**Midterm Edition: State and Local Elections**

This transcript was created using a combination of machine and human transcribing, so there may be some typos.

**Hannah McCarthy:** [00:00:00] Nick as you know in our last episode we talked about what midterm elections are and why they matter. You know all the sweeping implications stuff how midterms can affect the country with congressional redistricting and this referendum on the president and potentially flipping the House and the Senate and infusing Congress with all of these new ideas and setting the stage for massive change.

[00:00:23] But today I want to think small.

**Nick Capodice:** [00:00:28] Small like what kind of small?

**Hannah McCarthy:** [00:00:30] Small like local small.

[00:00:33] Let's start with the town up north in New Hampshire with about 7000 residents that is small. In August I drove up to Plymouth New Hampshire. It's a little college town in a place called Grafton County really charming. There's a town green with a gazebo and old timey diner Covered Bridge of course got a covered bridge.

[00:00:54] It's very New England and across the street from the town green in what used to be a bookstore is the office of the Plymouth area Democrats.

[00:01:06] So that's the sound of people doing the wave.

**Nick Capodice:** [00:01:09] Which wave.

**Hannah McCarthy:** [00:01:09] The blue wave.

[00:01:13] There were campaign signs leading up against the wall they had a life size cutout of Obama.

[00:01:18] There was a potluck party atmosphere in the room and I was there to meet this gentleman.

**Jeff Steigler:** [00:01:25] My name is Jeff Steigler and I am currently the police chief in Bradford Vermont.

[00:01:30] I am currently campaigning for Grafton County Sheriff.

**Hannah McCarthy:** [00:01:33] Jeff lives in New Hampshire but works just across the border in Vermont.

**Jeff Steigler:** [00:01:37] This is the first time I've ever asked the public for their support and obviously for their vote on both the primary and hopefully the general election. Also Franklin

**Hannah McCarthy:** [00:04:16] This was a Grafton County candidate night. The second one that week and Jeff was there to introduce himself and to convince people to vote for him in the New Hampshire primary and to explain exactly what it is that a sheriff does.

**Jeff Steigler:** [00:04:29] It's actually a constitutional position stage in the state constitution. But any of your listeners could Google are say one of four and you'll see what the primary functions but at the core of what the sheriff's department has to do.

**Nick Capodice:** [00:04:40] So did you google it.

**Hannah McCarthy:** [00:04:41] Of course I googled it.

**Nick Capodice:** [00:04:42] What did you find out.

**Hannah McCarthy:** [00:04:43] Well first and foremost in New Hampshire we call laws are essays. It stands for Revised Statutes Annotated and our essays include what amounts to a job description for elected officials. For example how an elected sheriff can and ought to lay down the law. They transport prisoners deputise bailiff's.

**Nick Capodice:** [00:05:02] Bailiffs like bull in night court.

**Hannah McCarthy:** [00:05:04] Right okay there you go.

[00:05:05] Yep bull was probably deputized by the sheriff. Until I spoke with Jeff Stigler.

[00:05:10] I really didn't know what a sheriff did or frankly the difference between county sheriff and local police chief. But every time I voted for a sheriff I was voting for someone who has major responsibility and it's the same deal with everything from governor to school board members to comptroller.

**Nick Capodice:** [00:05:26] What actually is a comptroller by the way?

**Hannah McCarthy:** [00:05:27] They're kind of like a state's chief financial officer. But the point is that there are a lot of obscure offices on the ballot and they can seem insignificant next to federal candidates like who cares about the railroad commissioner when you've got some flashy Senate race going on.

**Nick Capodice:** [00:05:41] Oh I have a feeling that we care we care.

**Hannah McCarthy:** [00:05:43] This is Civics 101 a refresher course on the basics of how our democracy works. I am Hannah McCarthy.

**Nick Capodice:** [00:05:49] And I'm Nick Capodice.

**Hannah McCarthy:** [00:05:49] And today we continue our five part series on the inner workings of midterm elections. But a closer look at the local and state offices you'll be voting on this November like Sheriff judge and governor. They may go by different names depending on where you live. But either way state and local offices can have a big time impact on your life.

**Cheryl Cook-Kallio:** [00:06:08] The issue with midterms is that I think we train people to be very hyper focused on national elections but most elections that are local are closer to the people.

**Hannah McCarthy:** [00:06:18] That's Cheryl Cook-Kallio, former high school teacher.

**Nick Capodice:** [00:06:20] For 39 years.

**Hannah McCarthy:** [00:06:22] And former Councilwoman and former candidate for California's state assembly.

**Cheryl Cook-Kallio:** [00:06:26] Will our house in California is called the Assembly and there are different names in different states.

[00:06:31] Most of them are House of Representatives but in California it is the Assembly.

**Hannah McCarthy:** [00:06:35] And she says that yes of course it is important that we have good Congresspeople and good senators.

[00:06:40] But.

**Cheryl Cook-Kallio:** [00:06:41] But whether or not you get a stop sign at the end of your street is really dependent on the kind of city council you elect county supervisors have control over regional issues that have to do with transportation and maybe even water. And so midterms are often ignored because there is no presidential candidate but they may be even more important because there's such a low voter turnout during a midterm election.

**Hannah McCarthy:** [00:07:04] So think of it this way. What is more likely to affect you. Nick capital on a daily basis theU.S. defense budget or the road in front of your house.

**Nick Capodice:** [00:07:11] I'm going to definitely say the road.

**Hannah McCarthy:** [00:07:13] It's the road the.

**Nick Capodice:** [00:07:13] It's the road.

**Cheryl Cook-Kallio:** [00:07:15] One of the things that an individual can do is pay attention to those things are most important to them. In most cases that's local politics your school board your inner city council county supervisors and perhaps your state legislature depending on the size of the state.

**Hannah McCarthy:** [00:07:29] So many of the people who keep your city or your town running smoothly or possibly not so smoothly get elected during midterms. You've got school boards for instance they can set school policy. Decide how the money gets spent. Even decide whether or not to close a school you've got county commissioners who can be in charge of everything from assuring water quality to collecting property taxes some even control public welfare programs and Nick judges. We vote for the people who are in charge of sentencing people to fines probation even prison in many cases. It is in our hands to decide who gets to make those decisions.

**Nick Capodice:** [00:08:08] What about something like the Register of Deeds.

**Hannah McCarthy:** [00:08:11] Yes I was so curious about register.

**Nick Capodice:** [00:08:13] We've seen signs for that all over the neighborhood.

**Hannah McCarthy:** [00:08:15] Everywhere.

**Cheryl Cook-Kallio:** [00:08:15] Oh Register of Deeds. OK. That's probably what we would call the clerk which has to do with all the paperwork in your life that is important your marriage your births the deed to your house those kinds of things are done and usually that's controlled by someone who is elected. So there are things like this that may or may not affect you on a daily basis but they certainly control the legalities of what you do in your everyday life.

**Nick Capodice:** [00:08:39] Nick what gets me about all of what Cheryl is saying is that you know when we complain about government and inefficiencies and taxes and all that stuff I feel like most of us are directing that complaining that I are at the federal government. You know the whole joke. Thanks Obama.

**Nick Capodice:** [00:08:56] Yeah.

**Hannah McCarthy:** [00:08:57] You think we're mad at the president we're mad at the federal Congress. And then there's this vague sense that the people at the very top are the ones who make things good or bad for us. But a lot of the structure in our lives is controlled at the state and local level.

**Nick Capodice:** [00:09:11] So basically it seems like we should be paying as much attention to these smaller elections in offices as we do to day the presidential election.

**Hannah McCarthy:** [00:09:19] Yeah I mean powers vary from state to state. But I would say at least as much like take the sheriff candidate Jeff Stigler who we met at the beginning of the episode if he wins the midterm he'll essentially be public he appointed law enforcement for an entire county races like that probably deserve more attention than they get. But there are offices up for election and midterms that do get some real attention like Governor.

**Nick Capodice:** [00:09:42] But what does a governor actually do.

**Hannah McCarthy:** [00:09:44] Or a lieutenant governor.

[00:09:45] For that matter.

**Bakari Sellers:** [00:09:46] This is very difficult for me. You take somebody who just lost the lieutenant governor's race and ask him about his the job that he could have had you know not only is it difficult I want to tell you how sharp that hurt because my lieutenant governor is now governor.

[00:09:57] OK.

**Hannah McCarthy:** [00:09:57] That did not start well. This is Bakari Sellers, attorney and former state rep of South Carolina he was in office for eight years and ran for lieutenant governor in 2014. He lost but he had some insights on the positions.

**Nick Capodice:** [00:10:07] Do you think he was really offended by that.

**Hannah McCarthy:** [00:10:09] I don't think so. If he was you forgive us.

**Bakari Sellers:** [00:10:11] I know it was tough. Now Lieutenant Governor and Governor. They. They are different in every state. We now have. If I'm not mistaken two African-American lieutenant governors in the country. So we are making progress on that front. Governor of course depending on your state we have a legislative state here in South Carolina meaning that really our legislature is way more powerful than our governor is but in certain states it's the other way around although the governor has a bully pulpit right.

**Hannah McCarthy:** [00:10:34] So in the same way that the President is Chief Executive Officer and commander in chief of the country the governor plays that role for the state so they can veto bills just like the president appoint judges just like the president. They may be in charge of the state National Guard or have the power to pardon criminal sentences. And just like the president most governors have someone waiting in the wings in case things go south.

**Bakari Sellers:** [00:10:59] Lieutenant governors a lot like vice president in the most important job they have is to be prepared. And why do I say that they have to be prepared because just like the vice president of the United States the age old saying is you are one heartbeat away from being president.

**Nick Capodice:** [00:11:13] So governor and lieutenant governor are a little like the president and the vice president. If their powers were limited by state borders.

**Hannah McCarthy:** [00:11:19] Yeah and Bakari says these are really important roles to watch because the person who you elect governor in this year's midterms they might end up being on a different place on the ballot later on when you have a governor.

**Bakari Sellers:** [00:11:29] You have to think that your governor has only one election away from running for president the United States. In Massachusetts you've had Mitt Romney run for president the United States.

**Nick Capodice:** [00:11:37] Lots of presidents were governors before the presidency Thomas Jefferson Teddy Roosevelt Jimmy Carter George W. name a few.

**Bakari Sellers:** [00:11:43] But you see governors run all the time. You're going to have a series of governors who step out there and run for president the United States and so when you each step up that you take there's another realm of possibility.

**Hannah McCarthy:** [00:11:53] That's one area of the ballot that we have not touched on yet. Right. State legislators and they are really important. It varies from state to state. Who in your state legislature you get to vote for in every midterm election. But who you're voting for is really important because aside from actually making the laws that govern you at a state level those legislators are in charge of a process that can decide the outcome of elections.

**Dylan Scott:** [00:12:16] State elections are not only important for your health care and for your education but also 2018 in particular is important in 2020 will be important as well because next decade we're going to draw new congressional districts which will be the opportunity for to outline these new maps for the congressional districts that we'll have for the next 10 years.

**Hannah McCarthy:** [00:12:35] That's Dylan Scott Vox policy reporter.

**Nick Capodice:** [00:12:37] Quick aside. Congressional redistricting sometimes called Gerrymandering depending on who you're talking to is one of those key factors that make these 2018 midterms so important.

[00:12:47] And it's something we actually dig into our first episode five things you should know about the midterms so give it a listen.

[00:12:52] Gerrymandering is a party hand picking their voters.

**Dylan Scott:** [00:12:54] And so which party is in control of the governor's mansion. Which party is in control of the state legislature will be very important for redistricting starting in 2020.

**Hannah McCarthy:** [00:13:03] You know some states like California they do have a redistricting commission that's either bipartisan or nonpartisan. But for the most part it's the governor and the state legislature that are calling the shots.

**Dylan Scott:** [00:13:14] And I think any expert whether partisan or not would tell you this. One of the reasons the Republicans have the sizable majority that they do in the House of Representatives right now is that they were in control of redistricting almost 10 years ago. So not only is this important for people's everyday experience with government and whether they are eligible for Medicaid or what kind of schools their kids go to. But when you look at control Congress it's it's not much of a stretch to say as one of my colleagues wrote recently that the next decade of the House of Representatives will be on the ballot in 2018 and 2020.

**Hannah McCarthy:** [00:13:45] OK we get a pause here for one second. Because what he's saying is huge. He is saying that your vote in this midterm election may end up deciding who you get to vote for for the next 10 years. I mean think of the possible reverberations of that.

**Nick Capodice:** [00:14:00] It's more than time because the people who put in power stay in power they keep drawing districts for the next 50 elections.

**Hannah McCarthy:** [00:14:05] Could be the next hundred elections.

[00:14:07] Dylan also made the point that those state legislators have the power to either facilitate or block initiatives that are coming down from the federal level like theU.S. Congress can say jump in a state Congress can either say how high or they can thumb their noses and stick out their tongues at them.

**Dylan Scott:** [00:14:22] So under the Affordable Care Act it expanded Medicaid eligibility to cover millions more Americans than it did before the ACA was passed. But they were allowed to decide whether or not they wanted to practice debate and that Medicaid expansion in about 20 states have refused to expand Medicaid directly as a result of the Republican controlled state legislatures or or the governorship.

**Nick Capodice:** [00:14:44] That's some real Tenth Amendment action their 10th Amendment of course being a super complicated amendment about the division of power between the federal government and the states right.

**Hannah McCarthy:** [00:14:52] So the whole principle of states rights how states are allowed to govern themselves in many ways. That is a big part of what makes the midterm elections so important. Those are elected officials who are close to us who might have obscure sounding jobs. They actually have the power to make a big impact on our daily lives. It's often the state level legislature that maintains this state justice system that regulates state industry that maintains highways implements welfare decides what to teach kids in schools. And it's the state legislature that decides what a sheriff does and we get to decide who that sheriff is.

**Jeff Steigler:** [00:15:30] If you're looking for change or if you are thinking about keeping things the way that they are the reality of it is if you don't go out and vote don't complain about it.

**Hannah McCarthy:** [00:15:37] That's Jeff Stigler again our sheriff candidate from the beginning of the episode. He won the nomination in New Hampshire's primary and now it is up to the voters to decide if he will win the office.

**Hannah McCarthy:** [00:15:47] All right. Nick so what do you think. I mean state and local elections are kind of a big deal right.

**Nick Capodice:** [00:15:51] In some ways possibly the biggest deal.

**Hannah McCarthy:** [00:15:55] Now you're talking before we sign off we have another major midterm from the past brought to you by Brady Carlson.

[00:16:01] BRADY used to work here at NHPR as a reporter and on air host. He's now at Wisconsin Public Radio.

[00:16:07] He's also the author of Dead Presidents which is a great book. Check it out. Take it away. BRADY What midterm are we talking about.

**Brady Carlson:** [00:16:14] I'm talking about the midterm of 1858. The key issue in the 1950s of course was slavery and that's at the root of everything that takes place in the 1858 midterm up until the 1950s.

[00:16:25] There were two parties the Democrats and the Whigs although really there were kind of four parties because each of the two parties had northern and southern wings. And here's why that matters. While the northern states had more population and therefore more representative Congress the proslavery Southern politicians were still powerful enough that they could block candidates block bills block proposals block anything that didn't fit with their view that enslaving people was not only legal and constitutional but it was morally right and had to be protected.

**Archival:** [00:16:54] All we've got is cotton and slave arrogance.

**Brady Carlson:** [00:16:57] To the top political figures of the day rightly or wrongly we're trying to keep this very tense compromise in place and as a result of that effort to to keep the slavery debate from boiling over you have this series of weak presidents in the 1950s.

**Archival:** [00:17:12] Pierce of New Hampshire is what do you say Mr. Pierce or Mr. Preston Pierce just Mr. President.

**Brady Carlson:** [00:17:16] James Buchanan of Pennsylvania is another. The parties were deliberately choosing people for president that they thought would be very cautious would not rock the boat and that would have worked except by the 50s the boat had kind of already been rocked over and over. Fewer and fewer people were interested in setting aside this debate over slavery for the good of the country and Franklin Pierce understood that firsthand when he signed the bill to allow the citizens of the Kansas Territory to choose whether to allow slavery or not. And I came all the way from Kansas to make sure just for you.

**Archival:** [00:17:54] And to ensure the freedom of Negroes in this state. What do you do.

**Brady Carlson:** [00:17:58] And it didn't go well it turned into the violent conflict. We now called bleeding Kansas and that's recognized today as one of the key milestones on the road to the civil war. It also realigned the political parties by signing Kansas bill Pearce had undone this compromise that had stood for decades where there was a geographic line that slavery could exist south of but never north of. Now slavery could be anywhere and Northerners were very very uncomfortable with that. So when Pierce undid this compromise Northern Democrats who had been uncomfortable with the proslavery wing of the party felt like they didn't have a political home anymore.

**Archival:** [00:18:37] The government cannot endure permanently half slave and half. Free.

**Brady Carlson:** [00:18:52] The Northern Democrats decided to leave their party and join up with what was left of the old Whig Party and a group of what were known as Free spoilers people who had opposed any expansion of slavery in western territories. They all joined together in a new party called the Republican Party. There's a lot of debate as to where the Republican Party actually started. My state Wisconsin has one of the claims. The state of New Hampshire has the other. The important thing to know is that this is a very exclusively northern party. There weren't any Southern Republicans and that one of the new Republicans who was an unknown at the time of the party's founding wound up being a pretty important guy a lawyer from Illinois who had been a little known member of Congress like a decade before but was so upset about Kansas that he came out of retirement and joined this new political party Abraham Lincoln.

**Archival:** [00:19:43] You know who I am. Abraham Lincoln.

**Brady Carlson:** [00:19:50] The party starts in 1854 two years later their presidential candidate John C. Fremont only narrowly lost the presidential election.

[00:20:00] By the mid-term elections of 1858. The party was on an even bigger upswing. The debate over Kansas has flared up again. It was even hotter this time. There had also been a big economic panic the year before and the new President James Buchanan was alienating just about everybody who came in contact with. Suffice to say voters were pretty fired up and so when the votes were in for the 1858 midterm the largest party in the House of Representatives was the Republican Party which had only begun about four years earlier. And one of the most surprising stories that came out of the 1850 and that term was Abraham Lincoln who had run for a high profileU.S. Senate seat in Illinois. It's one he lost to the longtime incumbent Stephen Douglas. But he had turned so many heads with his speeches in his well-thought-out debate points.

**Archival:** [00:20:53] A house divided against itself cannot stand.

**Brady Carlson:** [00:20:53] That he became a national political figure in two years.

[00:20:57] This political nobody who belonged to a brand new unknown party would be elected president of the United States.

**Hannah McCarthy:** [00:21:09] That is it for this episode in our five part series on midterm elections. But stay tuned we've got more coming at you civics 21 one was produced today by me. Hannah McCarthy Nick Capodice and Jacqui Helbert.

**Nick Capodice:** [00:21:22] Our executive producer Erica Janik. Maureen McMurry is a local gal does good.

**Archival:** [00:21:26] Music in this episode by Loopez, Blue Dot Sessions, Quincas Moreira and Drew Banga.

**Nick Capodice:** [00:21:32] In addition to subscribing to our podcast you can give us a visit at Civics 1 0 1 podcast dot org or follow us on Twitter at Civics 101 pod Civics 101 is production of NHPR new Hampshire Public Radio.