

Jerry Howard (00:07):

Welcome to Housing Developments, I'm Jerry Howard.

Jim Tobin (00:10):

I'm Jim Tobin. Hey Jerry.

Jerry Howard (00:12):

Hey Jim, what's going on?

Jim Tobin (00:13):

Oh, you know, the ushe. Busy times here in Washington, D.C. for the team. But it's kind of fall in D.C., with a lot of big ticket items in front of Congress, in front of the regulatory agencies, and our legal team is working hard. Everybody's working hard on the fall membership pushes, it's busy days here for your staff team.

Jerry Howard (00:39):

I'm glad to hear that, I can't wait to get home and spend a couple days in the office.

Jim Tobin (00:43):

Yeah, right. You've been on the road a lot.

Jerry Howard (00:47):

I've been in airports more than I've been in the air or in the cities I've been going to, unfortunately. So let me ask you real quick before we bring our guest in, what's going on with reconciliation, Jim? As I see it, the packages that have been proposed are going nowhere. There's going to have to be some serious negotiation.

Jim Tobin (01:07):

Yeah, serious negotiation. So the house right now and the Senate, to an extent, they're all scrambling this week to get their legislative packages out the door, so to speak, and ready for floor action by the 15th of September. House is proceeding with a three and a half trillion dollar package. Senate leadership is proceeding with a three and a half trillion dollar package. The problem is, that's going to collide with the moderates. Both in the house, there's about a dozen of them, [inaudible 00:01:36] in the Senate, there's at least two of them, and there's probably more who want to see a much smaller package. Something that Joe Machin been the lead on this, he's saying he wants to see something into the tune of one or one and a half trillion dollars.

Jim Tobin (01:50):

As you can imagine, your home state, Senator Bernie Sanders, doesn't really care for that number. He thinks that three and a half trillion, already, is too small and is a compromise. But the reality is, it's going to get smaller and that's good for us, good for the industry. Because we're tracking a lot of changes, both on the tax side, some good, a lot not so good and then also a lot of policy changes you're trying to jam through either on organized labor, housing policy, codes and standards and "incentives" for

adopting latest published codes. There are a lot of moving parts here, but what we're seeing this week is the starting point. If something gets to the President's desk, it's going to look a whole lot different.

Jerry Howard ([02:36](#)):

Well, yeah, that's exactly what I think. I also have to say, since you're trying to tie me to Bernie Sanders, yes, we share a common home state and a love for that state, it's just an entirely different type of love for the state than philosophically.

Jim Tobin ([02:51](#)):

That's right.

Jerry Howard ([02:52](#)):

But yeah, it's pretty interesting. And you know, with the margins as slim as they are, if this effort fails, what does that mean for the administration's agenda and the Schumer-Pelosi agenda going forward into next year, which is an election year?

Jim Tobin ([03:11](#)):

Yeah, if it fails, I think you'll see their base get pretty much demoralized about having both majorities, as slim as they are, and the White House and a chance to do big things. They get demoralized because they don't come out and vote next fall, when control of both the house and Senate are really a flip of a coin at this point. It energizes the Republicans, which, if you're a Democrat, that's not what you want to hear. And then, really the dirty little secret is, is that what we see every time, happened to the Obama term, happened to Trump, when Congress flips one chamber or the other, we start seeing administration rule by regulatory fiat or administrative fiat and a lot of executive orders. Whenever you don't have congressional oversight, that opens up room for a lot of shenanigans.

Jerry Howard ([04:02](#)):

All right. Well, you're certainly a busy guy, Jim, and we look forward to you keeping the members posted and bringing home the legislative bacon, as it were.

Jim Tobin ([04:10](#)):

Yeah, yeah.

Jerry Howard ([04:11](#)):

In the meantime, now let's turn to our guest. Jim, we've got something really exciting here. I mean, we've been focusing a lot of efforts at NAHB on a couple of areas, a diversity equity inclusion, as well as, workforce development. And we have with us an NAHB member and an author, who has managed to strike out at both of those issues with one book. We're joined by Mollie Elkman. Mollie is the president and owner of Group Two, a new home marketing company for home builders, and is the author of a book, right Jim?

Jim Tobin ([04:50](#)):

Yeah, that's right, Mollie, thanks for joining us today. Mollie is the author of The House That She Built and it's a great tool for, in my mind, young kids. But in particular young girls, to bring the excitement and the interest of the building trades and the home building industry to them. Maybe demystified a little bit

and show that women can do anything, if not equally as better as men, and that the industry is not dominated by men. So Mollie, welcome to Housing Developments.

Mollie Elkman ([05:29](#)):

Thank you so much, I am so happy to be here with both of you.

Jerry Howard ([05:34](#)):

Mollie, the book features 18 skilled trade careers, as I understand it, and it illustrates them as being appropriate for females. That is a tremendous message to get out. What made you think about that?

Mollie Elkman ([05:50](#)):

So the book is actually inspired by a real project that was designed and completed in Utah by the Professional Women in Building of Utah. And they did it. So, that really is what inspired showing this story, was that women can do these jobs and making sure that we are sharing the stories of women who have successful careers in construction, so that all children know that this is a path for anyone.

Jerry Howard ([06:24](#)):

What a great message, right, Jim?

Jim Tobin ([06:26](#)):

Yeah, absolutely. And as somebody who's been tied to the building industry, since you were six years old, went to your first trade show at six years old, tell us about your experiences. Oftentimes, I think I've read you were the only woman in the room. So tell us about what it's like to enter into, what is, a male dominated industry and how you got to break through and get comfortable in the industry.

Mollie Elkman ([06:53](#)):

Yeah, so I am a second generation business owner, my dad started Group Two in 1969, and it's always operated out of Philadelphia. So when I was a child, I was around home builders my whole life. And the conversation was always about housing and new home sales and marketing. I went to the builder show to see my dad present, he was a speaker for my many years. He published many books through NAHB's BuilderBooks.

Mollie Elkman ([07:25](#)):

So for me, this is home, this is where I'm comfortable, this is a space where I have always felt that I belong. But as I've been in the industry, I've realized that so many of the other women I meet were also brought in by a dad or a grandfather. And really, in having conversations with them and this group of women, we feel a real pull to be the ones recruiting the next generation of women. And these are great careers and great opportunities that everyone should know about. So, yeah, I love housing, I love our industry, I love NAHB. And to be able to share this with the youngest learners and have them connect their skills and interests with careers in construction is just very exciting to me.

Jerry Howard ([08:21](#)):

Well, it's not only exciting, it's, as you know, a product better than Jim and I experience timely. And it's something that NAHB has taken great pride being involved in. Like you, we want to thank your sponsors, who helped you create this book and get it out, 84 Lumber and Andersen, right?

Mollie Elkman ([08:38](#)):

That's right.

Jerry Howard ([08:40](#)):

They are very forward thinking companies and we're grateful to them as well. Now this book is being very well received, is there any plan for a sequel?

Mollie Elkman ([08:53](#)):

So there's actually a plan right now to print more copies. So the book launch was today, which is September 14th, and we are basically through our first print run. So this is the fastest selling title that has come through BuilderBooks. And really meeting demand is going to be the biggest thing here because we have a compelling story to tell, and it's compelling to others who are outside of the housing industry. I can't even tell you how many parents have said to me, "I never knew all the things that go into building a home." It's not just children who are reacting to this, it is the parents, it is the teachers. Because we broke it out into 18 different careers, we're able to really focus on STEAM, which it used to be STEM, but it's science, technology, engineering, art, and math.

Mollie Elkman ([09:50](#)):

And what we're able to do is build curriculum that connects these STEAM and construction careers in a really easy to understand way for a young learner. So for example, a child who may identify as someone who loves math and is good at math, if you ask them what they want to be, when they grow up, they would most likely say a math teacher, because that's the only career that they've been those to that utilizes math. So after reading this book, you'll see a kid would change their answer and they'll say, "Well, I really love math, I'm going to be an engineer." Because it's making that connection between a skill that a young child identifies and feels confident about and showing them what these great careers are and starting that conversation at a young age, not just for the child, but for the parents and the teachers.

Jim Tobin ([10:47](#)):

That's really cool. You know what struck me about it, is the illustrations in the book. It represents a diverse group of people doing the jobs. What was the inspiration behind these? And tell us a little bit about your illustrator.

Mollie Elkman ([11:03](#)):

Yeah, so the illustrator of the book is Georgia Castellano and she is the creative director of my company, Group Two. So we do full service marketing for home building companies around the country and Georgia and I work incredibly well together and she did all the illustrations. They're actually all hand drawn and it was a massive effort. So really, we did the marketing for the actual home that was built in Utah and throughout the process, we were able to hear the stories of all these women involved. And in order to complete that project, women had to fly in from all over the country, because there really aren't enough women in any singular market to complete a project like this. Which that says a lot right there.

Mollie Elkman ([11:57](#)):

So throughout the process of meeting these women and being a part of the actual build, we really felt that we wanted to show people that represented the complete diversity of the women we were meeting and know women that we get to work with. So it was very important to us that all different body sizes, everyone's skin tone is different, we have different abilities. We want to make it very clear that for every underrepresented community, that there is a spot for you in housing.

Jerry Howard ([12:32](#)):

So really, I think it may be best demonstrated by the illustration on the last page, right?

Mollie Elkman ([12:39](#)):

I love that picture on the last page. So the book really focuses on the individual because, of course, we want to encourage our children to be individuals, it is great to have your own interests and your own skills. But it's also important to see how an individual's skill can be a part of something much larger. So when you see these 18 careers come together and throughout the book, you really just see each person's career and contribution. And then at the end, you see them all together with the collective project, which is the home. It's a really powerful image because you see, yes, they're all individuals, but as a group, they really make something special.

Jim Tobin ([13:28](#)):

Well, it's a wonderful message. Jerry and I are fathers to three collectively, three beautiful, talented, smart, athletic, young women. My daughter's the youngest at 11, Jerry's daughters are college age or in college or getting ready to start college. My daughter is a huge Legos fan and my family room floor is filled with, not only her own kits, but also her own creation of buildings. So this very much speaks to her. What message do you have for the young women in the country, in the industry, other parents who have young girls, who are maybe trying to bring them up in the trades and in the industry? What word of advice do you have for them?

Mollie Elkman ([14:21](#)):

Yeah, so my advice would be to cultivate curiosity, wherever you can. So a kid could be building a fort and there is something to that. It's talking about, well, working with your hands is pretty neat. Look at what you just created here by yourself by using your own hands. And just having these conversations that are more about really mastering a skill.

Mollie Elkman ([14:48](#)):

And I think for me, when I was a child, I felt like I had to be good at everything. I felt like even though I was naturally better at art and English, I had to put just as much time into math and science and social studies. And really focusing on where you have self-esteem already building in children and letting them feel confidence in the skills that they're already identifying with, as skills that they are proud of. That's a really, really big part of shifting the conversation around careers in construction. And one of the things that is important to me is that, you'll see, one page is the painter, one page is the architect, one page is the plumber. I mean, you have totally different career paths, but they are all a part of building a home. So, the path doesn't have to look the same, but it's all a part of the housing industry.

Jerry Howard ([15:51](#)):

That's a terrific message, Mollie. We're really excited to be a part of this project, both Jim and I, as parents, but also as home builders and as Americans. It's exactly what this country stands for and we're really grateful that you took it upon yourself to bring the message forward. Thanks so much for being with us. And we look forward to helping you sell a whole lot more books and we're waiting anxiously for a sequel or whatever the next one is.

Mollie Elkman ([16:22](#)):

Yeah, so we already have the activity book in the works. And so the activity book goes with each of the careers and focuses on different skills that are needed for each of careers in the book. And I really appreciate the opportunity to be here today and thank you for everything that NAHB has done to bring this book to life. It would not have happened without any NAHB and BuilderBooks. And I'm really appreciative of our larger industry community because everyone has been very receptive.

Jim Tobin ([16:53](#)):

Great.

Jerry Howard ([16:53](#)):

Thanks Mollie.

Mollie Elkman ([16:54](#)):

Thanks so much.

Jerry Howard ([16:57](#)):

Jim, that was a great interview. What an interesting story, what a really valuable contribution this book is going to make, and Mollie has made to young girls and young women everywhere.

Jim Tobin ([17:12](#)):

Yeah. And like you said Jerry, talk about somebody who has the vision to take... You have the women who built the home in Utah, then you have Mollie who saw that as an opportunity to shine a light, not only on home building and not only on the trades, but women's role in those trades. And as you and I have talked about on this podcast with our friend and colleague, Rob Dietz, about the workforce issues that we have and how women can start... they're expanding their roles in the workforce when it comes to home building. But I think this is one of those things that could help the next generation realize that the trades in home building are a great career and they can use skills. And I love what Mollie said, about finding things that you love to do and applying them to the home building trades, really opened my eyes about somebody who's thinking big picture.

Jerry Howard ([18:03](#)):

Absolutely. This has been a great episode of Housing Developments. And I'm Jerry Howard, I want to thank the listeners. Ask the listeners, A. to subscribe, B. to sign up to come to the IBS and C. to remember, do business with a member, do business with associates who care enough about the industry to be a member of your local association. This is Jerry Howard...

Jim Tobin ([18:28](#)):

And this is Jim Tobin. Jerry, safe travels out in the country and can't wait to see you home in a few days.

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