



## Perspective/Opinion

# Incremental Change, my Antidote to Political Dissociation

By Laura Grogan, MD Candidate Class of 2024

*Medical Student advocate Laura Grogan reflects upon challenging herself to work towards bipartisan ways to make progress when the temptation to disengage is high...*

Born and raised in Madison, Wisconsin, I naively felt that debate and constructive conversation were a-okay, but little did I know this was more accurately described as slight nuances of likeminded individuals. My perception of Wisconsin as historically accepting of diverse perspectives is limited and flawed by the naivety of my privileged and sheltered upbringing...untangling my privilege from my memories will be a lifelong project. In my desire to pry my mind open to comprehend the experiences of others, I have learned to lean on regional experts who work day-to-day on these issues to inform my advocacy efforts. Much like a consult to a specialist for the most up to date recommendations for treatment, we must lean on those who live the outcomes and do the work to tell us what needs to be done. When I stumbled across the Vot-ER Civic Health Fellowship, I knew I had found an opportunity to challenge myself.

My background in advocacy centers on abortion access. While there is *plenty* to say about the relation between showing up for elections in Wisconsin and access to abortion care, I became a Vot-ER Civic Health Fellow to strengthen my bipartisan advocacy skills. This fellowship has allowed me to dust off my 12-year-old skills developed during my time at Beloit College, where an internship at the [Wisconsin Alliance for Women's Health](#) involved prioritizing policy proposals for the annual women's health policy agenda.

At Vot-ER we workshop storytelling, hone in on ways to inspire and cultivate leadership, and discuss persistence at organizations like ours that are slow to change. This fellowship provided me with support and hope from fellows in these uncertain times, as well as an unexpected partnership with Dr. Chris Davis, my co-fellow. Though it has been and will continue to be challenging for me as a heartbroken abortion advocate to remain engaged in bipartisan efforts, I feel that is a critical aspect of my development as a medical student in Wisconsin.

My advisor and mentor, Dr. Amy Domeyer-Klenske, emphasizes the importance of bipartisan work which has been reinforced in my time joining her on the ACOG Wisconsin Legislative Committee. She stresses the importance of bipartisan collaboration through common ground. [A postpartum Medicaid coverage extension bill for Wisconsin birthers was a bipartisan authored and supported bill.](#) While WI politics are increasingly more complex and heated, we as advocates for our patients and selves must be able to do our best to overcome our differences and find common ground.

The Vot-ER Civic Health fellowship has been interesting, as what the Boston-founded organization considers bipartisan may not *feel* bipartisan to your average Wisconsinite. Sometimes when I hear the stories of more traditionally progressive states making strides in their organizations, I feel discouraged or I hear my conservative family members' voices in my head picking apart the arguments and efforts of these groups. I push myself to overcome my intrusive thoughts of doubt and focus on what we can tangibly accomplish at our organization in the current context.

In our efforts to refresh conversations started by 2020 Vote Safe WI, we have collaborated closely with leadership and our government relations team. While I have been fortunate to learn from their expertise on what drives or limit decisions such as these, I remain convinced that providers play a part in empowering patients to vote. I also understand that many providers have worked on this before me, and many will work on it after me. In the discordant state of WI and the notoriously segregated Milwaukee, sustainable progress requires incremental change.

We are fortunate to leverage Vot-ER's expertise to implement student, staff and faculty facing efforts at MCW with the support of leadership. Although we are limited to internal efforts this election, we know we have work to do amongst physicians [- who are less civically engaged than the general population and comparable professionals.](#) No matter what belief systems you have guiding your decisions, I want to empower you to take your beliefs and those of your patients and peers, and advocate for change that will improve Wisconsin lives.

When days get long, and the temptation to disengage is high, lean on the people who fill your cup, and remember that your voice matters now more than ever. If you can't vote, check in with your friends on their voting plans, and speak up for things you want to see changed. We all need to take what we hear and learn from our patients and peers and bring it to the polls.

*For further reading:*

[Wisconsin Alliance for Women's Health information on postpartum policies](#)

*Laura Grogan is a medical student at MCW. She is a 2022 Civic Health Fellow for Vot-ER, a student of the 2022 AMSA Abortion Care & Reproductive Justice institute, and a member of the Wisconsin ACOG Legislative Committee.*