

FINAL TRANSCRIPT CATHY SCHAFFER 11/6/22

VC: Hello, I'm Vanessa Corwin

KK: And, I'm Kathleen Kaan

VC: We all encounter poll workers when we go to cast our vote. Did you ever wonder what it's like to do this job, particularly in today's volatile political climate? With us today is Cathy Schaffer, a poll worker in Tampa, Florida to give us the inside story. Cathy, welcome to the podcast. Thanks for joining us.

CS: My pleasure.

VC: Is this the first time you're doing this, and what made you decide to do this?

CS: Yes, it is the first time, and I thought it would be an interesting experience, and I'm relatively new to Tampa, I've been living here for five years, and I thought it would be an opportunity to do a public service and also meet my neighbors.

VC: And, have you done that? Have you met your neighbors?

CS: Well yes, actually. When you sign up to be a poll worker, they ask you if you will travel outside of your neighborhood. I'm assigned one polling place for early voting but a different one for election day and election day is literally right in my neighborhood so I thought that would be a good opportunity. So yes, it's worked out for me.

VC: Cathy, take us through your training and tell us if you think it adequately prepared you for the actual job.

CS: Well, you go through online training, of course you have to have a background check and all of that. The online training was about two hours and once you complete that, you take the necessary quizzes. I went down to the Board of Elections of Hillsboro County and took a class. It's called e-polling, and it's a tablet and you scan like the back of a license and that brings up the voter's information so that was a hands-on class as to how to use the equipment and also to identify the many types of ID that can be used besides a driver's license. So that was about another hour. The training was fine, and as a matter of fact it got so detailed into, well, if they have a passport and it doesn't have a picture then you have to do this and I got all flustered and I thought, oh, I hope I can do this, but when you sit down and actually do it it's easy. So yes, I had sufficient training. Now of course, every state has their own routine so I can only speak for, and actually, county by county could be different in Florida so I'm only speaking about the county that I'm in.

KK: That brings us to where do you work and what are your hours?

CS: Right, I'm in Hillsboro County and it's a very large county. And my hours are 6:30 AM to 7:30 PM every other day until election day. Now it was explained to me, we have two weeks of early voting in Hillsboro County but the smaller counties, the more rural part of Florida, they have one week of early voting. The early voting criteria is based on population so that's how I get to the two weeks.

VC: Do you get compensated for this?

CS: Yes, \$15 an hour. But there's no, like, after 40 hours....it's just \$15 an hour.

VC: Right, so it's straight time. But that's good, though, they pay you. Considering the threats to poll workers during the last election, have you encountered any threats or harassment?

CS: I have not. One of my co-workers has and yes, I was very concerned about my security but I said, I've got to do this. But it did happen to a co-worker. Because the people that like to sit outside with big signs of their candidate can get aggressive. It's not the voters, it's the people sitting out there with the signs. And, actually they fight with each other, the Republicans and the Democrats get into it together, but it has not happened to me personally, though.

KK: What happened to your friend, can you share that story?

CS: Well, the people with the signs cannot cross a boundary, they've got to stay back a certain amount of feet.

VC: It's something like 200 feet, right? Something like that.

CS: Something like that.

CS: So, one of these people who had the sign was inching too far over. So, one of the positions that we have is, you've got to stand outside and just make sure everything is calm. So, this man, a poll worker went over and said to this man, "you know, you need to move back" and he said something like, very nasty, "Who do you think you are, and I'm not going to move back and why are you here?" and he said, "well I'm a poll worker and you have to move back" so right away the guy goes, "well, I'll bet you're a Democrat!" So, and this was the greatest line, so he says, "Oh yeah? You think so? The first election that I ever voted in I voted for Goldwater!" (laughter) So, shows you how old he is. And clearly, he's not a Democrat. But then the guy said, "Why don't you just lie down in the street and die!" That's when he had to report it to my supervisor.

KK: Yeah, what kind of security do you have for you guys.

CS: None.

KK: Because these people are crazy.

VC: None?? Don't you have police?

CS: No.

KK: Really?

CS: The only thing that they have done is they moved the drop box inside. I'm at the library, it's inside the doorway, it's not outside any more. And I've had people ask me why they moved the drop box and I said, it's for security. It's inside and two people have to be sitting beside the drop box at all times. So, there's no security.

VC: Wow. So, you mentioned, Cathy, there's like different positions. Do you do the same job all the time, do you get rotated? How does that work?

CS: It's a two-hour rotation. You've got your e-poll workers that are logging people in. Now we have in the early voting, we print out the ballot because once the person's address pops up it goes to their particular district all over Hillsboro. So that's one assignment for two hours. Then you go to the back of the room where the actual—it's called a DS 200—where they insert the ballot to count it. You've got three people back there. Now you have to remember, I'm in a huge polling place. We have a team of 14 people. That's apparently big. Most polling places have about five or six. So, you have to explain and help them insert the ballot, so that's another two-hour rotation. Then you have the third rotation which is the two people sitting at the drop box and two people outside monitoring the situation of the comings and goings of everybody. Now the library, the main entrance to the library is in the middle of the building but the polling place, you've got walk all the way down so there's a lot of direction. I would say "Are you coming to vote today? Yes? OK, it's down there on the right." The other day I said to a man, "Are you coming to vote today?" and he goes, "NO!" "OK, that's good too...so that's the other position. So, there are three positions that you rotate every two hours, and with the 12-hour day you get to do everything twice a day.

KK: You know, I'm just thinking, can we go back to the question about your training—did they screen you before you started your training so... thinking about any rogue poll workers who would be there just to disrupt, have you encountered anything like that?

CS: No...No. Other than a background check. I was surprised at how they really didn't talk about aggressive voters at all but they spent a lot of time, an enormous amount of time, talking about people with disabilities and how to handle that. You are never supposed to ask anybody if they want assistance. You cannot say that. They have to say, "I need somebody to help me." And when that happens you have to fill out a special form, because they do have the poll watchers there and you can't be in the same booth without that piece of paper.

VC: So, speaking of poll watchers, have you encountered any and have they caused any problems... are they armed, are they videotaping, taking license plate info, anything like that?

CS: Well, they are inside the polling place so it would be impossible for them to get license plates because they sit inside where, as they call them, the privacy booths are, and people are voting. A lot of them are on their phones a lot so... but they give me the creeps. You know they kind of sit there and...I had an incident where a young woman who was in a motorized wheelchair went over to the booth and filled out her form. She didn't have assistance, and she motorized over to the intake box and it seemed as if her left arm was not paralyzed but she had to do the whole thing with one hand. And this poll watcher was staring at me because I'm not allowed to touch the ballot.

KK: Exactly.

CS: She gave me that evil eye stare, but she eventually did it and she was fine. That's basically all they do, they just kind of like... if there's any kind of a discussion everybody kind of looks up, but they stare at their phones a lot.

KK: It sounds like they are there to intimidate. Period.

CS: Yeah well, we... I just pretend they're not there. And they're nice, they come and say hello. They wear a very big tag that says "poll watcher" and they're just kind of like, part of the furniture.

KK: Oh God, in this day and age you never know what's going to happen. I've never done this before or ever. I can't imagine that there were poll watchers watching you guys before, I'm not sure that it ever existed.

CS: That poll watcher didn't take her eyes off me while that young woman was trying to insert the ballot.

VC: So, have you had any experience at all with conflicts in your polling place either on the part of other workers or with the voters?

CS: The voters have been very pleasant. A lot of them have thanked me, thanked us for being there. Everybody is very anxious to vote, very happy to be there. When they cast their ballot, it scans and the screen comes up, "you have voted," and they're so happy -- "Look, I voted!" It really is a very positive feeling from the voters. The only issue with the actual workers is that some of them have been doing it a long time and they get upset with minutia. But they're nice people. And some of them have very interesting stories. It's just the minutia that flips them out.

VC: How's the turnout been, by the way so far?

CS: Yesterday we had 750 people. We're averaging 600-800 a day. I'm very happy to tell you, lots of young people

VC: That's great to hear. Definitely

KK: Now we're curious, you told us great stories, but what do you think is the most challenging about doing this job?

CS: The hours. Because when you get there at 6:30 it's not like you can sit at your desk, have your coffee, turn on your computer, you hit the ground running. You get there at 6:30, you've got to take all of the vote early signs and put them out in the street. As I said, it's a huge parking lot so you have a lot of those arrow signs, "vote" so that takes ten minutes, then we have a little meeting with our supervisor. So, you literally have between five and ten minutes before the polls open and you have to be at attention at 7:00AM and it goes right straight through until 7PM. That's been the most challenging. It's a very long day.

VC: It's a long day. Do you get any time off for lunch?

CS: Half an hour.

VC: Are you allowed to go out?

CS: Well, I go sit in my car because it's much more comfortable, but because we're on a rotation schedule you can't say, "I'm going to take an hour," you've got to take your half hour because someone else has to go out. And you also have to be sitting up at attention when there's nothing going on because at any time a voter could come in. So, it's not like you can sit back and go aaah... you can't read, you can't be on your phone, so it's a very, very, very long day. I wouldn't do it again just because it's two weeks. If it was one week I could do it again, now that I'm into the second week, I'm really tired.

KK: That was going to be my next question, would you do it again. Would you recommend others to do it?

CS: Oh, I think it's, I'm enjoying it, if the hours were shorter, I would be fine. It's interesting to meet people. 99% of the people don't wear MAGA hats or t-shirts. Everyone comes in, pretty much I have no idea what their party is. So that's nice.

VC: And, what's the most rewarding part of doing this for you?

CS: That people are so happy to be there. It's very nice. It's a lot more positive... and people will wait. We took a power hit and it was right before seven and everybody said, "we'll just wait, it's OK, it's fine." It really is... people are just happy to be there. So that's nice.

KK: Yes.

VC: So, you've given us a picture of early voting. How do you think election day will be different for you?

CS: Now election day is going to be completely different. What they do Sunday night when the polls close, they strike everything. They take everything down and they reconfigure it. So, my election day assignment, being that it's in another building, I'm actually going there Monday afternoon at 3:30 to set up and then election day, and when the night is over and everybody's out, I have to take everything down. So, it'll be a different experience election day.

KK: Well, we certainly appreciate what you're doing and what other poll workers are doing. You go and you vote, and you never think about it. I'll have a totally different attitude when I vote on Tuesday for sure.

VC: Exactly. Cathy, thank you so much for doing this today. You're giving us the inside view of a typical day of a poll worker so thanks again.

CS: My Pleasure!

VC: OK Cathy, so is there anything else that we haven't covered that you'd like to add?

CS: Yes. Having witnessed the whole process of signing in to vote, and then inserting your ballot, and the security involved, because at the end of the night they open up the machine and they take the paper ballots out and they are put into a locked suitcase, brought over to the Board of Elections. The machines that are used for early voting are not used on election day. They get locked up. The paper ballots are actually kept for 28 months. There is no way in Florida you can steal an election. It's impossible. It's impossible. So yes, I just wanted to say that.

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