

Make Me Smart November 11, 2021 transcript

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Kai Ryssdal: Alright, there we go.

Molly Wood: It's like you sparked it. You caused it. Amazing.

Kai Ryssdal: My brain today, I don't even know what. Hey, everybody. I'm Kai Ryssdal. Welcome back to Make Me Smart, making today make sense is what we do around here.

Molly Wood: I'm Molly Wood. It's hollowed out shell Thursday, which means we might verge into the dark place after a long week. But it's not yet Friday. Hopefully, we will be smiling by the end, though it is also Happy Veterans Day to Kai and all our veterans out there. Thanks for your service, for your service, and working. Thanks for working today.

Kai Ryssdal: Yeah, yeah, I should have taken it off. I should take my birthday off. And I should take veterans day off. I should.

Molly Wood: Yes, you should.

Kai Ryssdal: But I don't cause I'm just not good at that stuff. But anyway, shall we move on?

Molly Wood: Yes. Let's move on to the news.

Kai Ryssdal: All right, to the news. I got a couple, one of which I was not surprised at and one of which I was. The first one that I was not surprised at was that Rivian, that new electric SUV and truck and Amazon delivery van company that went public yesterday, was up another 22% today. And here's the thing that kind of gob smacked me about it. And it honestly, it doesn't make a lot of sense. Rivian, which I think has an order for 100,000 vans from Amazon and has sold some, like not a terribly large number of vehicles at all, is now worth more than General Motors, which sells 8 to 9 million cars a year. And I know we did the whole Tesla thing when it became a trillion-dollar company and all of this, but the valuation just doesn't make any sense. And I fear that we're headed for a fall. And look, I'm all about the electric car space. And yes, it's great. And it's good for the company. And I hope investors make a lot of money. And I hope the company pumps out zillions of cars, but they're not yet. And so how do you get like a, like a \$90 billion market cap on day two? I don't get it. I don't get it.

Molly Wood: It is, I mean, yeah, uh huh. These are, this is like, there needs to be sort of a stock market fundamentals thing like, dear kids, this is what price to earnings ratio means. This is not

that these are marketing companies, right? They're not car companies right now. They're marketing companies. And they're doing a great job at it. I mean, Tesla is making money. But the amount of money it's earning relative to its market cap is--they're very far away, let's say, they're very far apart.

Kai Ryssdal: Not even in the same like, neighborhood. Anyway, here's the thing that really surprised me in a not very good way. An article in The Guardian today about climate change and about the world militaries. And it turns out, say scientists for global responsibility, that the world's militaries combined and the industries that provide them their armaments are estimated to create 6% of all global emissions. Again, that's from scientists for global responsibility. Now, when you think that commercial aviation is, is responsible for 2% of all global emissions, 6% is a lot. And here's the really gobsmacking part. Here's the thing. The emissions by a country's defense establishment are not held against them according to the Paris treaty. They don't have to report that, it doesn't count. It doesn't count. It's craziness. I had no idea.

Molly Wood: I had no idea. That's absolutely astonishing. 6%, and it's just automatically excluded. And apparently it was the case under the Kyoto Protocol, after lobbying from ding ding ding the US government. Of course. Just, we just want to burn, we just want to roll coal on those fast airplanes. I mean, that really is astonishing. Yeah, the giant ships.

Kai Ryssdal: Yes! Well, at least in the American Navy all the really giant ships are nuclear powered but, but I mean, come on, you know?

Molly Wood: Yeah. Yeah.

Kai Ryssdal: It makes no sense. We can't get there from here if, if the American military can just do whatever we want.

Molly Wood: Yep. The literal opposite of how we survive is how we fail. And this is that. To carve out loopholes the size of, you know, well, the world's military. Wow. Well, you know what? Knowing is half the battle, so good job The Guardian for digging up that little factlet. Whoo. I mean, on the climate front, I had started out with a true hollowed out shell Thursday story, which was the climate scientists from the UN who on Tuesday released a report saying, you know, that halfway through COP26, I guess is the word I'm looking for. Based on the, you know, utterly halfhearted, totally watered down agreements and comments that had come out of cop 26 as of Tuesday, and that was before the US and China at least had a, like a surprise agreement to try to tackle this together. Which, you know, was something but not a lot. But that based on these watered-down promises, the world is on track for 2.5 full degrees Celsius of warming. Now, what's considered the hard stop goal here is 1.5 degrees Celsius by the end of the century. And that's still not a good scenario, right? That's still a scenario in which there is massive, frankly, death, suffering, migration, you know, huge adaptation necessary, and that we're actually on track for a much faster degree of warming of the type that will start to trigger collapses that we actually can't even predict, like tipping points that will push us over into, you know, into things that like, really pretty sober minded scientists are referring to as the collapse of civilization. Like

that's what a disaster COP26 has been. So far, like not even trying. So instead of that, even though I totally talked about it, I decided to put in this other story which is a little more hopeful, because as I have said over and over and over, the reason that I started doing all this climate coverage was upon hearing a climate scientist be like, oh, yeah, no, we're screwed. It's an engineering problem now. And so call me a technocrat, but it is. So thank goodness we are evidently getting kind of tantalizingly close to nuclear fusion, which is, you know--yeah, evidently. So two things. One, there have been a bunch of scientific breakthroughs specifically, in China. There is a nuclear fusion startup called helion which raised \$500 million, saying that it's developed new technologies that may make nuclear fusion viable. And to explain what this is, it's different from nuclear power, it's essentially an unlimited source of carbon free energy. And so there's kind of, and this has been like, the pipe dream for a really long time, the science was too expensive, like the, you know, technology didn't exist or false. We're getting closer and closer. Yeah. False alarms, like, I'm sure that, you know, the oil and gas industry has been quietly disappearing scientists. That's rank speculation on my part. But on the premise that we might be getting closer, there's kind of a great piece in Bloomberg that tries to imagine what that would mean, like what a world of cheap, clean energy, essentially unlimited carbon neutral energy would mean, and all of the ways that the, the, the chain reactions, the almost unpredictable chain reactions that that would cause, right? Like, he points out, it's this guy, Tyler Cowen, he's like, let's say you, okay, you can't use nuclear fusion to fly a jet plane, but you could definitely use it to split hydrogen and oxygen into clean hydrogen fuel, and then replace fossil fuels in airplanes. You could have, you could desalinate water on a massive scale because it would just be like, super cheap, right? Turn Nevada into a forest, heating and cooling, forget about it, do whatever you want. Like, it just becomes this kind of magical enabler of things that will have profound influence. And so I bring it up mainly because it's a really interesting read, because I hope we get there, and also because, honestly, at this point, this is how we're gonna get there. We're gonna have to invent it, invent our way out. Because we're not getting any help.

Kai Ryssdal: We don't have enough time. We don't have enough time.

Molly Wood: Well, I mean, we have--

Kai Ryssdal: Because, yeah, and well, it's like you were saying the other day, right. When I said it was voluntary. And you said I was voluntary until it's not, right. And really, it's not voluntary. It all has to be mandatory, just, just morally and humanity-wise.

Molly Wood: I mean, we don't have enough time, right. We are out of time, in some ways. But we have time to save what we can. I guess. Which sounds like a really depressing, sounds like a very Thursday way to put it, but that's where we are. Save what you can. Also, this story like went by a couple, I guess it was yesterday, and I saved it for today because it's just so hollowed out shell. The US Department of Justice is suing Uber. Remember Uber? They're totally still around. They mostly just deliver food now. But apparently back then they were still picking up people and giving them rides places, when they had disabled passengers who needed more time to enter the car, Uber charged them a fee. Charged them a fee.

Kai Ryssdal: Classic Uber.

Molly Wood: Yep, started in 2016. It kicks in two minutes after a standard Uber arrives at a pickup location and is charged until the car begins its trip. Uber said the average wait time fee charged to riders is less than 60 cents. The Justice Department was like, no, that's actually terrible. And they sued them.

Kai Ryssdal: Yeah, just, you know, sorry, closing the door cause a kid's playing handball against the wall. Anyway, that's terrible.

Molly Wood: That's a real pick me up, though.

Kai Ryssdal: Kids are out of school today. Kids are out of school.

Molly Wood: Yeah, I know. Totally getting ignored because we're all working.

Kai Ryssdal: We all got things to do.

Molly Wood: Come on.

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

Molly Wood: On the cute kid note. Yeah. Well, speaking of veterans day--

Kai Ryssdal: Can you guys hear that?

Molly Wood: Yeah, I heard that. Dang!

Kai Ryssdal: I think she's playing tennis out there. I don't know what she's doing.

Molly Wood: Wow. That's kind of fun. I want to play the interrupt dad's podcast recording game. As someone with two, one cousin on call and one cousin actively in the US Navy, I appreciated the news today. It made me smile, that this is the first Veterans Day in two decades without any troops engaged in an act of war overseas.

Kai Ryssdal: Yeah, yeah, we should be, which is great news. We should be clear there are still American troops getting shot at and a lot of different places. But the large scale, the large scale ground activity has stopped. And that's a good thing, that's a good thing. Yeah. Yeah. Okay, mine is a little off the wall. So have you clicked this link or no, not yet?

Molly Wood: I'm gonna click it now. I didn't want to spoil it.

Kai Ryssdal: So we all remember Mark Zuckerberg's rollout of the metaverse and how he did this to the camera spiel about what it's gonna be. And then he took you into the metaverse and

it was great. So Iceland, Iceland clearly said, oh, my God. And so they got some Icelandic dude who looks a little bit like Zuckerberg, and they put him in a, in a, in a, like a, sort of a, you know, a cool little Icelandic looking living room or something. And he just talks. So we got a little bit of the tape. This thing goes two minutes, but ,but we've only got 30 seconds. Here we go.

Kai Ryssdal: And he looks out the window onto the Icelandic icescape and then he goes outside, its water, and anyway, it's awesome. It's two minutes of the country of Iceland dicking on Mark Zuckerberg. I apologize. But it was great, it was great.

Molly Wood: Just trolling the bejesus out of him. Oh my god, this is incredible. He totally has the, he has like the weird thing.

Kai Ryssdal: He's got the haircut and whole deal.

Molly Wood: This is incredible.

Kai Ryssdal: But I kind of love it.

Molly Wood: Also, let's go to Iceland. I mean, I'm just saying, this is working. Well done.

Kai Ryssdal: I really want to, it's gorgeous. Gorgeous. Yeah.

Molly Wood: I'll meet you there for spring break. Oh, he even has the sunscreen all over his face. Wow, good find.

Kai Ryssdal: Good find, huh? Twitter's amazing, Twitter's amazing. Anyway, that's my deal. That's my make me smile for today. I kind of loved it.

Molly Wood: Really, really good one. All right, try to top him audience, try to top him. Send us your make me smiles. Your other thoughts and questions, you can email us at makemesmart@marketplace.org. Or you can call us, our number is 508-827-6278, 508 you be smart. Also you can write to us on the website [marketplace.org/makem smart](http://marketplace.org/makemsmart) and you can just attach a little audio file. Easy peasy.

Kai Ryssdal: Easy peasy. All right. We're done, back tomorrow for economics on tap and the YouTube live stream, we'll do some discord as well. 3:30 on the West Coast, 6:30 back East. If you don't want to miss a show, you know what to do, right, subscribe and get new episodes straight to your phone or however you decide to get your podcasts. We'll be here for you when you do.

Molly Wood: The biggest make me smile and hollowed out shell Thursday is when the show's over and then tomorrow show is happy hour Friday. That's the best part.

Kai Ryssdal: Make Me Smart is produced by Marissa Cabrera. Today's episode was engineered by Drew Jostad.

Molly Wood: Bridget Bodnar is the Senior Producer and the interim, Interim Director of on demand is Donna Tam. A title that does not fit her awesomeness in the slightest.

Drew: Hey, everyone, it's Drew. We're planning some special surprises for Molly before she leaves. And we'd love your help. Send us your goodbye wishes for Molly so we can share them with her on our last week. You can email us with your note or voice memo attachment at makemesmart@marketplace.org. Just put goodbye note for Molly in the subject line, or leave us a voice message. Our number is 508-827-6278. That's 508-UB-SMART. Thanks for your help.