

Make Me Smart August 16, 2021 transcript

Note: *Marketplace podcasts are meant to be heard, with emphasis, tone and audio elements a transcript can't capture. Transcripts are generated using a combination of automated software and human transcribers, and may contain errors. Please check the corresponding audio before quoting it.*

Kai Ryssdal: Here we go. Oh, my goodness. Hi everybody, I'm Kai Ryssdal, welcome back to Make Me Smart. We, and by we I mean we, are back from vacation and ready, willing and able to make today make sense.

Molly Wood: I believe we are. Let's do that if we can. I'm Molly Wood, thanks for joining us. It is Monday, also known as what did we miss Monday. So much, so much. Yeah, I haven't even put in like, as many links as I could have put in here because I think it's almost too overwhelming.

Kai Ryssdal: Because really. That, that sound you hear in the background, by the way, is my daughter coming home from the first day of school, in-person school. The dogs are back from the kennel because we were away and so she's out back playing with them. So that's, that's the mutual, you know, happiness that's going on.

Molly Wood: The mutual joy? Oh, that is adorable. We had like, we had make me smile early.

Kai Ryssdal: That's right. That's right. We started with the make me smile. How about that? On what is, on what is honestly not, not a great Monday. And honestly, I don't think we can properly call this one a what did we miss Monday because your news item is actually a thing that happened today. And mine is everything, he says, gestures wildly, that happened over the weekend, the fall of Kabul, the rise of the Taliban, all of that stuff. And it's, it's, it's a story that's really hard not to just obsess about for a whole lot of reasons, for a whole lot of reasons, you know?

Molly Wood: Yeah. I would imagine, especially for you.

Kai Ryssdal: Well, you know, I was thinking about that. And, and I, and I really, I truly don't want to put me into this at all, because I never served in Afghanistan. It was a very long time ago, my service was, but it resonates a little bit and it resonates with my friends who are still in the national security community. So maybe that's, that's why it was for me. But, but the other thing, really, and I guess I'll just jump right into my news item here, is, is the way it was done. Not the decision to withdraw, right? I don't think there are too many people out there who would disagree with it as a matter of policy, right? I mean, Lindsey Graham, just cause he's Lindsey Graham. But mostly people are like, you know what, 20 years, it was time to go. I think the problem is with the way it was done, especially in the last 30 days, really, and last 72 hours. And I cite just as, as my favorite expression of how bad it was, George Packer in the Atlantic, whose article is called "Biden's Betrayal of Afghans Will Live in Infamy," nice little historical reference,

and then the subhead is “our abandonment of the Afghans who helped us, counted on us, and risked their lives on us is a final gratuitous shame that we could have avoided.” And I agree with every word of that. I agree with every word of that, it was terribly handled. It is a stain on us. And Biden’s speech today from the White House, which, you know, was defiant and strong and accepting of some degree of responsibility. He actually said the buck stops here, as opposed to President Trump who says no, I bear no responsibility at all. Although to be fair, Biden did say to Savannah Guthrie a month and a half ago, “no, I’m not responsible if anything bad happens.” But, but look, it was, it was badly handled. And I think he needs to come out and say that. That’s, that’s what I got. That’s why I’m thinking about this.

Molly Wood: And we should clarify that we mean the, specifically in this case, the translators, the people who gave aid to the United States military, who, you know, for over a month, members of Congress and members of the intelligence community have been warning would be in serious danger if the Taliban marched through the country, and that they needed to be evacuated quickly. And I did think it was sort of interesting in that speech today that Biden essentially said, you know, Packer writes, you know, there were always this, these not very believable or adequate responses, one of which is the one the president gave today, which is we didn’t want to panic the Afghan people by conducting a mass evacuation. It sounds like you’re not buying it.

Kai Ryssdal: No, I’m not. There were ways to do this that would take a much longer podcast than this is to do it properly and in accordance with American law, but also with humanitarian spirit, which I think is what’s called for here, you know, and also Biden executive authority, there, he has huge--he, the president--not Joe Biden, but a president has huge executive authority on immigration. And he could have used some of that in the past like, 90 days, you know, and it’s not like nobody knew that the end was coming, right. I mean, he announced it was coming. Donald Trump announced it was coming. We’ve known that. And then there were ways to get this done, which would, yes, the last 72 hours would have been a mess. But it would have been less, there would have been less culpability and less stain, I think. That’s, you know, that’s kind of where I am.

Molly Wood: Yeah, yeah. I can’t stop reading about it either. And I don’t know, I don’t, I profoundly don’t know. I feel like there are probably five journalists in the entire world who actually understand what has happened and what’s happening and is happening in Afghanistan. And I think there’s so much weird political crap happening between the President and the Pentagon, and I don’t, none of it is, you know, and I just am like, this may qualify as one of those stories that’s so complicated and so bad and, and just goes back to the original sin of our presence there in the first place that it’s just like, hard to, or Russia’s presence there in the first place, like I don’t even know, but it just feels a little bit on brand for American invasion throughout history. And it is awful to watch. Awful.

Kai Ryssdal: Graveyard of empires, right? Am I right? Is that what it was called?

Molly Wood: Yep. Yeah. I mean, my brother texted me today and, you know, the phrase that's been going around all day, which was the Taliban in 2008 saying, "you may have the clocks, but we have the time."

Kai Ryssdal: Oh, that's a good one. Sorry to laugh, but that's a really good line. That's a really good line. I hadn't heard that before.

Molly Wood: I mean, this was always, I guess that's what, that is what is so hard about the reality on the ground is that this was always in the offing. And while there were parts of it they could have done better without a doubt, I'm not sure--right, it's like, how do you pick and choose? So you say, oh, okay, we rescued, you know, 1000 or 5000 of the people who helped us, but we still left all those women and girls to the Taliban.

Kai Ryssdal: Yeah. Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah.

Molly Wood: So like, I'm not sure there's hairsplitting. It's, it is just, it's infuriating. It's like, it's just such an old story, right? Like, oh, just men couldn't stop waging war and women and girls will suffer again. I don't know if the--yeah. Yeah. Other things that happened, obviously, that we missed that we just, that are so, I think if we sound a little grim despite our two-week vacation, it's another devastating earthquake in Haiti, its children getting sick and dying from COVID in classrooms where they're not allowed to have mask mandates. They're, you know, it's, it's, it feels a little dark. I'm not gonna lie.

Kai Ryssdal: There's a lot of grim out there.

Molly Wood: And on top of that, I just, I marveled for over a week at the speed with which this absolutely devastating UN report about climate change came and went. Came and went! I kind of want to start a, like a bot that is like, did the New York Times cover climate change today? Yes, or no? Because it's like, it showed up on the front page for a couple hours that day, and then has not come back. And then I think there was like, maybe one story today about drought. And it's just sort of like, guys, this is a really urgent situation. Going back to things that may live in infamy, the thing where we just say, oh, another terrible report came out about climate change, and then we don't do a damn thing, is also, assuming we're still around to see it, going to be something that we are ashamed of later. So the latest evidence of that is that for the first time, the federal government has declared a water shortage on the Colorado River, which according to CNN is a thing that cannot be overstated because the Colorado River serves, what is it, like 30 million people in seven states?

Kai Ryssdal: Yeah. Yeah. Yeah.

Molly Wood: I mean, it is really, really bad. 40, more than 41 million people living across seven US States and Mexico, in Arizona and Nevada, they're going to have to make actual significant cuts in their water usage. Water is probably going to get expensive all over. And the rivers and

the lakes just keep draining because we're in a mega drought that doesn't show any sign of easing up.

Kai Ryssdal: Yeah, totally. Totally.

Molly Wood: It should probably still be in the paper every day. Like, I don't know, just some stories that are like, hey, lawmakers and policymakers and businesses, what are you doing about that? Boy, this report came out, it was really bad. It was like we're not going to be able to avert the worst effects. Or, you know, some of that. Anyway. Yeah.

Kai Ryssdal: This, well, this was, this was--and I forget the acronym, right? It's like I copper, I whatever, this was like, like report number 15, or something that comes out every three years. 14 was in the news all the time. IPCC. 13 or whatever the previous report was, was in the news all the time, and this one just got zeroed out in a stunning amount of time.

Molly Wood: I mean, I saw a tweet that basically was like, it's pretty wild that the UN's IPCC, the International, I don't know, basically climate commission, came out and was like, yes, so a certain degree of warming is already locked in, and it's going to be bad for millions and tens of millions of people, and if we don't do something right now, we are talking about an unlivable planet. And that was like, at best the number two story because a bunch of Americans don't want to have to wear a cloth mask so they don't get a virus and die. I just, I just--okay. And he was like, honestly, it's a little bit like, on, on brand. Yeah, make the happy place sting.

Kai Ryssdal: I should get the dogs and my daughter out here again. That's what I ought to do.

Molly Wood: I mean, can we just get some more cute dog and kid noises? Cause that's adorable. Awww. I mean, you know what, and it did make me smile a lot. My child started high school today. In person.

Kai Ryssdal: Oh, man! Oh, man.

Molly Wood: Yep. He went to school for the first time after a year-and-a-half. Because his school never reopened.

Kai Ryssdal: How'd it go? Have you seen him since? Is he out yet? Is he home?

Molly Wood: No, I'm picking him up right after this. They have a long day at this school. But I do know that because he's in high school now, he got to leave campus for lunch. And he texted me in the middle of the day--

Kai Ryssdal: As a freshman?

Molly Wood: Yes. I don't care for this! Yeah, I was like, I'm sorry but I don't think that's a good idea.

Kai Ryssdal: Wow.

Molly Wood: In the orientation they're like, they just have to be back in time for class to start in the afternoon. I was like, that ding dong is never gonna make it back.

Kai Ryssdal: You understand this is a 14-year-old kid, right? Come on, man.

Molly Wood: 14-year-old at Shake Shack, like, if he made it back to class today, I'll eat my hat.

Kai Ryssdal: What could possibly go wrong? What could possibly go wrong?

Molly Wood: But it did make me really happy though. Hallelujah. It's all like kids, all the kids just and their nervous energy, it's delightful to see.

Kai Ryssdal: Okay, is that, was that your, was that your actual make me smile?

Molly Wood: No, I was also, that was, nope, that was just my like, tertiary make me smile. My real make me smile was that we did all these stories about the child, the expansion of the child tax credit. And we were like, God, it's gonna lift a lot of kids out of poverty. And it's shocking that we have that much room in order to do that. And now there is in fact data out and it's a few days old. And so I apologize to the Make Me Smart fill-in team if they already covered it, but I just feel like it's still worth saying that those payments, the first child tax credit payments did, did reduce child hunger by 24%. Fully 24% of families with kids said, thank you, we can afford food now. And that's a little bittersweet, but it's good that it worked. And it's gonna keep coming. And I mean, yay for that.

Kai Ryssdal: Totally, totally.

Molly Wood: Yay for that. Yep.

Kai Ryssdal: I was cheered to see not, not by the news of her retirement, but by the fact that Carli Lloyd is going out on a high note with the US women's national soccer team. She has been there for 312 games, which is a record for female soccer players at the national level. Here's this, this statistic on how good she was: of the 312 games in which she played, the US women's national team has lost 17, which is--

Molly Wood: Oh, my god.

Kai Ryssdal: Yeah, pretty great, right? I mean, look, they didn't have a great Olympics, but she's won two Olympic gold medals. She's won two World Cups. The US women's national soccer team is, is a treasure and ought, by the way, to be compensated accordingly. That's a matter clearly for the courts. But I just want to point that out because she deserves all the props she's gets, she's going to retire at the end of the year, she's going to play the rest of the

Women's Soccer season and then a four game series for the women's team. And then she's out, but, but good for her. I think she's had quite a career. And I was, I was just happy to see that.

Molly Wood: That's amazing.

Kai Ryssdal: She's getting the due she deserves. Yeah, isn't she?

Molly Wood: Yeah, that is amazing.

Kai Ryssdal: She's just bad.

Molly Wood: Awww.

Kai Ryssdal: In the good kind of way.

Molly Wood: I did see that, that the Olympics like the, you know, the viewership was largely concentrated around women's sports. And that's where most of the betting happened. And like, this whole idea that we're not into it, it's just a lie. We're into it.

Kai Ryssdal: We ought to invest in it.

Molly Wood: I mean, 17, 17 of the 312 games, like, yeah, that's bananas.

Kai Ryssdal: That's like 95%, just like 95%. Anyway.

Molly Wood: It's bananas. Do you think we're that good at this show? We've only kind of crapped out on 17 of our 312 shows.

Kai Ryssdal: Oh look, we gotta go. It's time to go. Sorry, only 15 minutes on this podcast, got to go. So we're done. Tomorrow, we're going to do a little bit of what it's like to come out of a pandemic. Look, we're clearly still in it, but things are opening up and there's some challenges, right? There's the Delta variant, people are going back to school, people going back to work, it's, there's a lot going on, it's being called, as a matter of fact, pandemic flux syndrome, and I feel that. We'll explain where it is tomorrow on the show, don't miss it. Lots and lots of stuff to catch up on. Send your comments, your questions, to makemesmart@marketplace.org.

Molly Wood: Or you can call us and leave us a voice message, which never stops delighting me. Our number is 508-827-6278 or 508-UB-SMART. I'm just practicing for when we have to go back to the golden days of like, 80s radio, 80s commercial radio. Call us up, leave us a voice message.

Kai Ryssdal: Make Me Smart, which is the podcast you are listening to, for now anyway, is produced and directed by Marissa Cabrera. Today's program, today's program was engineered by Juan Carlos Torrado, expertly.

Molly Wood: Expertly, I agree. Bridget Bodnar's the senior producer and the executive director of on demand is Sitara Nieves. And I hope you're happy to have us back. A couple of wildcards up in here.

Kai Ryssdal: You know, we'll just see how it goes. See how it goes.

Molly Wood: Anything could happen.

Kai Ryssdal: Anything could truly happen. There we go.