

Make Me Smart September 30, 2021 transcript

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Molly Wood: That would be kind of amazing. Like you know what? I don't want you to listen.

Kai Ryssdal: I don't want you to listen, actively. Now Charlton starts in cause we're being jerks. We want all of you to listen to everything. Pay no attention to what that man behind the curtain says.

Molly Wood: How many times do I have to tell you? Be nice to the engineers.

Kai Ryssdal: Welcome back to Make Me Smart, where we make the day make sense. And you know he's sitting there looking at the clock going three, two, boom. There we go.

Molly Wood: Yeah, yeah. I'm Molly Wood. Thanks for joining us. It's hollowed out shell Thursday. I've been calling today D gaff Thursday and for those of you who know what that is, you know what I'm talking about. Which means the news fix might be a little spicy and or dark placey. Hopefully if you sent us make me smiles and one of you did. We'll have you smiling by the end of the show. It has been, I mean, I think we should acknowledge right now that even though we are not a politics podcast, like just the sort of sheer insanity at the Washington level, I think has added yet another layer of just delightful stress and madness.

Kai Ryssdal: That's exactly right. That's exactly right.

Molly Wood: So like, turn it off. Honestly, turn it off. Because you do not need the blow by blow of whether America is somehow going to ruin America, you don't need it. Just wait for the breaking news alerts, like did or did not.

Kai Ryssdal: America has ruined America, this just in from the New York Times. Okay, let's go, why don't, why don't you go first?

Molly Wood: Oh, my goodness. Um, you know, many times when there's a hearing in Congress and Facebook has to come and answer for the things that it has done and give the blame, it doesn't feel that meaningful. I got to say, like, kudos to The Wall Street Journal for bringing us, I almost hesitate to say this out loud, but for bringing us the closest we've ever been to the possibility of accountability for this company. Because like, by revealing all of these internal documents and causing Congress, these internal documents, of course, we've talked about this several times, but in case you're just joining us, welcome, hooray. You're gonna love it. The, the, the stories that they published called the Facebook files that that made it pretty incontrovertible

that Facebook has been made aware more than once of the damages that it can cause ranging from, you know, sex trafficking to organized crime to damaging the self esteem of kids, and so on and so forth, resulted in hearings today that also sort of resulted in Facebook, kind of shockingly, like on purpose releasing and, and the Wall Street Journal publishing, releasing its own internal research, right. So they were like, okay, well, here are the annotated slides of the original research that we conducted. And they're, and they're very proud of this, like, we're doing the, this research because, yeah, we really want to know. And then they release it with these annotations, these notes on the side of every single slide that are basically like, no, I don't know how many of you have. That's what they say. That's what they saw. Like, I don't know how many of you have engineers in your lives, but I have a couple and one and two in particular tend to sort of respond to things with like, no. And those things might be like, I feel this way. No. And that's all, that's literally, it's really funny.

Kai Ryssdal: That is the role I play in those conversations that people have with me. People mostly hear the guy, my friends and my wife will be like, no.

Molly Wood: No, it helps if you turn it into a family joke. So tell your family they should just like, gang up on you on holidays. But that's all I could think about when I was reading this, right? It would be like, for example, you know, a third of teens generally say this is terrible, and we're having a really hard time and it makes us feel bad. And then the notes on the side are like, no, this actually doesn't say that. And even if it says that, it's only this many and then they only said that. I mean it's like I believe one somebody on Twitter described it as like, utterly divorced from reality. Because in every case, some note comes in work and school stress has the highest reach for teenagers, right, over half of them experience sleep issues, body image issues, sadness and financial stress. And then the notes will be like, no, these screening questions weren't about experiences on Instagram or related to Instagram specifically, but actually whether a person had these--so they commissioned research, and then they assigned a team, probably for Mark Zuckerberg's benefit, to go and just like contradict every single slide of the research, it's unbelievable. It's unbelievable. You got to go read it. And Congress, despite some whiffs today, was having none of it for the most part. A rare moment of nonpartisanship.

Kai Ryssdal: That's good that they're not having any of it right because for too long as you and I have talked about a gazillion times, it's been oh we're really sorry we'll do better and here we are, you know.

Molly Wood: And now they're not saying sorry anymore, that's their new strategy, which is great, because you know what, that's what they just get us a step closer to are you actually going to do anything about this? We shall see. Yeah.

Kai Ryssdal: Okay, you're gonna keep going to third one here. Are you want to, are you good?

Molly Wood: Um, yes. Well, I do. So I tweeted about this. So I think, I know, normally I don't tweet my business, but it was just one of those. It, I was upset and angry. So the the news, pag, first of all, is that there's a story at NBC News about how COVID is killing rural Americans at

twice the rate of people in urban areas. We like they're much like with Facebook, we shouldn't need any more data to tell us how stark this divide is. The Times I think, had a piece David Leonhardt, from the upshot calling it red COVID, which I think at this point is almost what it has to be called given these disparities, but they're also disparities in places where the, where there isn't robust health and education and diet to start with, and then you have low vaccination rates and all these things that are happening and it's, it's this quote from the story by this, head of the National Rural Health Association said like I almost want to cry, just saying it. We've turned many rural communities into kill boxes. And there's no movement towards addressing what we're seeing in many of these communities, either among the public or among governing officials. Which gets me to the thing I tweeted, which is that on Monday, my mother, who's fully vaccinated but elderly and immunocompromised, was how to go to the ER with COVID pneumonia and super low blood, I mean, I can talk about it now because they think they might really start tomorrow after giving her every drug imaginable. She had monoclonal antibodies twice, she had the steroids like I call it the presidential package. Yesterday she was at the stage you know when Trump made the Secret Service drive them around in suburban. Yeah, that was kind of my mom yesterday. She was real hyped up on steroids, remdesivir, like all of it, all of it. And they just today took her off oxygen to see if she can breathe well enough on her and to go home today, tomorrow, the next day. I mean, she was like it was a real close call. And it was a real close call because she lives in an area that doesn't have herd immunity and a super low vaccination rates and she was in the hot, they it took them 15 hours to find her a hospital bed, that's another thing they talked about in this article that there's nowhere to send people and there's no, they, there, they often can't transfer them to places with better care because those places are full. The hospital she's at has 80 COVID patients, four of them are vaccinated.

Kai Ryssdal: And of course you could not get on a plane even if you had been so inclined because you've got, you know work, and a child and all this, you can't get on a plane because you can't get in the hospital to see her, do I have that right?

Molly Wood: Can't go to the hospital to see her, yep. And neither could her husband who also has COVID. And also, so it's not like we could go stay there. He isn't, yeah, I mean it's just, it's, it's like the, it's the American story playing out almost two years into this pandemic. Almost like minute for minute, right, they can't find a bed, the ICUs are full, the like, thank God the drugs were actually available. Because if they hadn't been, I don't know. But we cannot continue to like sort of not, I don't know, be honest about this divide and what it's doing to people. And I don't, I don't know that like, shaman rage is, I've had a lot of rage and I've wanted to shame a lot of people, but I don't think that's how we get out. I really don't.

Kai Ryssdal: It doesn't work. We talked about that. It doesn't work.

Molly Wood: It's like we need radical love so that people feel safe to take care of themselves when they're being told not to for somebody else's benefit.

Kai Ryssdal: Yeah. Okay, deep breath we'll take a little turn. I'll do a little different news. Okay?

Molly Wood: I can't wait.

Kai Ryssdal: Here's one that actually I saw and I said, oh, I gotta put that in there because it's really gonna bug Molly in the kindest and most loving way, it's gonna bug you. So, so here's the URL starting tomorrow. And let's back up for a minute. Ms. Wood has had many, many, many news items, which are about the United States Postal Service, and Louis De Joy, the Trump appointee who's still somehow in charge of the US Postal Service. Yes, I know it's the Board of Governors, don't at me. Anyway, starting tomorrow, first class mail delivery, the standard for delivery will go from one to three days if you mail, for first class letters and periodicals, to one to five days. Okay, so we've known for a while that mail is slowing. But here's the deal. Here's the deal. The Postal Service says, no, that's actually a good thing. Because it's going to make things more predictable and reliable. Even if it's just a little more slow. That's, that's what I got. That's, that's lemonade out of lemons. Lemonade out of lemons. And I just, I put that in there.

Molly Wood: I mean, that guy is just winning. He's just continuing to sit there on his little mushroom.

Kai Ryssdal: And let's remember, he runs a company that's in direct competition with the United States Postal Service, which is the root cause of, of all the airtime he's gotten on this podcast. Okay, my second and more substantive one is this, we learned today, and I'm sorry to have to drag you back into the news. But it's kind of relevant, you know, in a much bigger picture kind of way. So Congress is going back and forth on three and a half trillion dollars. Joe Manchin thinks this, Kyrsten Sinema thinks this. Sorry, Kyrsten Cinema thinks this. A trillion and a half blah, blah, blah, whatever. Right? So this morning, Politico gets its hands on a, I can only call it a deal sheet that Joe Manchin sent to Chuck Schumer this summer about what Manchin will accept and the conditions for accepting it in some kind of infrastructure plan. And right at the top of the page, okay, top line \$1.5 trillion. We're going to start debate no earlier than October the first this year, which by the way, is tomorrow, and goes down to another list of preconditions. And then he says, Federal Reserve ends quantitative easing. Okay. So this is a member of congress putting as a condition for his vote, the Federal Reserve ending its big bond buying program. Okay, yeah. Now, a couple of things that I have to say about that. Number one, by statute, the Federal Reserve is an independent agency. Number two, so Manchin wants interest rates to go up. Okay, that's what's gonna happen when the Fed stops by all those bonds. Okay, fine. But number three, let's flip this around. And let's say that somebody wanted the Federal Communications Commission to reinstate Ajit Pai's policy on net neutrality. That's fundamentally what's happening here. Right, is that the Congress is saying, hey, you independent agency charged with rigorous regulatory oversight of XYZ part of this economy, do what I want or I'm not going to vote for this big other thing that affects the entire economy. And that to me, that's quite something, that is quite freakin something.

Molly Wood: And it's one person out of 535. Right?

Kai Ryssdal: I just, I find that kind of gobsmacking.

Molly Wood: Who, by the way, I think received, is still, there was like, now people are starting to say, hey, I noticed that you are still getting all this money from this energy company that you founded, getting dividends from that. And they're just saying there's a lot of climate stuff in there. And there's a lot of fossil fuel money floating around. Yeah, it's I you know, I follow Justin Amash on Twitter. He is a former member of Congress. Yeah, a libertarian. And he has been a really outspoken and very interesting critic of the way that Congress works, for example, the fact that a bill like this, and it's actually super interesting reading and maybe it's up early, I don't really know, but when he talks about is how representative government is not in fact at all, and not just because of like corruption or that you, know, or big, you know, lobbying and all the money that flows into politician coffers. But because leadership of each party goes into a room, crafts a bill, brings it out and a lot of times the rank and file certainly in the house where there are tons of them, but also in the Senate. They don't, they don't see it. They don't know what's in it. They don't, they, and they don't have floor debates where everybody can like, introduce amendments and go back and forth and you know, a process would occur and you might come out with a bill that in fact represents what the entire, you know, congressional body might want to happen. And he was pointing out on Twitter that that's exactly the reason that this particular bill right now can be held up even when the Democrats have a slim majority by two people. Because if you just brought it to the floor, the way the Congress was supposed to work and said, okay, fight it out, right. Thunderdome. That then you would sort of be forced to get to something more representative as opposed to like, right, I want interest rates to go up? Why? Because I'm invested.

Kai Ryssdal: Like, what is that? Because I said so. Yeah.

Molly Wood: Yeah. So it's easy to blame the people, the individuals, but it's also the system.

Kai Ryssdal: Just for sure.

Molly Wood: For sure, yeah. Totally agree. Totally agree, bonkers.

Kai Ryssdal: Yeah. All right. All right.

Molly Wood: Let's do the world's quick.

Kai Ryssdal: You got to do, you got to

Molly Wood: I do. This one thing made me laugh. Just literally going to read it. Thank you to Brian Richardson at Silicon Chef on Twitter. Who sent me a screenshot of trending in the United States from earlier today. And I'm just gonna read this because this is the timeline that we're in right now. Lindsay Lohan partners with canine cartel to auction off an NFT of her furry themed avatar, also known as a firstsona. I don't know. I have no comment on that at all except--

Kai Ryssdal: My persona.

Molly Wood: If you would like there to be higher quality make me smile items on our show, or if you want to share something that made you smile I mean actually that really did make me laugh out loud. So thank you so much for signing it. Do exactly what he did, send it to us. Sometimes it's hard for us to find them because we're doom scrollers by nature. Yeah, but also we care what amuses you, record and send us a voice memo or an email makemesmart@marketplace.org or you can call us and leave us a voicemail, our number is 508-827-6278, 508-UB-SMART.

Kai Ryssdal: And with that we're done, back tomorrow for economics on tap the YouTube Live Stream, we'll do some discord as well. 3:30 Pacific time. Check your local listings wherever else you are and if you don't want to miss the show, by the way, subscribe to this podcast to get new episodes straight to your feed and into your brain.

Molly Wood: It's only a matter of time, we're so close to the matrix.

Kai Ryssdal: Make Me Smart is produced by Marissa Cabrera. Today's episode was engineered by Charlton Thorp, engineer resident.

Molly Wood: Donna Tam is in the senior producer chair today and says she should have sent us cakes, and the executive director of on demand is Sitara Nieves.

Kai Ryssdal: Little host management there, Donna.

Molly Wood: Always send cakes. What's so funny is I cannot believe, wow, I'm looking at this now, the deal sheet.

Kai Ryssdal: Oh, it's crazy.

Molly Wood: Feeling his oats, I guess, feeling his oats.