ERIC: Right now I wanted to talk about

Engagement in young voters when it comes to politics

We were just talking about whether or not you’ll be voting next Monday

And I think that’s one conversation

But I think that we all know and we’re all well aware of the fact that

Whenever we come to an election

Be it provincial, federal, municipal, municipal especially

We know that the younger demographic just, for some reason, does not vote

Not in the same numbers that everyone else votes

Which is just low all around, period

So this is kind of a broader question of engagement

And what do we need to do to engage that younger demographic

We had a caller during the 10 o’clock hour

Talking about how she had an 18 and a 20 year-old

And one of them is voting, the other one just says why me

I don’t have enough time, I don’t want to vote, whatever, I don’t care, who cares

And how do we solve that is the question

Bethanny Sanders, one of the five members of I Am A Voter movement

Out of the University of Waterloo, takes time, joins me on the line

Good morning, Bethanny, how are you?

BETHANNY: I’m great thanks, how about yourself?

ERIC: I’m doing well, thanks so much for your time

Tell me about I Am A Voter, what is it all about?

BETHANNY: Well really, it started actually as a group project

We are students from Renison University College

In the Bachelor of Social Work program

And we were given an assignment basically to create a social change event

So we got together in groups and we really started talking about what we’re passionate about

And with the upcoming municipal election, we decided to focus on youth voter turn-out

And how we can engage youth to vote

So we’ve kind of been throwing some events and trying to get youth in the area

Specifically the University of Waterloo

To kind of get on the bandwagon and go out there and get their voice heard

ERIC: What type of things are you doing?

I’m assuming that social media would be a huge part of your campaign

BETHANY: Yeah, so we actually have a Twitter account, @2014voter

And we are also getting the hashtag #iamavoter out there

We’ve been using Twitter to kind of connect with youth

And also having the help of the region to also help promote what we’ve been doing

ERIC: Now, why do you think it takes people like yourselves to do these kind of campaigns

Why aren’t our local politicians, the people running, the candidates, doing things like this?

BETHANY: Well with that, I think it’s kind of difficult to aim and to target youth

Because as an adult, it’s a lot more difficult to be able to relate to youth

And the problems that they’re going and dealing with on a day-to-day basis

As a student, I can fully understand what they’re going through

A lot of ideas that they’re talking about

So I think it’s a lot easier for us to engage them and give them that information

On the same level that they’ll understand

ERIC: And how’s it been going so far?

BETHANY: It’s been going great, actually

We, just last Thursday, had an event in the Renison Cafeteria

Which we got quite a few people to pledge their vote

So basically we’ve started not a petition, but a pledge

Where if you feel like you’re really passionate about voting

Ro you want to go out there and pledge that you will make a difference

And have your voice heard

We’re just getting people to sign their name, just to tell us kind of numbers

That we might be expecting to see

Or making it almost a promise to yourself that you’re going to go out and do that

ERIC: What are you hearing from students as to major reasons

As to why they’re not voting

BETHANY: One of the biggest ones would just be knowledge

A lot of people don’t know who the candidates are, what the municipal government does

Or even where to go and vote

So we’ve been trying to clear that information up for everyone

Give them the resources so that they’re able to kind of push those excuses aside

And really utilize that power they have

ERIC: It’s interesting, because one of the things I hear that you’re doing is

Let’s see here, you’re doing things like

I guess giving people, you know, snacks and promotional materials and etcetera

To get people interested and handing out information as well

And somebody on Twitter just tweeted me and said

“Snacks is a good call, students always show up for free food”

BETHANY: Well you know what, we were actually so fortunate enough

As to get some popcorn from Reed’s Chocolate in Cambridge

And they’ve definitely- the smell of popcorn brings students around

During lunch time is when we’ve been mainly doing this

So of course, people come in, they’re hungry, they see the free popcorn

and they come over to see what’s going on at the booth

What kind of information are they talking about?

So, as they’re learning about voting, they have something to munch on

And it kind of works out, it’s beneficial for both groups

ERIC: Well, and the hope there, Bethany, would be that people don’t just start

Showing up for the free food and just forget about why they’re there

Because I think that could happen to an extent with the younger crowd

I mean, I did the university thing, I remember how it was

So, it’s like “What, pizza lunch? Okay, yeah I’m going”

And you’re not necessarily showing up for the right reasons

You’re just getting a free slice of pizza

I think there’s a broader kind of conversation that needs to be had about

It’s one thing to try to get people to the polls

It’s another thing to try to get people to the polls for the right reasons

And those reasons are being an informed voter too, right?

You know, to say “Go out there and vote”,

Well, anybody can put an “X” beside a candidate’s name

But I think it’s important to have kind of an emphasis

On being an engaged and informed voter as well

BETHANY: Oh exactly,

With the snacks, a lot of that’s not trying to be gimmicky

But it’s really just trying to get people over there so we can talk to them

And from there, we’re really able to spread the information to them

We’ve given them so many resources through that

So, some people may see it as that way, but it’s kind of a way to get people over there

And start the conversation

And with youth, a lot of people, if you have an informational booth, they’ll walk right by it

So we want to come out as a little bit different

And give youth and students a reason to come over and talk to us

ERIC: On the line with Bethanny Sanders, one of the 5 members of I Am A Voter movement

You can get them on Twitter @2014voter

I like your sign there, your profile pic I should say, “Rock the Vote”

It’s about trying to connect with the younger audience

I think you need to use phrases like that , you think you need to keep doing what you’re doing

Now what kind of feedback have you been getting from some of the students

BETHANY: It’s been quite positive actually,

The school of social work has been very excited about how it’s been gaining momentum

And a lot of the students themselves come by and say

“Thanks for coming to Renison, sometimes we’re not fully remembered over here

On the off side of the campus”

A lot of other youth have been saying “You know what, I didn’t know I could actually vote on campus”

So the information that we’ve been able to give has already excited a lot of people on campus

And the growth of it, how quickly it’s starting to get around

Is really exciting for us, to see that people are interested

ERIC: What are your thoughts on online voting?

Is this something you’ve thought about, you’ve talked about that you wish

Would be happening more so than it is?

BETHANNY: So with online voting, this isn’t something we’re necessarily

Talking to the youth about

We’ve more focusing with students on voting on campus

Because many of them live actually on the campus itself

Its actually a pretty interesting concept, a lot of people can’t make it out to the polls

Because depending on their hours, or not everyone has the ability to get there

So I definitely think it’s a great idea, it’s a way to move forward in voting

But I’m still partial to the good old traditional way

ERIC: Paper ballot, yeah

BETHANY: Exactly

ERIC: Have you been hearing from students about online voting though?

Because I know the City of Cambridge is trying it for this election

You know, if you were to ask me, I think we should have online voting

I think there are proper measures you can take to make it safe, to make it

Si that people don’t feel that their vote might be miscalculated or whatever

I think it’s about time that we do it

And I’m just wondering, for people in university, for people in college, for young people in general

I mean, this is something they must be thinking about at some point when deciding to vote

And they must be thinking, in today’s age, they must be thinking

“Can’t I just do this on my computer?”

Has anybody asked you guys about that, you know “Why can’t we vote online?”

BETHANY: To be 100% honest, we actually-I myself haven’t heard a lot going on with that

I think a lot of the students actually aren’t aware that’s something that’s available this election

So it’s not really been a conversation we’ve had too much

However, there has been that concern that some people can’t get to the voting polls

So that’s one where we would bring something like that up for that

But it’s not really been something that’s been brought to the table too much for us

ERIC: As far as the feedback that- I mean, are you going to be doing this regularly for elections now?

BETHANY: See, I’m not really sure about that

We really started it for this election, and you know what

With the way it’s going, I would definitely be interested in continuing doing something like this

Because it’s really important to get that out to the youth voters and to the student voters

So, you know what? In the future, we may actually continue to do something like this

Because with the feedback we’re getting from it now, it’s been really quite positive

ERIC: And that’s kind of where I was going with that

You know, you have a chance to learn, doing some things this time around

You could adapt, you know, make it bigger, better for the next time, for sure

BETHANY: Oh, exactly

ERIC: And that’ll get even more people out

Bethany, thanks so much for your time, appreciate it

BETHANY: Not a problem, thank you very much Eric

ERIC: Alright, Bethany Sanders right there

One of the 5 members of the I Am A Voter movement, which is happening here locally

You can get them on Twitter @2014voter

And it’s a campaign dedicated to- a movement, I should say

Dedicated to getting the young vote, the young voters out there

Kind of teach about the process and to get them out there and vote