MOLLY: Hi, everyone, and welcome back to All Careers Considered at the Walter Center podcast. Today I'm here with Cherrish Pryor, Indiana state representative and Democratic floor leader. Representative Pryor graduated from IU Bloomington in 1993 with her bachelor's in criminal justice and also has her master's in public affairs. And today we're going to talk about her career in state politics and how she's really used her skills and passions to make an impact, starting from when she was a student at IU to being a well-established professional in the state of Indiana. So thanks for being here today, Cherrish.

CHERRISH: No problem. Glad to be here.

M: So I'd love to hear a little bit more about you. Tell me a little bit where you're from and kind of how you ended up here today.

C: OK, all right. Well, I was actually born and raised in Mississippi, so I moved to Fort Wayne, Indiana, when I was almost 16, graduated from Fort Wayne South Side was fortunate enough to get into the group's program as a summer program at IU and I did that. And after leaving IU I graduated and moved back to Fort Wayne for a couple of years, working for GTE at the time. GTE is now part of AT&T. I worked there for a little while and then after that internship with the House of Representatives, moved to Indianapolis and I have been here since 1995. So that's kind of my career path, way to Indianapolis and politics in a short form.

M: Very cool, so I'm curious to hear a little bit about if politics is something that you always thought that you were interested in going into or kind of what inspired you to take that step in your career.

C: So, you know, oddly enough, I did not know that I wanted to do politics when I was younger. But my grandmother, when I was in Mississippi and my grandparents raised me and my grandmother was very involved in registering people to vote and advocating, she was really you know, there are a lot of people, we hear a lot of the heroes of the civil rights movement, but there are a lot of unsung heroes of the civil rights movement that were doing a lot of things for civil rights and justice and voting in and my grandmother was one of those individuals. And so I just remember when I was young, we would get up early in the morning. She, my aunt, who's four years older than me, and we would go, living in Mississippi, we would drive down these dirt roads, registering people to vote just literally all day. And for me at that time, because I was so young, I knew that she was doing something really important because she got us up early in the morning to do that, but we were also always stop at the store and get snacks. And so I was really always excited about stopping at the store and get pop and candy because my grandparents didn't keep all this stuff at home. So I was really excited about what the snack time was going to be at lunch time, that was what excited me. So being involved and seeing that in as I grew older, it just kind of clicked. And then I realized really how important voting was. I became aware of what she was doing and not knowing how important it was at that time because I was young and I just wanted to have the good snacks, great lunch, but watching her
and seeing the respect that people gave her and my grandfather, because all the things that they were doing in the community and you know working the polls on Election Day, because she did that as well, and having my aunt with her, those things, I think stuck in my mind in the back of my mind, not knowing what they were then, but now coming to appreciate what they what she was doing and it played a big role in who I am today and I always give her credit for the good or bad for my political career.

M: That's a really cool story. It sounds like your grandma is an awesome person. And so I'd like to fast forward a little bit to when you were an IU student and you were getting ready to graduate and you're getting ready to take your criminal justice degree and enter into the working world. What was that like for you kind of going through job interviews and kind of trying to figure out exactly what you wanted to do with your career as a twenty two year old? What was that like for you?

C: You know, it was really scary. You know, by that time I had gotten used to being at IU because I always also did the summer programs there so I spent really year round at IU except for maybe the holidays I was there. So it was kind of scary going out and trying to find a job and hoping and praying that you get interviews with different companies or being a criminal justice major or probation departments in my particular field of study. It was scary, but it was challenging. I finally landed a job with GTE, which was not in my area of study. Well, actually, you know what? Let me take it back a little bit now. Now that I'm thinking about all the stuff that I did actually have a job in my field. I was a loss prevention officer for Ellis Ayres at the time. So we don't even have Ellis Ayres anymore, but the loss prevention officer was really like the in-house security for the department store. So I did use my major when I first graduated. So that was really exciting. It was exciting when I got that job. So it was a part time job. In addition to that, I also worked at GTE. So, you know, I think this is a great experience. Great. But it's a scary experience, a great experience. You don't have a choice. Just got to kind of have to move forward.

M: Absolutely. That's so true. So obviously now you're in a role in what you're able to really make a difference in people's lives and impact your community, especially at the political level. So how challenging is that? You know, is there anything that surprised you about it or anything that makes the work hard or maybe also equally rewarding?

C: So I was an intern for the House of Representatives, and so I knew, even though I was a freshman, I had a lot of experience and knowledge of how the process works and how you build relationships. So I have that as an advantage for me, understanding the process. The disappointment, though, has been being in a super minority of a super minority of a super minority and those three super minority is that I'm a female, super minority, I'm an African-American, super minority, then I'm a Democrat, so super minority. And so the frustration is trying to get stuff done, knowing that you are that super minority three times over. And every day that I walk through the state house, I know that I bring those things which are wonderful assets that I have with me, but also knowing that because of that, sometimes people may not
want to listen to you because you're a woman. People don't think that your issue is important because the issue that specifically focuses on the minority community or the African-American community, or being in a political setting, just not wanting to hear your appeals because you're a Democrat. And so those things are frustrating, however, the one thing that I can do is use my voice. You may not hear my bill, but you can't stop me from raising my hand and speaking the truth that I know. And speaking up for the people in my district. So even though I may not get my bill heard, I still have to press releases, press conferences, to say something on Facebook or Twitter, and then depending on what the bill is stand in front for the chamber and speak in support or against the bill that I do or don't support, and also letting my opinions be heard in committee meetings.

M: Well. Awesome, thank you so much for sharing that. Sounds like you are just really killing it and making such a difference, and I really admire you for that. So, yeah, of course. So to kind of wrap things up, the sort of the goal of this podcast is to help students and young professionals realize all of their career opportunities and kind of figure out how they can pursue those opportunities. So what would you tell a student who might be maybe they just graduated or they're graduating this year and they want to be just like you when they get older and maybe they do fall into one of those minority categories or super minority, as you mentioned. What kind of advice would you give to that student?

C: Well, I will tell them to never give up and don't allow other people to determine what your fate is going to be for your career choice. If you're interested in politics, get involved and get engaged in a campaign. We have internships available here at the Indiana House of Representatives and also at the Senate. They're paid internships. There are a lot of internships that are not paid, but they're paid internships. They are a great opportunity to open doors for individuals to one, learn the legislative process and two a lot of our interns, go on to be staff people as well they get hired on. And those are pretty good paying jobs. I think they're like 36,000 is what they start out with. So it's not a whole lot of money, but is certainly a lot more than what a lot of other jobs are with benefits. And then a lot of a lot of students also go on to be lobbyists. And those are very lucrative positions as well. So getting involved, at the legislative level opens up so many opportunities for students and I would say to take advantage of them, regardless if you're Democrat or Republican, I'm a Democrat, but if you're a Republican, get involved with your local party, volunteer on campaigns, so that when there are opportunities available, you know, you're standing there and you're ready to raise your hand and say that I have that experience, I've done all these things. I'm ready on day one to take on this challenge and hold this position. And if you show up to volunteer to work, you help out, people are going to remember that and they're going to want to see you, for me I think, you know, seeing young people get involved is one of the greatest, most rewarding things I tell people, particularly young people. This district 95 is not a seat that I own. District 95 is a seat that I hold temporarily because someone else is going to come along, hopefully someone younger is going to come along after I'm done and retire to feel this space and work on the betterment for the people in my district and also the state of Indiana.
M: Absolutely. Thank you, that's really great advice. So if students have any questions, would it be OK if they reached out to you, maybe through our Walter Center Success Network, which is our networking platform.

C: Yes, it is. You filled out my paperwork so reach out to me if they have any questions about anything. I'd love to talk in any way that I can.

M: Awesome. Well, thank you so much, it was great hearing your story and thanks for being here with us today.

C: No problem. Thank you.

M: Thanks everyone for listening. And we'll see you next time.