experience or enough training or enough money, like all those sometimes what can be limiting beliefs. Just being honest about the political landscape, you're pretty young. Also when you look at a lot of the status quo of people that have been in the state legislature, they look very different from you. How did you break through that? The idea of being inexperienced or being from a different background or from a different area, small town versus big city.

S**Susan Manchester** 09:02

Mm-hmm. So it's funny you bring that up because I did have a few things working against me, if you will. I was young. I believe I was 30 when I officially said, "I'm going to run for this." I was from a small town. And at the time, the district that I was running for, Auglaize County, where I'm from, was a small part of the district. It was not the dominant county in that district. and one of the people that was also running had a very recognizable last name. And in politics, name recognition is everything. And so I knew all those factors existed, but sometimes, and I think this is true with entrepreneurs as well, you have to be just excited enough to go for it and say, why not? And I think that was a big part of it for me is I really felt like I had nothing to lose, you know? And I had enough support to feel like I could move forward. Now, I would say with running for office, you do want to have— you want to start with some critical mass. Like, if you talk to stakeholders in the community, your county party leaders, people who are active in these kinds of things, and everybody's telling you, hey, maybe this isn't such a good idea, you want to take that into consideration. But when you're talking to those people and you're getting some interest and some support, which is what I had, I felt like I had enough support to keep moving forward. And so I did.

J**Jason Duff** 10:30

And when you think about developing, um, things that are important to you— so like in the political speak, I think that's called a platform— um, how did you look at your life experience and start, you know, to, to create that along with getting feedback from other stakeholders when you build your— when you were building your campaign?

S**Susan Manchester** 10:47

I think a big part of it was knowing the issues that were important to the communities that I wanted to represent. And a big reason why I became so intimately familiar with those issues is because of my work in Congressman Jordan's office. Congressman Jordan's district overlapped with the district that I was running for. And so I was very familiar with the conservative values and principles that guided a lot of the voters in this community and felt that I could be great at representing those values as well. So I think that was one thing, and just recognizing over those years that I worked for Congressman Jordan that, hey, this is, this is what people care about. And one of my positions, I was a legislative assistant for Congressman Jordan for a while, and so when people from the district would come to Washington to meet with him, I was always in on those meetings. Sometimes I even had to take the meetings myself just because schedules were busy or whatever. And I think that was so valuable and instructive for me because I got to hear directly from people. And probably the even better part was when I had to answer those phone calls and sort through all those emails to really see this is what constituents are calling in about. This is what they care about. And a lot of those things that are so foundational, especially to, you know, what conservatives stand for in general, that wasn't changing, you know, just because I was running for a state-level position.

J**Jason Duff** 12:16

Yeah. How do you deal when someone calls in and they're not very nice, but they have different values or beliefs than you do? Like, have you been at— were you in situations where maybe you thought something when you first started your job, but as you listen to that feedback or that criticism, your idea or your policy has changed?

S**Susan Manchester** 12:39

That's great. You know, I think something that I've really learned over time is to just not take anything personally. I just have to give me advice on that.

J**Jason Duff** 12:48

No matter. Easier said than done. We talk a lot about on the podcast, there's a lot of leaders. And one of the comments has been made is that you're always taking flaming arrows from all directions. And it's hard when you are an empathetic person, like to not feel it. Like, give us your secret sauce with that.

S**Susan Manchester** 13:07

So, well, the secret is I'm still continuing to learn. And even 5 years in, you know, I was accustomed to taking phone calls on behalf of someone else for so long. The transition of then becoming the person that they're yelling about was very difficult. Oh, big time. Because it's easy to take arrows for someone else. It's like, no big deal.

J**Jason Duff** 13:33

Don't care. It's your job too, right?

S**Susan Manchester** 13:34

It's the job. Yeah. But then all of a sudden those arrows are coming right for me. And that was really hard. And I will tell you, the first term, literally the first year I was in office is when COVID hit. And that was a time when all eyes were on state government. And it was a very difficult time regardless of, you know, where you felt about the whole thing, what was happening to you personally. I would say everyone felt very personally impacted by everything that was going on. During that time, and there were a lot of arrows shot. And I think getting past that now, I've just come to realize, like, I was in that position at that time, and anybody else in my position at that time was gonna get the same thing. And I think now that we're even more removed from it, I realize everybody in a position of leadership, whether you were a pastor, or a business owner, or in government, We all were experiencing similar things when it came to how to lead in an unprecedented time. If we want to bring that back. All this to say, but the key in all of it is just not taking it personally because it's going to come for you if you're in a position of leadership, no matter who you are.

J**Jason Duff** 14:50

Circling back for people that you may disagree with or that you're engaging with as a constituent or another legislator, where and how do you work with those folks? Because I think that's one of the biggest criticisms that you hear, not only at the federal level, but like everything is so divided.

S**Susan Manchester** 15:09

You know, I will say the second part of that is not making any assumptions about people. And I have— I will always take a meeting with someone, and I know when a meeting request comes into my office, I know what organization is requesting it, what they stand for, typically what issue they want to discuss. And there are plenty of people who want to come into my office with a completely different point of view than what I hold. And most of the time, I'm still happy to sit down and have the meeting and just say, I'm sorry, I don't agree with you on this, but thanks for taking the time to let me know your side of the story. I mean, and to your— I think you asked a question earlier about has my view ever moved on something. And ultimately, you know, The guiding principles that I have, the conservative values that I hold, those are going to stay the same. That's pretty much the foundation. My view of the role of government, my view of the role of business, those things aren't going anywhere. But there's a lot of nuance, shall we say. I think what's really fascinating is seeing how at the at the state level, there's a lot of issues we deal with that are very different from what the federal government deals with. And, you know, how it falls into any of those categories or any of those guiding principles, I think has been a very instructive practice to go through to really decide how I'm going to land on something. And so I can't think of, like, there's really never been a time where someone's coming at me from the completely opposing view and I've moved maybe more toward them. I can always have compassion for people who are in a difficult position. I can always have empathy for where someone's coming from, and I can always make it my goal to not make any assumptions about these people based on, you know, what they stand for and the kind of issues that they're bringing to me.

J**Jason Duff** 17:13

Yeah, that's really cool. And I feel like we've had previous perspectives of, I mean, the federal government and then especially at the local level you know, this podcast is meant for entrepreneurs and developers and things like that. And I think one of the biggest things, pieces of feedback that we get a lot is how to like push through and still get something accomplished when there's so many people telling you no, or, you know, pushing against you and setting up those barriers for you to get through. And I feel like every survey that we've put out, we've gotten those kind of questions about in different shapes and forms and things like that. So I appreciate you sharing that. And I think, you know, take those lessons and apply them to a local level as well. Lead with listening. And you can hear the humility that she's speaking with. And I think that can defuse probably a lot of those flaming arrows and kind of bring it down to more of a conversational level than rather than, you know, playing into it as much. But the other thing that I like that Susan mentioned is how you're accessible. And being accessible can be one of your greatest strengths of getting that feedback and building new relationships where, you know, I think a lot of criticism of some leaders is that they're, you know, in an ivory tower or in another state and, you know, they're not connected back with the district. And I think voters today are holding a lot of their leaders accountable to, you know, be connected to what's happening.

S**Susan Manchester** 18:35

Absolutely. And I would say now more than ever, we are more accessible than ever. There's so many opportunities for people to get in touch with their elected officials. And it is so important what you said, Jason. It's about the relationships because at the end of the day, it's so much easier for people to not make assumptions about me if they've actually had the opportunity to get to know me and vice versa. And I think, and sometimes, look, sometimes you sit down, you have the conversation, it doesn't go well, and then you figure out what to do from there. That's okay. Again, it's not personal.

J**Jason Duff** 19:12

But no, you're so right. And, and I do think, um, we put people on a pedestal. And what, what the negative is about social media, either the pedestal or down in the dumps, I think I should say too, is that you make these assumptions that you know someone based on a tweet or based on, you know, what other people in the media are saying or what influencer is doing this. And the other thing I'll say for people listening, some of the biggest breakthroughs that I've had in my life is actually reaching out to people that in my head thought I, I would— they would be, you know, not approachable for me, when in return they're like, oh, I'd love to meet with you and connect with you. And do you find that— do some people, do you get intimidated with the process? I, I don't think I could reach out to our state rep Susan Manchester because she's a state rep.

S**Susan Manchester** 19:58

Yeah, it's so funny because on one end you have that, and on the other end you have people who call you at 10 AM, and if you don't call them back by 10:15, they're like, she didn't call me back. Yeah, it cracks me up because yes, both Dreams definitely exist. But yes, to your point, I mean, I try to emphasize this with everybody is I'm very accessible. You can email my office, you can call my office. If you want to set up a meeting, we try to make it happen. And I think something that maybe people don't typically realize, I spend more of my time in the district than I do in Columbus. That's how it should be. I mean, I'm typically in Columbus maybe 2 days a week when we have session. And so those other 3 days I'm here at home. I like to fill my days with meeting with constituents. And so you should never hesitate to contact me.

J**Jason Duff** 20:50

Yeah, I think one of the things we like to do with this podcast is to give the lay of the land for those who may be unfamiliar with how certain landscapes work. So I think, you know, explaining a few of the basics as far as maybe the role of the House of Rep at the state level— House of Representatives, excuse me— and then, you know, what the 78th District is and like where it's at for Ohio listeners. And then those specific things, I know you already mentioned a few, you know, email, things like that, but how, how do people actually reach out to their state reps to actually get involved and do anything about those issues?

S**Susan Manchester** 21:21

So I really will tell you the best way to do it is the old-fashioned way: email, phone call. You can email my office, rep78@ohiohouse.gov, and we will make sure that email gets taken care of. Now, I want to let people know we always strive to do our very best, and I say we— I have an aide who works for me full-time and she helps with that process because there's a lot of communication that comes in and it's extremely helpful to have someone else involved in that. So we always try to do our very best. Sometimes people will email in about something and I'll just call them back. I mean, there's a form that you fill out online when you go into email from the Ohio House website. You can go and email your rep from that website or you can just email me directly. Either way, if you leave your phone number and email, chances are if it's a nuanced topic, I'll probably just call you about it. There have been issues in the past that have affected certain communities in a very specific way. I see that we're getting quite a bit of volume on that issue. Instead of even taking the time to set up meetings with everyone, I'll just call them that day and say, hey, can we talk about this? That's what I always strive to do.. And now listen, we're, we're still people, so we might not always do it perfectly, but that's always the goal.

J**Jason Duff** 22:43

And ultimately, when you hear that feedback, then can you maybe just explain how the— how it all works, right? So what do you do with, with what you're hearing from your district, and where does it go from there?

S**Susan Manchester** 22:54

So oftentimes people will email about a specific bill. They may email about a certain issue that's impacting their community directly. And I always talk to my aide pretty much on the regular, on the daily, I mean, about what people are writing in about. Sometimes she'll even just forward me the email and say, hey, what are we going to do about this? I mean, we have a very strong communication between the two of us about where these things are going. And so, yeah, people just send in an email or give a phone call. And depending on the situation, if it's a bill, for example, that people are calling in about, typically I already know how I'm going to vote on that bill. So I'll just tell them, hey, I'm a yes on this, or I'm a no on this. Or if it's an issue that's kind of in those core principle categories, I can say, you know, you can count on my support for this because it falls under one of those principles. So it depends. But that's basically how all that communication is handled.

J**Jason Duff** 23:56

So, you know, for us that are working in our businesses and our lives and our communities, to actually craft legislation? If we see that there's something in state government that's not working the way it should or could be made better, what's the best way to, to start to work with your local state rep to, to look at those things?

S**Susan Manchester** 24:15

So I love when people call me about an issue like that. If there is some type of legislative solution to it, oftentimes if someone writes in about that type of thing, I'll set up a meeting with that person, especially if there's someone in the community that, you know, has a number of different things to talk about. I love meeting with people in person. I don't want to pretend like I just email and call people all day. There's definitely a lot of in-person meetings that happen. And so this has happened a number of times. In fact, I can give you an example of a bill that I successfully got done. There was a person in my district who served on a board for one of our state universities. And this was pre-COVID. He was advocating for them to have a policy where they could meet virtually because at the time that wasn't an option at all. He found a great example of another university who had one of these policies. But believe it or not, that is something that the state had to change through the legislative process. So I got that bill drafted up and introduced it. And honestly, when COVID hit and virtual meetings became more of a norm, it was much easier to get it done., but we were able to get it into the state budget and that then became policy. And I will say I'm very proud of that bill because it put a lot of parameters around virtual meetings. And I think it's actually a very good model for any entity to follow because it's not a whenever you want to meet virtually, you just can. I mean, it put a lot of good practices into place in my opinion. And so I'm, I'm So glad we got that done, and that came directly from someone in the district.

J**Jason Duff** 25:58

Congratulations on that, and that's a great example. And, you know, for taking it from idea, and when you say crafting the legislation, can you speak to how you involve, um, other state reps, other folks that are working maybe on the administrative side of state government, and then also potentially folks that are lobbyists that represent different industry groups to actually get the best, like you said, there's details of that that you're really proud of. I imagine you didn't come up with all those ideas on your own.

S**Susan Manchester** 26:27

Correct. It is a very collaborative process, and I think the best legislation is the one that has the most collaboration on it. Now, sometimes you get too many cooks in the kitchen as with anything. But to your point, when it comes to getting something done legislatively, you want to have stakeholder engagement and involvement. I do not know everything, especially when But when it came to university boards of trustees, I knew nothing about that. And so, it doesn't make sense for me to try to come up with all these ideas on my own. I needed to talk to people who were in the higher ed space to say, hey, is this even something you guys want? You know, talking to university presidents, is this actually something that you think would be beneficial for your boards? Another example of a bill that I had signed into law was the Beginning Farmer Tax Credit program. This is something I'm extremely proud of, coming from the family farm. It's basically a program that would connect outgoing farmers with incoming farmers and provide a tax credit to the outgoing farmer who sells or rents land or assets to a beginning farmer. And that bill, we had all of the major commodity groups engaged on it, you know, from Ohio Farm Bureau, Ohio Corn and Wheat, Ohio Cattlemen's. I mean, every commodity group was on board and they used used their membership and their engagement to advocate for the bill. Farm Bureau was heavily involved in writing out the details of that legislation as well. So again, it's always a collaborative effort. And what's really fun with that bill, it's been in effect— the program's actually been in effect for a year now, and I'm meeting people who have participated in the program and are using it. And that's, that's the most rewarding part about state government, is you actually get to see the impact of what you do every single day.

J**Jason Duff** 28:19

Yeah, that's super cool. I'm curious, you know, you're talking about a few, you know, highlights of your career. Do you maybe have a few low points for you that— we talked about Flaming Arrows before, so covered that.

S**Susan Manchester** 28:33

So it's interesting. When I was first elected in 2018, there was a very contentious race for Speaker of the House happening at the time, and I did not vote for the person who ultimately won the speakership, which if you know anything about politics, you know that put me in the doghouse from day one, basically. And so that was extremely difficult. Not only did I not support this individual, but I was also very against his signature piece of legislation, which is a little bill called House Bill 6. And if you've heard about it, it's because that individual is now in jail because of the absolute corruption that was involved with that bill. And so I was under a tremendous amount of pressure to become a yes vote for that. And that is one thing I'm so grateful for that experience, as difficult as it was, because I learned the power of saying no and the power of having a line that you will not cross, the power of knowing your values going into something like this. One of the best pieces of advice I ever received about going into this job was, never love the job so much that you'll do anything to keep it. And I feel like that whole experience—

J**Jason Duff** 29:50

Oh, that's really wise. Yeah.

S**Susan Manchester** 29:52

And I think that's important for any industry, right? Right. I mean, so because no matter what you do, you're always presented with an ethical dilemma or an opportunity to compromise your values, to cut corners. And this really showed me that it would— I mean, in the short term, I might have gained something by being a yes vote and supporting this person. But in the long term, I mean, the bill got rewritten. This guy's in jail. Like, I mean, there were a lot of consequences for this whole thing. And I think ultimately it was bad for the state. And so I'm really glad that I stuck to that while it was a low point.

J**Jason Duff** 30:30

Sure.

S**Susan Manchester** 30:30

I learned so much from it.

J**Jason Duff** 30:32

All right. At this time, we're going to take a quick break to hear a word from our sponsors. Brewfountain's voted best beer bar in Ohio. Come visit their award-winning team in downtown Bellefontaine for a fresh, fresh local craft beer, soups, salads, sandwiches, wine on tap, and handcrafted cocktails. And they're always available to cater your next event with their box lunches and platters. Cheers to Small Nation! Come check out 600 Downtown Pizzeria in downtown Bellefontaine, where they cherish the art of making the most authentic, unique, and delicious world-famous and award-winning pizzas. Their team hand spins each pizza the old-fashioned way and only uses the freshest of ingredients. Come see why they were featured on the Food Network. And then I know in our previous conversation you were talking about how you've kind of, kind of been known for, and you're really passionate about, the areas of child welfare system, foster care, and agriculture. Those have kind of been associated with your name now. So what, why is that? Why do you care about those things? And, uh, yeah, what, what are you, what's your vision for that in the future? So, I mean, I know there's 3 separate areas, but go ahead.

S**Susan Manchester** 31:35

No, I appreciate that. I think A long time ago, I was just confronted with the issue of child abuse and how much it can impact a person for the rest of their lives. And I, I did a lot of reading and just, um, had a lot of interesting experiences where I saw that play out firsthand. And it just made me really think about the fact that our kids are our future in every way, shape, and form. And those early childhood experiences shape the individual that you become. You know, I mentioned at the beginning of this how wonderful my childhood was. I mean, it was ideal in every way, and not every kid has had that. And so I don't believe that the state is ultimately the solution for that. You know, there's only so much we can do. But when it comes to the kids who are in the state's care, in the foster care system, I want us to be able to do our very best to take care of them. And so So, I, one of the bills that I had signed into law dealt with foster caregiver training standards. And again, this is so funny how this is a theme for me, but one of the pieces of that was doing foster care training online. And, you know, that turned into something, it was a very small change in what we were requiring from future foster caregivers, but it was something that could potentially get more people involved and on the path to becoming foster parents. And so I think that's something that I've really come to embrace in government. I know I'm a big believer in small government. I don't want to grow government, but there are some things that we get in the way of. And when you just make a small adjustment, it might have very long-term impact. And that's what I like to look for.

J**Jason Duff** 33:23

Yeah. And innovation, like finding new ways to be more efficient with the resources that we have.

S**Susan Manchester** 33:28

So I love—

J**Jason Duff** 33:28

Absolutely. I love that you have done that. You know, the big thing that we do in economic development is solving problems. And just like Ethan was asking about those issues related to agriculture and childcare and, you know, helping small businesses succeed, what are some things that you think on the horizon for the state that you're just excited to work with your other legislators to improve upon?

S**Susan Manchester** 33:53

So something that I have been a huge advocate for is getting rid of the personal income tax in Ohio. I would like to get it down to zero because if you look at states where people—

J**Jason Duff** 34:03

Listen, I'm just kidding.

S**Susan Manchester** 34:05

You think that's true? If you look at states where people are flocking to, Tennessee, Texas, and Florida, Ohio will never have their weather. But one thing that all those states have in common is no personal income tax. And I think that that is a huge economic development tool for us, especially— look, we've all been impacted by inflation. I think in the bigger cities they're seeing that more. And frankly, there are some states that are just more expensive to live in. And I think if Ohio can be a more affordable state and a place where your money is yours, I think that's a huge win for us. Because the truth is, we've been losing population for the past 20 years and we need to reverse that. And I think that that's something that is within reach. We have reduced the income tax every year that I've been in office and that we've done a budget. But we're down to, I believe it's just 2 tax brackets, and I think the top rate is a little over 3%, which is great. I mean, don't get me wrong, that's pretty minimal.

J**Jason Duff** 35:04

Yeah.

S**Susan Manchester** 35:05

But it's a much better selling point to say we're at zero.

J**Jason Duff** 35:09

It's interesting looking at your lenses at the local level and then moving it more regional and state and of course now national and even global. Ohio, you know, I attended an event that was put on by One Columbus the ED411 conference about 4 months ago, and JP Nazareth and other leaders from Kenny McDonald from the Columbus Partnership, they were just, you know, highlighting along with Lieutenant Governor Husted how this is Ohio's year. I mean, we were looking at the type of business deals the state has been sinking the last 2 years, and then particularly with the index that looks at Ohio being more business friendly. We used to be like number 46th in the country, and I think now we're like in the top 5. And so those were steps that the administrators— so if we think of government, the administrative side of what we do would be, you know, the governor's office and, and all the kind of purview of the full-time, you know, workers in the government stuff. But the, the legislature, you've got state reps and state Senate, you know, working together to build legislation with the help of the administration to make the state more competitive. So I, I like that you're looking at understanding how we stack up with taxes. Is there other things like that that, that you and, and, and other state legislators you think are looking at to make Ohio a better place to do business?

S**Susan Manchester** 36:36

So I think you bring up an excellent point. We have made so many strides in the economic development arena, and there are so many businesses that we've been winning to Ohio and even here in West Central Ohio, there is a lot of very exciting developments coming. And I think that does have a lot to do with leadership, right? It's so important to have people who have a growth mindset for the state. So I would say, you know, the personal income tax is a big one. But aside from that, just looking at our regulatory structure and how we can continue to scale that back so that Ohio is a more business-friendly state. One thing that maybe doesn't necessarily apply just to businesses but is tangential to it, we have been passing a lot of compact bills in the Ohio legislature. So for any kind of professional licensures, be it nurses, doctors, social workers, Ohio is entering into state compacts for those licenses so that that your license is good here in Arizona and multiple other states. And that's something we've entered into so many of those compacts in the time that I've been in the legislature. And I think that's a huge development because that's a good draw. You're not gonna have to reapply for a new license and go through the whole process. Once you move here, your license is already good. I think that's one, again, one of those small things that we can do that really has a long-term impact.

J**Jason Duff** 38:04

We recently interviewed a new home builder, um, Doug from Monticello Homes, as a guest on our podcast. And right now in the housing crisis, we want people to find more people like Doug and his team that are going to be coming, um, and be motivated and excited to plot out new subdivisions and build new homes. And, you know, one of the things that he mentioned is just how the regulatory requirements and burden from when he first started the industry, you know, 20 years ago to what it is today, it's become a lot harder. And I think, you know, just knowing that case, if someone's seeing that in their lives or in their business, like what is the best way and not just going to their state rep, who else should they be contacting to help kind of make those positive changes?

S**Susan Manchester** 38:52

That's a great question. And I will say, I think starting with your state legislators is a great place to start. As we are able to take that information and then get it to other stakeholders, you know, when it comes to homebuilding in particular, I think of the Ohio Homebuilders Association being a very important mechanism to discuss those problems and bring forth good ideas. So I really do think there's a lot of value in still contacting your reps and senators, and to your point about housing in general, I've heard it from multiple sources now that that it is a lot harder to build houses in Ohio than it is in other states. And granted, we, we want to make sure these houses are safe. I'm like, I don't want just anybody— yeah, exactly. I'm like, I— you don't want me building a house, trust me. But if there's an opportunity to scale back on those regulations, and if there are other states that do less and still have safe housing, I think that's something to examine. So, and I've heard that in multiple places now, and you're bringing it up today. So I think and so I think that's another valuable thing is we have so many issues in our ear all the time. And so making sure that you're kind of the squeaky wheel is also really valuable.

J**Jason Duff** 40:04

And I think you mentioned that finding ways to take and roll back regulations, but we're also experiencing a lot of changes and transitions. You know, voters went to the ballot and we're now seeing recreational use of marijuana, which is brand new to our state., and I imagine that case, it's bringing a lot of your constituents to ask questions about how do we keep people safe with that, but while also acknowledging the voters and allowing recreational use.

S**Susan Manchester** 40:32

So this is an extremely challenging topic. I was against legalizing recreational marijuana, and so now that it is here, the legislature really needs to be serious about figuring out how we're going to regulate because this is something that, like alcohol, should be highly regulated. And frankly, I don't know all the answers for what that needs to look like. But to your point, Jason, it's so important that we take it seriously, the effects of this drug, because it has not been legal in this state. It's been around, but it's certainly not been legal. And I think it brings up a lot of difficult questions for employers and what they need to require from their employees now. Driving safety, what that looks like. I mean, I feel like we're at a point where there are more questions than answers on how we sort this out. But it is really critical that the legislature takes a hard, long look at this because I, I don't want to see this becoming something that prevents us from the growth that I know is possible in this state.

J**Jason Duff** 41:39

And you just hear like that those are like the, the two sides of the spectrum. What regulations do we need to be really taking a careful look and rolling back. And then through these new things to keep people safe or to, you know, see the workforce and the employers remain strong, what new things do we need to be put on? And you see it creates lots of conversations and differences amongst people. Is that— do you kind of get excited, like, seeing both sides of those perspectives?

S**Susan Manchester** 42:05

Oh, absolutely. I mean, and it's fascinating talking to people who were all for the legalization of recreational marijuana and the kind of points that they made and And some of them, interesting points, you know, I can hear where they're coming from. I mean, at the end of the day, I didn't fall on the same page, but it is, to your point, it is an interesting dynamic where there is times when you need to regulate and times when you need to pull back. And I think, again, not to harp on this example, but marijuana should be treated like alcohol in the way that it's regulated.

J**Jason Duff** 42:41

And I think most voters and most people I would 100% agree with that, but it's like you said, the nuances between— correct— and then where the money goes. Like, I think that who is making money on this and, um, what, you know, groups of people or industries benefit. When can I get a one rapid fire in? But first, go ahead.

S**Susan Manchester** 42:59

Yeah, well, I just— to the point about the money, I think the most frustrating part of this whole legalization movement is the fact that we are going to use all this tax money then to fund mental health mental health programs and rehabilitation. And the state is already doing a lot of very good work in that area. Now, we are in crisis in that there is simply not enough mental health workers out there to take care of the demand. However, it's very frustrating to me to, in my mind, use a problem to solve a problem is what it feels like on that front. But I think it's an important discussion we need to have. Of where is that money going to go and, and how are we going to move forward as a state so that we're all taken care of and living good lives. That's really what I want for all Ohioans, living good lives.

J**Jason Duff** 43:52

Love that. Um, rapid-fire question: when people hear the word lobbyist, I think in general it's a negative connotation. We've actually hosted a lobbyist on the podcast, Abe Jacob, just to share like from his perspective you know, why that role is really important. Can you just speak from your role of like what that means to you? What is a lobbyist to you?

S**Susan Manchester** 44:18

A person who is paid to represent a certain point of view. And that's all it is. I mean, it doesn't have to be that deep. I have a lot of— frankly, I work with lobbyists all the time. They're in my office, they are in the hallways of the State House, and they are paid to represent a certain point of view by their clients.. And it just so happens there's plenty of lobbyists out there that I agree with their point of view. And so I'm happy to work with them. You know, in the case of Ohio Farm Bureau and Nationwide Insurance, those were two entities that were very supportive of my Beginning Farmer Tax Credit bill. And so they were extremely helpful in using their resources and their memberships to get that bill across the finish line.

J**Jason Duff** 45:00

And whether you like it or not, and I just want to double down on this, is getting involved in your constituent group, whether it's your local Chamber of Commerce, whether you said the Farm Bureau, or your industry-specific trade association. You know, I learned a lot by having, uh, John Barker from the Ohio Restaurant and Hospitality Association here, just sharing the perspective of the types of things that are coming down Ohio's pipeline and on the radar and what that association is working to educate its members, to align its support. But I think where people sometimes feel left out is they're not sure what groups or what, you know, folks they should, should join.

S**Susan Manchester** 45:43

And I think that's a great question. And I will say, for every industry out there, there is some type of association or group that you can join that probably has a government affairs wing. And I think that is so valuable because you get to learn from people all over the state that are in your industry. It's a great networking opportunity. And also, it's really helpful to have that presence and that voice at the State House because I know the relationships. And again, it's about relationships with people. I know what lobbyists represent different associations. And so if I want to know what that association's view on a certain bill is, I will call that lobbyist and they will tell me. And it's really helpful to hear. Now, I think something to keep in mind is there may be times when you don't agree with what your association is doing, or they might put support out or put a no vote out on a bill that you actually do support or don't support. And in that case, I think it's important to, again, talk to your local legislator and make sure that they understand, hey, my association is supporting this particular bill, but I don't, and here's why. I find that extremely valuable. And that's happened on a number of items because, you know, at the end of the day, people still have their own opinions.

J**Jason Duff** 47:02

Yeah. Can I do another rapid fire? Go ahead. And then we're going to turn to Ethan. So the state budget, there are certain line items that tend to get into the state budget. So for someone listening, and maybe it's an improvement of building a new amphitheater in their town or improving a walking path path. Um, have you used that or been a part of lobbying for that, and what advice would you have for them to get those types of capital projects and line items in the state budget?

S**Susan Manchester** 47:31

So currently we are going through the capital budget process where you can submit your request to your local legislator, and then we go through the process of prioritizing those requests and then advocating for them. And I would say to anyone out there who is looking for capital funding for a project, go ahead and put in the request. You have nothing to lose by doing so. And take the time to sit down with your legislator and talk through the importance of the request and why you need the money. The truth is, it's your money to begin with. I mean, it is all taxpayer dollars. And so for me, I would like to make sure that I'm bringing home as much as I can in the form of capital projects that are ultimately going to benefit the community. Unfortunately, you know, not all these projects are created equal, and sometimes there's things put forth that the funding's not going to happen, right? But again, what do you have to lose by asking for it?

J**Jason Duff** 48:29

And for those that are listening, it is so important to— even if you're not ready to submit your project idea to your state rep or, or state senator, just going through the planning activity, because there are times where funds become available or line items are established. But if you're not ready with some of the ideas or the potential projects, you're going to miss out on that opportunity. So I just want to double down on that because I watch, you know, through, through seeing in media announcements and so on, these communities that maybe are getting their historic theater restored or seeing a brand new community center be built or a library that's improved. And I want to see more of that for our regions. And again, using Susan and your state rep or your state senator as a conduit to get your project ideas on the radar is very important.

S**Susan Manchester** 49:22

Absolutely. And to your point, there's an opera house in Fort Recovery and in St. Mary's that both got capital funding.

J**Jason Duff** 49:29

Congratulations. That's great.

S**Susan Manchester** 49:31

It was great. And, you know, I am a theater person, as you know, so it was very exciting. For us to get that going. And to your point, those kind of projects can do so much for the community at large, and so that's why I think it's important to advocate for them.

J**Jason Duff** 49:45

Yeah, that's awesome. Well, thank you for just sharing all those things. I think you unpacked a lot of lessons for just leaders in general, you know, people listening to this podcast. But also, um, I think it just reminds me, you know, to, to be grateful for our public servants. And, um, you know, you appreciate that you have to become an expert in so many different industries and, you know, try to to do what's best for everybody. So I think for anyone listening, you know, even just shoot your state rep, you know, a thank you letter or something like that. But so thank you for the work that you've done. And just, I don't know, it's a good reminder that, you know, you're a real person too that has a lot to handle and, you know, you're doing the best you can and, you know, just trying to hear everyone out and dropping those lessons of leadership along the way. So thank you. To kind of change gears a little bit, you were here not too long ago in Bellefontaine, so I'd like to do a show segment called our tour takeaway. Ooh. So just kind of curious, as you were taking your tour around Bellefontaine, you know, what kind of stood out to you? What did you notice about this area specifically?

S**Susan Manchester** 50:51

So I will tell you, I come to Bellefontaine all the time. It is about 20 minutes away from where I live. So my husband and I are frequenters of 600, Brew Fountain, Syndicate, Flying Pepper. I mean, we love them all. So it is amazing having grown up in this area. We didn't used to come to Bellefontaine very often. There wasn't much downtown especially, but now being able to come downtown and literally walk around the block and hit up a couple of spots is It's amazing. I absolutely love it. So I feel very excited about all the things that are up and coming, which is what we talked about on the tour, some of these new businesses that are coming here. And I think it's really just incredible what you guys are doing, and I'm so grateful for it. I'm glad that I live so close and that I get to experience it all the time.

J**Jason Duff** 51:44

Well, just from a, the business owner standpoint, like Susan is very accessible and visible. Like she You know, she says what she does and she lives it, like shopping in our small businesses and putting a spotlight on them. I also think that's a neat opportunity as a state rep to storytell and highlight when good things happen. And we hear from many of our businesses that she is in there shopping and spending. And also a big shout out to your husband, you know, Isaac. He's also a small business owner himself too. So yeah, I want to make sure and remind can you, just for those listening, because I think his story is really cool, can you give a quick plug to him? Because he is pretty amazing.

S**Susan Manchester** 52:23

Absolutely. I'm so glad you brought him up because he is amazing. He's literally the best. And his family business is called Wildman Spice Company. It was actually started by the Wildman family in 1895, I believe. And Isaac's grandfather had a small business called Gray's Orange Barn, which was outside of New Hampshire, Ohio. Many of you from the Lake area.

J**Jason Duff** 52:46

It was amazing growing up.

S**Susan Manchester** 52:47

Going on. It's the best. It was the absolute best. Unfortunately, his grandfather passed away pretty young, but there was— the Wildman Spice Company had a spice display in Gray's Orange Barn, and at one time they came to his grandfather and said, this is one of our best-selling displays, would you be interested in buying the company? And so he did. And now Isaac and his father and his brother all work there. Many of you might know Chef's Seasoning. That's usually what people know. If they know Wildman Spices, they know Chef's Seasoning. You can literally put it on everything and make it delicious. So it's very fun.

J**Jason Duff** 53:24

Again, I think that adds to your unique perspective of growing up on a family farm, family business. Now you and your husband having another family business. And just to kind of share, you've got some new plans related to your public service. Do you want to talk a little bit about that?

S**Susan Manchester** 53:41

Absolutely. I am running for state senate, which is very exciting. And I have to say, I've had the honor of representing 5 of the 7 counties in that district. My current district is Allen and northern Auglaize County, and then this Senate district covers Allen, Auglaize, Shelby, Darke, Mercer, Champaign, and Logan. So just a fantastic territory. I mean, just the best. I say It's the strongest, most supportive communities in the state of Ohio. And I would put that up every single day. It's, it's fantastic. And I'm so excited about the opportunity to represent that area.

J**Jason Duff** 54:18

Yeah, that's so exciting. A couple of closing questions for you. One is, what is one professional development resource that was impactful for you along your professional journey?

S**Susan Manchester** 54:27

So I am a reader. I love to read. And there are many books that I've read over the years that have been very instructive for me. One of them that I read back when I was in college is called Leading with a Limp, and it's about the importance of recognizing your weaknesses as a leader and being able to kind of utilize that and make it into your greatest strength. Yeah, I think the humility aspect is something that is often missing in leadership. I also am a huge John Maxwell fan. I really love his writing. Leadership Shift, I think, was the book that I read most recently by him, and And both of those books have a spiritual element to them. And so my faith being very important to me, that's an important piece of leadership. And so I really appreciate those resources because of that.

J**Jason Duff** 55:13

Yeah, thank you for sharing that. I think those are a couple of new ones for us on the show. And then where can people follow you to keep up with the work that you are doing?

S**Susan Manchester** 55:20

So you can email or call my office.

J**Jason Duff** 55:22

Yeah.

S**Susan Manchester** 55:23

If that's all that you take away.

J**Jason Duff** 55:24

You better see a spike after this episode drops.

S**Susan Manchester** 55:27

I know. Call me, call me. So you can email the office, rep78@ohiohouse.gov, or you can call 614-466-6344. And I also have Facebook and Twitter, Susan Manchester. I would say that's not the best way to reach me. Reaching out to the office is really the best way to get in touch.

J**Jason Duff** 55:46

Great, awesome. And I'll try to link some, as many of those things as I can in the show notes below. But Jason? Yeah, Susan, thank you for your service. I think back to, you know, probably it's now been 10 years ago when you and I connected, I think coming back from DC. And just to, at the time, like we set out this really big vision to reshape Bellefontaine. And at that time you were also setting out your vision to be a state rep. And now to see that you're taking and building upon that to run your race for Senate, I'm just, I'm really proud proud and, and thankful to call you a friend and just appreciate the, the service and advocacy and, and hard work that you're putting into, to your job. It's showing, and those results are, um, are pretty awesome. So just thank you for being on the show today.

S**Susan Manchester** 56:33

Thank you so much, and really love what Small Nation is doing and how much you've grown, how much Bellefontaine has grown. It's amazing to be a part of it in this capacity, so thank you for everything you do.

E**Ethan DeLeon** 56:45

Thanks for tuning in on this episode of the Small Nation Podcast.

E**Ethan DeLeon** 56:47

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