(MUSIC PLAYS)

SPEAKER:  
You are listening to the AOTA podcast. Here is your host, Matt Brandenburg.

MATT BRANDENBURG:  
OK. Today, I am joined by Jill Tighe. Jill, thank you so much for being on the show.

JILL TIGHE:  
Thanks for having me. I'm so excited.

MATT BRANDENBURG:  
It is our pleasure. Jill is AOTA's Grassroots and Political Action Committee Specialist. You're also an experienced professional storyteller and advocate, and you've been with AOTA for six years. What else can you tell us about your role with AOTA?

JILL TIGHE:  
So, I manage AOTA's Legislative Action Center. I help our advocates contact their legislators to protect and promote occupational therapy writ large. I work on AOTA's annual advocacy events, and I support the public policy team, which includes the federal affairs team. This includes the state affairs team who works in conjunction with your state OT association. And I work with the regulatory affairs team. Everyone I work with at AOTA, like, I can't even tell you, they are so smart, like so smart. Everyone knows so many things and I'm learning new things every day. So, these six years with this brilliant team has been a joy. I am also close personal friends with OT Rex (UNKNOWN). I know. I am not responsible for OT Rex's shenanigans at conference, but I know who is, so.

MATT BRANDENBURG:  
Oh. So, this will be an episode shrouded in mystery.

JILL TIGHE:  
Yes. Secrets galore. (MATT BRANDENBURG LAUGHS) I have none. Ask me a question. I'll answer it. (LAUGHS).

MATT BRANDENBURG:  
Well, OT Rex truly is kind of my personal white whale in terms of having on the show and interviewing. And so, maybe you can make a connection there.

JILL TIGHE:  
Oh, I don't know that OT Rex does audio interviews only because OT Rex has to protect their voice. They got to, they got to keep that voice safe because they have a secret singing career.

MATT BRANDENBURG:  
(LAUGHS).

JILL TIGHE:  
Yeah. Someone big and famous.

MATT BRANDENBURG:  
Oh, wow.

JILL TIGHE:  
Yeah. You'll never know.

MATT BRANDENBURG:  
I love this. I love this.

JILL TIGHE:  
You'll never figure it out.

MATT BRANDENBURG:  
(CROSSTALK) Hopefully down the road, maybe we can do like an interpretive dance together or something.

JILL TIGHE:  
Ooh, OT Rex is a great dancer, is a great dancer, (MATT BRANDENBURG LAUGHS) and gives great hugs and takes great pictures. So, one day, Matt, you'll meet OT Rex and it'll be great.

MATT BRANDENBURG:  
I can't wait. I can't wait. (JILL TIGHE LAUGHS). Today, we're going to be discussing advocacy which is a huge topic in terms of scope. I think there will be some government and lawmaking discussion. I know I'm not as informed as I would like to be or knowledgeable when it comes to advocacy. But I wanna thank you again for sharing your time and your knowledge and your expertise with us on this topic. But I thought it would be a good idea to discuss ground rules and disclaimers before we just jump into our interview.

JILL TIGHE:  
Yeah. So, when talking about advocacy policy, don't we all wanna know a little more? 'Cause there's a billion things, but no one person can be all things to all people is, is a firm belief of mine. And this is why we have memberships and associations where we hire folks essentially with our membership dollars to do that legwork for us. It's things like that because, again, no one person can be all things to all people. So, it's important to listen to the experts on some things. But talking about policy and politics, I just wanna lay a ground rule. And I do this in everything, every time I talk about policy and politics, 'cause I know that it is an emotional stakes thing. Government and lawmaking have real-life impacts. So, the ground rules I wanna set before we start our interview are really just that we're gonna base everything we talk about here in good faith, meaning that we are going to take the politics and we're gonna put it aside. We're gonna take the red versus blue, the elephant, the donkey politics to the side.

And we're gonna talk about policy. And we are gonna focus on occupational therapy writ large. We are also going to assume... And this, this is going to anger folks all over. But we are also going to assume that all members of Congress, all legislators want what's best for their constituents as voiced by their constituents. And constituents is just the folks who vote for 'em. Some folks don't agree with that take and that's their prerogative like, hey, I'm not gonna tell you how to live your life, but I am going to say for our conversation, we're gonna have some good faith, we're gonna have some goodwill, and you and I are meeting on an even conversation ground. Does that make sense, Matt? Is that OK?

MATT BRANDENBURG:  
It does. I think it's OK. I think it's a wonderful ground rule, a wonderful way to start off the podcast because as you said, there are so many confounding variables when it comes to policy and law, and there's a lot of directions we can go. But I love that. Just remove the politics and focus on what applies most to occupational therapy and AOTA.

JILL TIGHE:  
Yeah. And the whole goal, excuse me, as I swallow some coffee, the whole goal is to protect and promote occupational therapy. That's the bottom line.

MATT BRANDENBURG:  
And I think we can all get on board with that. I have one quick clarification. You mentioned writ large.

JILL TIGHE:  
Oh, yeah.

MATT BRANDENBURG:  
So, that's not a phrase I'm familiar with or have heard before. What does that mean?

JILL TIGHE:  
I use it. I think, I think it's a Jill ism. Maybe I use writ large to just mean like above all. Like, occupational therapy is the focus. It's the, it's the, the title of the document, like it is, it is writ very large in the document. It's a weird, it's a weird Jill ism and I totally get why it's confusing. (BOTH LAUGH).

MATT BRANDENBURG:  
No problem at all. I totally get it now. Like it's in large print written large. (LAUGHS).

JILL TIGHE:  
It is a weird turn of phrase, though, right? Writ large, huh?

MATT BRANDENBURG:  
Yeah. Is it writ or wrote? Should it be wrote?

JILL TIGHE:  
Oh no. Oh no. My English degree is cringing. (BOTH LAUGH) I think you're right. (LAUGHS).

MATT BRANDENBURG:  
Well, let's go ahead and dive into advocacy.

JILL TIGHE:  
Yes.

MATT BRANDENBURG:  
Act one level setting in civics.

JILL TIGHE:  
Yeah.

MATT BRANDENBURG:  
I love how when we were discussing this, you brought acts into it to, to really lay out our outline, the...

JILL TIGHE:  
Shakespeare, all day, every day. The man knew how to tell a story.

MATT BRANDENBURG:  
That is the truth. I think we can all agree on that. What is advocacy? Why, why should we advocate?

JILL TIGHE:  
So, advocacy is just raising your voice in support of something that is important to you. It can include a number, a vast number of any types of actions or issues. It's, it's a broad swath of things. But when we're talking about advocacy here in a membership association setting that focuses solely on one profession, and one unified profession, and those sorts of things, we can talk about how we advocate for that piece. So, it is not just raising your voice to decision-makers. It is raising your voice and sharing your story to interested parties. It is, I don't, I don't wanna use the phrase like spreading the good word, but like it is telling folks about important things. It is storytelling. And the reasons that you should advocate is because no one else is going to do it for you. I can tell you right now, one of my favorite fun facts about Congress is that there are like a handful of, of attorneys general, there are a handful of school administrators, there are a bunch of doctors, there are a bunch of lawyers, there are a whole bunch of professions.

But you'll notice in that list of professions at this point in 20, what is it? It's 2022, right, Matt?

MATT BRANDENBURG:  
Correct.

JILL TIGHE:  
Oh, my goodness. (MATT BRANDENBURG LAUGHS) At this point in history...

MATT BRANDENBURG:  
(CROSSTALK) that test the interview can continue.

JILL TIGHE:  
(LAUGHS) No, I'm just, I'm, I'm all over the place. At this point right now, not a single one of those decision-makers is an occupational therapy practitioner, or has been an occupational therapy practitioner. So, they don't know your day-to-day. So, it is important that you are raising your voice and advocating to them to support your profession 'cause only you can tell your story, right? If I told your story, it's gonna be less interesting because you are your expert. You are the expert on you. So, that's, that's why I want to encourage folks like you listeners to advocate because I can, I can prattle for days on any topic, but you are the expert on your life. You can advocate through AOTA's Legislative Action Center. You can advocate through setting up your own personal meetings. You can advocate through all sorts of things. And we'll talk about what how to set up advocacy avenues to advocate, as I like to say. It's a fun little turn of phrase, but it's a little weird and hard to articulate on a mic.

But yeah, no, advocacy is storytelling, it is engaging, it is promoting and protecting your profession with your words.

MATT BRANDENBURG:  
I love that. And I love all the, the use of alliteration and literary devices there. I'm already intrigued and captivated.

JILL TIGHE:  
Oh, dope. (BOTH LAUGH)

MATT BRANDENBURG:  
Advocacy is definitely something that's introduced early on in OT curriculums. At least that was my experience. I remember hearing a lot about it, but not always understanding how I could begin to advocate for the profession. You mentioned a couple of things that practitioners can do. How else would you say a student or a practitioner can advocate?

JILL TIGHE:  
So, I think, I think some of the best ways to advocate are for a student or practitioner to interrogate within themselves why occupational therapy? Like why is it important? Only because by building that groundwork for you, you can align all your advocacy to that vital piece, right? So, like, if you're going into healthcare because another family member went into healthcare and you saw the great work that they did, that's important. And that's information that shows that this thing is vital. It makes a difference in people's lives. And you can then tie back to reasons why occupational therapy is important, right? Like, we can talk about hypotheticals and I can help people craft their stories easily. I'm a solid editor. (BOTH LAUGH) But what it is, is if you build your story, if you, I don't wanna call it creating your own mythos 'cause you're not lying like you are, you are taking your experience and you are sharing it with folks who do not share your experience. And that's important.

That is the groundwork to building a conversation instead of a monologue. Like right now, Matt, I'm monologuing at you a little bit. Like, if I were a big evil villain, this would be hilarious. I'd probably have a cape, big hair, it'd be awesome. However, advocacy is a conversation. So, if you build that story, you are using advocacy to create a conversation with folks who make decisions that will affect your life. So, I think for new practitioners, starting with why OT, why occupational therapy, why be an OTA, like, why those things are important is huge.

MATT BRANDENBURG:  
I love that. I love that. I think most of us, if not all of us, hopefully, all of us have had kind of a light-bulb moment in realizing, wow, OT is an amazing profession, or, you know, a confirm, a confirming moment where we realized, yes, this is the impact I want to be making in my career and in my day to day. But there's still on the outside so much misunderstanding about what OT is and what it does. So, honestly, just rehearsing that story and internalizing it is a great first step. Where, where can practitioners look to find, you know, legislation or news about how these new policies and laws may impact the profession of occupational therapy?

JILL TIGHE:  
Yeah. So, AOTA's website, aota.org is a great place to go for all your news resources. So, a lot of time is spent writing things, cultivating things, and putting things together for you. So, if you go to aota.org and then you see a little menu that says practice, education, career, publications, community events, and advocacy. And then about, that's another thing. But advocacy is sort of our home for all kinds of resources for you to know about advocacy. All of those other things are also other resources created and built by AOTA, my AOTA colleagues who are stellar. Literally, everyone in the group is a genius. That was a fancy way of saying genius because everyone I work with is a delight and a joy. But that being said, focusing on advocacy stuff, you can look at in that advocacy webpage, there's a lot of information for you to engage with. You can look at a list of advocacy items broken down by issue. So, that will include stuff like healthcare reform, like Medicaid advocacy, like the occupational therapy licensure compact efforts, like private insurance advocacy that, that staff at AOTA are doing on the daily, information about schools and early intervention, telehealth, workforce diversity.

There's all kinds of resources on aota.org for you to learn more about what's going down right now. We also have advocacy news that we update, that we update and share in all of AOTA's practice pulse newsletters and things. These web articles we write about what's going down on Congress. So, we watch the day-to-day of Congress and engage and read and all kinds of stuff and distill it down for you to find OT specific things, 'cause again, no one person can be all things to all people.

MATT BRANDENBURG:  
And I love that so much. And I know myself and other practitioners are, are grateful for that because after a full day working at the clinic as much as we love occupational therapy in our profession, you know, doing additional research to inform ourselves to advocate is really difficult.

JILL TIGHE:  
It's a lot.

MATT BRANDENBURG:  
But it's nice that it's all on aota.org. There's all this behind the scenes work that, that gets put into it. Can we dive a little bit deeper? Can you share an overview of AOTA's federal affairs department?

JILL TIGHE:  
Sure. So, my boss is Heather Parsons, who's dope. She (LAUGHS), she'd probably laugh at that I hope. She was a school-based OT and she working with a whole bunch of other folks sort of decide the angle on, on how we approach things like everyone is engaged and working together. But so Heather's my boss, she's a lobbyist. Then we have Abe and Andy who are both lobbyists. So, that's three lobbyists covering Congress with all of the issues that may impact occupational therapy. So, that's a lot for three people, which is why grassroots support makes a difference. And we'll talk about grassroots in a minute. But that's Heather, Abe, Andy. And then there's Darlene, who is the AOTPAC manager. And she's amazing. I cannot say it enough how awesome everyone I work with is, but everyone that I work with in federal affairs is dope and they do great work. And then we have the state affairs team who works in conjunction with your state OT association, and they are all very smart. And then the regulatory affairs team who are also very smart.

But essentially the reason it's broken out like this is because I think Matt, you and I discussed lawmaking, yeah, and kind of how it works.

MATT BRANDENBURG:  
Briefly. Yes.

JILL TIGHE:  
Yeah. So, I just to clarify for here, essentially, in a vacuum lawmaking Congress, that's the legislative branch writes the laws. The president eventually hopefully signs it into law. And then the regulatory agencies write mandatory rules and regulations for you to follow. All of these things take a lot more time. But AOTA's policy department is engaged at every step possible. So, our regulatory affairs team is reading those thousands of pages of regulation that will affect your day-to-day life if they don't already. And they're commenting, they're engaging with the various agencies that make decisions. And then you have AOTA's Federal Affairs who's engaging with the legislative branch and building champions for occupational therapy in addition to your grassroots work. And then AOTA's state affairs is doing that and more at the state level with in conjunction with your state OT association. So, that's a lot of things for a lot of people to be engaging in all at once. (LAUGHS).

MATT BRANDENBURG:  
Yes, yes, it is a lot, especially for me whose, you know, basic law understanding is really founded in Schoolhouse Rock. I'm just a bill on Capitol Hill.

JILL TIGHE:  
Yes, I wish that were the way it worked, but it's way more complicated, man.

MATT BRANDENBURG:  
I know. I was, I was shocked to learn that myself.

JILL TIGHE:  
Right. And listen, I love rules. Like I'm here for a rule. You give me a rule, and I will stick to that rule sometimes like 95% of the time probably. But congressional rules are a lot. So, we focus on that. So, you don't have to.

MATT BRANDENBURG:  
I love that. And what, what would you say OT practitioners should understand about lawmaking and about the different committees within, within Congress?

JILL TIGHE:  
Yeah, so bureaucracy is, can be considered a pain, but I think it's kind of neat because it's the way that humanity has decided to categorize things. Like, I think that's kind of cool. And it's, it's wild. The various systems and the Robert's Rules of Order and all kinds of things. But a thing to know about Congress is that Congress has the ability to legislate pretty much everything. Anything that is not explicitly the responsibility of the federal government is the responsibility of the state government. But all that is to say from the food you eat, the car you drive, the clothes you wear, things that are available for you to purchase, all kinds of things like that, legislation will affect you. So, it's not just professional. And it's not just personal. It is a broad swath of things. And I think that's a thing for folks to be aware of and just to know about. That being said we are a membership organization and we focus on occupational therapy. So, we are here to support occupational therapy again, writ large.

And I think, I think that's important to know because, because Congress has so many things, again, no one person can be all things to all people, right?

MATT BRANDENBURG:  
Yep. Yep.

JILL TIGHE:  
So, for that reason, all of these various buckets and things that Congress has parceled out into can be daunting. But I need every single person to know that legislation is, is written in English. Like it's there, it's, it's available on the website. congress.gov is available to anybody. So, if, if y'all were curious, you can literally search the words occupational therapy in any piece of legislation all the way back to like the 110th Congress. It goes way back further than that, I think. I'm not gonna search it right now, it's not worth it. But information is available at our fingertips if we so choose to dig for it. All that being said you don't have to, this can, like, like my, my big thing, Matt, and I'm going off on a tangent, but like, my big thing is that I think advocacy is important in that folks should advocate to their capacity or below their capacity. And I say below their capacity, and folks are like, "Oh, no, that sounds bad." But what I'm saying is you have to care for yourself first, right?

MATT BRANDENBURG:  
Absolutely. Otherwise, what are you advocating for?

JILL TIGHE:  
Exactly, because policy and politics can take an emotional toll, right? So, we're gonna be gentle to ourselves. We're gonna take a deep breath, we're gonna drink some water, and we are gonna think about how does this certain policy affect occupational therapy first? At least that's what I'm gonna do during work hours. During personal hours, it's a different story. I'm gonna jump rope with OT Rex. Those are just my evening plans. (BOTH LAUGH) But I mean, you know what I mean, right? Like...

MATT BRANDENBURG:  
Yeah.

JILL TIGHE:  
Like we gotta take care of ourselves.

MATT BRANDENBURG:  
And the first step is really learning, looking some of those things up at congress.gov, checking out some of those resources on aota.org.

JILL TIGHE:  
Yeah. And looking now...

MATT BRANDENBURG:  
Not feeling, you know, stressed by it, but looking into it.

JILL TIGHE:  
Right. And you can ask, like, we are available for y'all to contact us at any point in time. We have email addresses. They're on AOTA's website. We are here to support AOTA members and occupational therapy, again, writ large.

MATT BRANDENBURG:  
Love that. Does OT Rex's email happen to be up there?

JILL TIGHE:  
OT Rex's email is not up there, but the main email address we will make sure that OT Rex gets your words of encouragement or sassy poems.

MATT BRANDENBURG:  
Oh, OK. (JILL TIGHE LAUGHS) OK. I'm so glad you mentioned that because I'm just sitting on a trunk load of sassy poems that I haven't known what to do with.

JILL TIGHE:  
Honestly, if you wrote a sonnet to OT Rex, I think I'd give you an OT Rex pin because there are OT Rex pins where OT Rex has low grabbers that I give out to very special folks.

MATT BRANDENBURG:  
I love that. Challenge accepted? (BOTH LAUGH)

JILL TIGHE:  
Yes.

MATT BRANDENBURG:  
I really wanna discuss grassroots, how grassroots falls into all of this that we've been discussing. Before we move on, though, is there anything you wanted to mention about the AOTPAC?

JILL TIGHE:  
Just that, AOT members can learn more about AOTPAC on aota.org/aotpac, one small piece of just knowledgeable information for all y'all is that none of your membership dues can go to supporting candidates. So, that is just a piece of knowledge for everyone to know that, that AOTPAC more information is available on aota.org/aotpac.

MATT BRANDENBURG:  
I love that. We'll include links in the episode description as well for all our listeners to check out. Let's talk, let's talk grassroots. What is grassroots advocacy? How is that different than just the umbrella term of advocacy?

JILL TIGHE:  
Yeah, so grassroots is a broad term, and it's, it's become a government affairs sort of buzzword. But I, if you all think about how grass grows, they dig little roots in the ground and then those roots intertwine. And then every single blade of grass is kind of communicating together, right? Like, that's a thing that they work together to be a thing. So, grassroots is essentially the folks on the ground doing the work, working together. Now, grassroots, because it is a industry term, that's what we have to use. I prefer to think of it as a mosaic where every one of your actions paints a little square that eventually takes up the big gorgeous picture that is occupational therapy. So, every action you take, every storytelling piece that you share, eventually, paints that gorgeous picture of how important occupational therapy is. So, when we talk about advocating, we can talk about a billion different avenues, but if we're gonna focus solely on occupational therapy in the healthcare world, right, what I, what I like to clarify is advocating up versus advocating out.

So, when you're talking to folks who have the ability to make decisions to change your life, folks who are the, the ones in control of legislation, folks who are in control of power in some way, shape, or form, that is advocating up, you are advocating up to change makers to decision makers, right? There's also advocating out. And I know you can't see this, but I talk with my hands. And right now, I am pointing up to the sky and out to my left. And out just means that you are talking to folks around you, you are talking to fellow professionals, you are talking to your colleagues, you are talking to family, friends, to neighbors, to folks like you who might need to know about occupational therapy. Another arm of advocating out, I like to think of as doing your job well and providing evidence-based care to your clients, like doing good work, because that way you are representing your profession well, because you never know who might be on the receiving end of your care, right? Like, we have a member of Congress, who is a big fan of occupational therapy because she credits occupational therapy with saving her life 'cause the occupational therapist caught a blood clot and it's a big deal.

And so, she's a big fan and it's awesome. And I love that story because it really illustrates how doing your job well may change the course of your advocacy journey, right? Like, that made a difference because now that person is in Congress and making decisions that affect occupational therapy. Cool. Right.

MATT BRANDENBURG:  
That's amazing. You never know how much of an impact you're going to have in people that you work with as an OT practitioner. And that's reasoned enough to be as evidence-based and practicing at the top of your license to really advocate out. (CROSSTALK)

JILL TIGHE:  
Right. And even that, like, I'm, I'm sorry, Matt, I don't mean to cut you off, but I just, I just wanna add that like, I am such a big fan of what all y'all do. Like, I just wanna throw it out there that like, OT is so good. Like, everything that all y'all do is so good. It is so affirming. It is so life-giving and building. And I'm just, I'm such a fan of everything all y'all do. So, thank you.

MATT BRANDENBURG:  
Jill, you come on the show any time you want. (BOTH LAUGH)

JILL TIGHE:  
You call me up. I'll give you a pep talk, man. Let's do it. (BOTH LAUGH)

MATT BRANDENBURG:  
I love that. Honestly, that is the pep talk I need, our listener's need, and a lot of OT needs. I know we all got into this profession because we recognize how good OT is. But in the larger scope, sometimes it can be discouraging to, to see how many people don't recognize OT or maybe don't even understand OT. And that's why these, these grassroots advocacy efforts can be so beneficial and are so important to our profession. You shared one awesome example of advocacy with that now member of Congress. Can you share another example of grassroots advocacy that that led to a positive outcome for occupational therapy?

JILL TIGHE:  
So, I can share that politics is a game of inches, right? Like everything moves forward slowly and requires a lot of attention because again, you're fighting over like a whole bunch of attention, right, because no one person can be all things to all people. So, I can share with you that one advocacy win was building relationships with a member of Congress's office that eventually led to... And this was not just through grassroots, but through the hustle of one of our lobbyists to get one of AOTA's board members to testify in front of Congress on the value of the Allied Health Workforce Diversity Act. This was in the 117th Congress. I don't know when you're listening to this but this was again in 2022. I think that's when Victoria testified. But she testified in front of a congressional committee on how important this piece of legislation would be. It was really cool to watch because it was like my friend is on TV and they're testifying in Congress in a place that I watch all the time.

It was just really cool. But for that reason, that piece of legislation has been included in some other stuff. And other members of Congress saw the value of that legislative language and put it into other bigger packages of legislation. It is November right now as we're recording. I know Matt, we didn't wanna date this. But there is an election happening. So, who knows what's going to happen? Politics is anything but predictable. But end of year, lawmaking is happening right now. AOT has info on our website on that. Through grassroots advocacy, you see change and you can change hearts and you can change minds and you can build a coalition of folks to move important issues to you forward. So, like AOTA works with other associations too and other coalitions, other groups of, I don't wanna call 'em heavy hitters in the industry, but like healthcare organizations that support specific aims. And we all work together to make change sometimes. And it's awesome because coalition building is really important.

So, I think that's, that answers your question and adds several more probably. (BOTH LAUGH)

MATT BRANDENBURG:  
It really does. I don't even know where to start. That is a wonderful illustration, though, and I love that kind of development of coalitions or playing a part with coalitions. It sounds like, from a practitioner lens, it's like interprofessional collaboration.

JILL TIGHE:  
Yeah, exactly.

MATT BRANDENBURG:  
(CROSSTALK) advocacy. And that's the highest level.

JILL TIGHE:  
Yeah, on a, on a macro scale and on a scale that is big and specified in a different way for sure.

MATT BRANDENBURG:  
I love that. And it's so easy to know as a practitioner how important that type of collaboration is. And it's really encouraging to hear AOTA's efforts and how there's representatives of our profession testifying in front of Congress, like that's a big deal.

JILL TIGHE:  
Isn't that cool?

MATT BRANDENBURG:  
It's so cool. And I feel like so many of us just aren't aware of, of all the work that, that goes into it and these great hurdles that are, are being made.

JILL TIGHE:  
Yeah, there are... It's, it's all a, again, it's a, it's a game of slow-moving, slow, slow-moving, but change happens. It happens incrementally, but it does happen. So, legislation passed two or three years ago, does have an effect on you today. So, no better time to advocate than today. And Matt, just for you, I almost broke out into rent but I didn't because this theater kid knows when to shut up. (BOTH LAUGH)

MATT BRANDENBURG:  
I really wish you would have. (BOTH LAUGH) Oh, I love it. What are some first actions that you would recommend to practitioners who maybe wanna begin dipping their toes into, into advocating? Where can they start?

JILL TIGHE:  
Yeah, I think the, the best places for you to start is AOTA's website. There's all kinds of news for you to dig up through history of things to understand things. But the other piece that, that is my baby that I spend most of my time working on is AOTA's Legislative Action Center. That's www.aota.org/takeaction. That's super easy to get to. This is your home for any issue that AOTA's Federal Affairs has decided is important at this point to have a push. But advocates can also write their own letters to their advocate, to their members of Congress, to their legislators. So, a fun piece on this legislative action center is that we have all of these pre-written letters on all kinds of issues from... And things will change because a new congress means new bills. So, in January 2023, we will start the 118th Congress and there will be two sessions of that. And that means that anything that has not been signed into law during the 117th Congress then has to start over in the 118th. So, we will need some advocacy there, but we'll have some stuff pre-written for you.

But advocates can also search legislation, advocates can edit any of our letters. All of our letters are editable. I pride myself on this, that if you don't agree with one of AOTA's letters that they've, you know, that we've prewritten for you to edit, you can delete it all and write your own. The only thing I ask when you are advocating to your legislators is that you do so respectfully. That's it. So, please do so respectfully in a professional capacity because you are advocating in a professional capacity. Because we have these pre-written letters, you can edit them, you can change anything you like and you can also write your very own to... If you are, if you live in a state, you have two senators and one representative. If you live in a territory, you have one non-voting representative. And we can go over those. Advocacy will affect your profession and your practice of that profession. So, using AOTA's Legislative Action Center is an opportunity for you to, again, raise your voice, tell your story, and engage with folks who make decisions because they represent you.

MATT BRANDENBURG:  
I love that. Excuse me.

JILL TIGHE:  
No, you're good, (MATT BRANDENBURG LAUGHS) good.

MATT BRANDENBURG:  
So, the Legislative Action Center looks amazing. You can sign up for alerts via email, even text. I'll be honest though, a lot of, you know, the letters and the issues and the laws and the, you know, the, just the phrasing and new vocabulary of things may be overwhelming to some practitioners. What do you recommend? How, like, do you recommend they sign up for email alerts that they try and track certain legislation and learn the process? That way, what could practitioners do to, I guess, set them up for success when they advocate?

JILL TIGHE:  
Yeah, so email alerts are good. What you can also do is you can ask us like AOTA's Federal Affairs Team. I think we are all, we all pride ourselves on this in that we're people, people, which sounds really weird coming out of a podcast, but like, we like people. So, if you have a question, please contact us. Like, if you're like, I'm not sure what this word means, please contact us. Like we are a resource for you. Your membership dollars help us support you. All we wanna do is support you. So, we're available, we are happy to answer questions. It actually is like my favorite part of the day to help people and to like listen to what people have to say 'cause it's not just me talking. I wanna hear what you guys have to say 'cause again, I'm not the expert on your life. You are. So, please contact us. AOTA's Legislative Action Center is useful if you use it. So, you can sign up for email alerts, you can find legislation, you can find your elected officials and read and learn more about them.

But also you can ask AOTA questions all the time. And I hope you do 'cause we're resources for you.

MATT BRANDENBURG:  
Absolutely. Thank you. I think this is a resource that needs to be used and is so great for, for, for members. So, definitely reach out listeners, you should reach out. You mentioned the legislative action center, other resources on aota.org. Are there any other resources you'd like to recommend to listeners who wanna learn more about advocacy?

JILL TIGHE:  
congress.gov is a great resource. There are other non-governmental organizations across the spectrum that, that can provide information on how Congress works. But congress.gov, the Library of Congress has all kinds of information out there on the history on how congress works, on how it's worked in the past on committees, on various pieces of legislation and how it will affect current public law. It's all very interesting, I think. But I'm a nerd, like I'm a policy nerd, so I could spend days reading like the very specific rules of one very specific committee. You don't have to do that, but it's all, it's all up there, it's all transparent, it's all available at congress.gov, if you had a curiosity or a burning need to know how the Energy and Commerce Committee sets their schedule.

MATT BRANDENBURG:  
There we go. If we have that need, you know, start a discussion in the comments.

JILL TIGHE:  
Yeah, we can chat about it. Like, tell me, tell me your thoughts and folks can contact us at fad@aota.org. So, that's our main email address and I see all of those. So, if you send an email address, I will point you hopefully in the right direction. And if I don't, I will find someone who will.

MATT BRANDENBURG:  
Perfect. Thank you so much, Jill. And that's f-a-d, fad@aota.org.

JILL TIGHE:  
Oh yeah, you got it. You got it.

MATT BRANDENBURG:  
There we go. We're hoping that advocacy isn't just a FAD, though.

JILL TIGHE:  
Oh, yeah. Oh, that's so good.

MATT BRANDENBURG:  
(CROSSTALK) participate throughout, throughout their careers.

JILL TIGHE:  
Oh, I wish, I wish I had a drum kit right now so I could just put on (UNKNOWN) that 'cause it was so good.

MATT BRANDENBURG:  
(LAUGHS) Alright, Jill. It's time now for the Golden Nugget segment. Our final question of the interview. If you could recommend one thing to practitioners, what would it be?

JILL TIGHE:  
Oh, oh, no. If I could recommend one thing to practitioners, it would be to take a walk outside. I know that's like really simple. That's like so simple. But I'm like the one thing that I can think of, because right now I'm in a fall wonderland. And I'm like, all, all of my recommendations are like really simple, like take a walk outside, drink a whole glass of water, tell somebody you think they're great, like, like all my stuff is stupid (BOTH LAUGH) and like kind of wholesome in a weird way, like it's gentle. I don't know. I don't know. I don't have any good like recommendations other than to, to breathe and tell folks that you think they're neat, if you think they're neat.

MATT BRANDENBURG:  
You know, that's a, those are wholesome (JILL TIGHE LAUGHS) and pure recommendations, and they seem small and like easy action steps. But I think those are perfect recommendations, especially when discussing a topic like advocacy that sometimes becomes political and stressful, and can be really overwhelming.

JILL TIGHE:  
Yeah. I feel like such (CROSSTALK)

MATT BRANDENBURG:  
Taking these small actions can give you perspective.

JILL TIGHE:  
But little things, they make a difference.

MATT BRANDENBURG:  
Retweet. I (JILL TIGHE LAUGHS) totally agree.

JILL TIGHE:  
I love it. I am, I am actually going to take my own advice and go pet my dog who's being a monster. But yeah, thank you, Matt. This has been a joy.

MATT BRANDENBURG:  
Of course. Thank you so much. It's been awesome having you on. And I think we need to do this again to, to talk more advocacy and, and talk more AOTA's Federal Affairs.

JILL TIGHE:  
I'm in, I'm in. And I bet I can con a few folks to join too.

MATT BRANDENBURG:  
We welcome any and all guests.

JILL TIGHE:  
Awesome.

SPEAKER:  
Thanks for listening to the AOTA podcast. Tune in again next time. (MUSIC PLAYS)