

Make Me Smart November 8, 2021 transcript

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Kimberly Adams: Not today, Satan. Not today. Molly Wood.

Molly Wood: Right. It's me, Satan, otherwise known as Molly Wood. Welcome back to Make Me Smart, the podcast where we make today make sense. It's already off to a great start, it's already gonna be awesome, best podcast of the week.

Kimberly Adams: And I'm Kimberly Adams in for Kai Ryssdal. Thank you for joining us. It is Monday and we're starting off on a light note because I just called Molly Satan. Yes, also known as what did we miss Monday, where we do a lightning round of stories you might have missed over the weekend along with one big news story of the day. And I should say the reason I called Molly Satan is because I don't want all the negativity she was trying to bring to my timeline.

Molly Wood: I did. I did. I sent her--I clicked on a trending topic and then I tried to share it, which is basically the crappiest thing you can do to anybody. Like first, don't click it. And second, if you do click it, don't share it. It's like the new cybersecurity. It's like, don't download the attachment. It's like the ring. Don't share it. In case you're wondering where Kai Ryssdal is, by the way, this is very exciting. He is off on a sudden field trip to Washington, DC to interview Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen, so stay tuned for that. Is he going to come visit? I would hope. Stay tuned for that. But on the plus side, we get to hang with Yellen.

Kimberly Adams: Yes, yes, yes, yes. So yeah, let's, let's do the news fix. I mean, like you say, there's only one big story.

Molly Wood: Infrastructure week. It finally happened.

Kimberly Adams: I thought you were gonna go with the climate one.

Molly Wood: I mean, I am. But I really think I want to actually just like, talk about infrastructure because this is a huge freaking deal. It is an unqualified huge deal. And everything that I've seen reported about it has been so qualified that it's kind of annoying. And I think we should just talk about your story, which is what is in it?

Kimberly Adams: Yeah, it's, so of course, I linked to the version of it that ran in the St. Louis Post Dispatch, because I'm from St. Louis. But it's in many, many places. But yeah, this is actually a huge deal. And like you said, so many people are focused on, oh, yeah, this finally got done. But everybody really is waiting for the build back better and the social spending bill, and

it's like, wait a moment. Yes. All of those things are very important. And the compromises that were made are going to be really meaningful in terms of impact and who does and doesn't, you know, get government benefits as a result of these negotiations. But what actually did end up in this infrastructure bill after years and years and administration after administration trying to get something done on infrastructure is pretty freakin significant. We've got, I'm just gonna run through some of these things, \$110 billion for fixing highways, bridges and roads, that's about 173,000 miles of highways, 45,000 miles of bridges that are in poor condition, public transit, almost \$40 billion for public transit, including improving accessibility for people with disabilities. Passenger and freight rail, improving Amtrak's maintenance backlog. A lot of that's towards the northeast corridor, which one could argue is like the area that needs the least help but it does have the most traffic so it's kind of a whatever there. But \$7.5 billion for electric vehicle charging stations, \$65 billion for broadband access, especially for rural, low income and tribal communities. \$65 billion for modernizing the electric grid, \$25 billion for airports, \$55 billion on wastewater and water infrastructure, including \$15 billion to replace lead pipes. I mean, there's a lot more in this. I mean, I read somewhere that there's like money in there to help self-driving cars better recognize when they're about to hit a pedestrian or a biker. There is so much in this and, you know, even the people who did not vote for it are going to be taking credit for a lot of the ways that this money shows up in local communities.

Molly Wood: Oh, for sure. A bill that the White House is projecting will average 2 million jobs per year over the coming decade is definitely going to be taken credit for, for which credit is going to be taken. Credit is going to be taken. Let's just put it that way.

Kimberly Adams: And this definitely was bipartisan. It did, it did have a lot of, I mean, there are some Republicans who crossed the aisle in the House to vote for this to make sure that it got through. And there was definitely bipartisan support on the Senate side. So there was compromise. It got ugly. It was a lot of fighting. But Congress worked.

Molly Wood: Yeah, I mean, it really did. Like it was ugly, messy legislating. Nobody likes legislating. Nobody likes to watch it, except for maybe Kimberly, cause she reads all the bills. But, you know, America, the American public does not like to watch legislating, it is not good TV. And we don't like it when like, one thing succeeds. But there's a big flashy thing on fire, like I get that. But when you look at the number of things that are a part of this bill that are like, biggest investment,in decades, biggest dedicated investments since the construction of the highway or in history, this is like a, this is a pivotal moment in investment in American infrastructure, full stop. Like we are going to be talking about this alongside the construction of the transportation, the interstate transportation system. It's a really, really, really big deal.

Kimberly Adams: Yeah. And all of the things that are being said about how important the social spending bill that's going to have, if it passes, many, many things that are going to be super meaningful for caregivers and families and climate change. Very important piece of legislation as well. But this got done.

Molly Wood: This got done. Yeah, totally. And I just didn't want to sleep on that.

Kimberly Adams: Actually, let me not say. The President hasn't signed it yet. But he says that he will. It is not officially, officially done. It's like, almost done. Okay.

Molly Wood: Yeah, I told you she likes legislating. Alright, what else you got?

Kimberly Adams: Okay, a story from the 19th that I really thought was great over the weekend. I mean, pretty much the 19th does such a great job on so many pieces, especially as they relate to women. Chabeli Carrazana, who's, I think we did a deep dive with her at one point, if I'm not mistaken, or maybe it was on the PM show but I forget. Anyway, she has a piece about how moms with access to remote work were the most likely to leave their jobs in the pandemic, which is really fascinating because we've talked about women being sort of left behind in the recovery and because of lack of access to childcare. But a lot of that narrative has been about low income women or women without college degrees not having access to the same opportunities. But in this case, it's the women who were able to work from home, but had to work from home and take care of their kids that the pandemic broke them. And it's so fascinating and really good write up of that research. I mean, you probably have many more thoughts about this than even I do, Molly.

Molly Wood: I could certainly relate. Yeah, I mean, it's such a heartbreakingly scenario on every level because it points to moms who had the resources to quit, unlike the ones who didn't, and found themselves in the absolutely impossible position of neglecting one thing or the other, right, their kids or their work, or hopefully had family to step in and fill the gap. But that, you know, it was this impossible burden, even though men were also at home. The dynamic of women and the emotional labor and the unpaid labor at work, and the burden of childcare was still so significant that if women found themselves in the position of having like, you know, let's say a bit, in fact, I mean, I can tell you I know all of these women, I am one of these women, but I have at least the luxury of not managing 40 or 100 people, which some of my friends do. Like, imagine that you have, you know, some big VP or SVP or EVP job and 40 to 100 employees and two little kids at home. It's like, you pick one of those things. And that's what happened. It's infuriating.

Kimberly Adams: And people chose their kids. Yeah.

Molly Wood: When they could, yeah.

Kimberly Adams: If they had the option. Speaking of tough choices, the other big story that is also the only story, climate change, and this amazing long read in The Washington Post about climate change data or the data around global warming. So the Washington Post did this investigation that basically said all of these countries around the world that have been claiming that they've been reducing emissions or they're offsetting emissions by planting trees and all these things, yeah, a lot of it's BS. Like, it's just not true. And that it's, it's, I can't even explain all the math behind it. It's kind of complicated. But basically, they did a deep dive into all the ways that these countries are reporting their emissions data, and what data you can actually measure because as we covered on marketplace tech the other day, the ability of scientists to measure

emissions has gotten so much better and so much more precise. But what that means is that now you can fact check these countries' claims about emissions. And a lot of those numbers just do not add up. It's a long piece, but it's really fascinating and super important.

Molly Wood: Yeah, definitely. We should also make it super clear that the United States is for sure one of those countries. That was like a weird freudian slip. We are definitely one of those countries who is putting out some bologna reporting about how our national forests are like a giant carbon sink that totally offsets all of the methane stuff that we're not even counting. Oh, okay. Good job. Great job, guys. I will speed through a couple of these things that I think you should read. No, I mean, I'm so with you on those two big stories that, you know, the other one actually that's along a similar vein, is this--I read it in the LA Times. And the underlying report was published by this independent Swiss Research Group, Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime that studied actually plastic, the way that plastic, which you know, Americans love to think is being recycled, is not only not being recycled, as we've discussed, but a lot of times, it's shipped overseas, often with the help of organized crime groups who would just act as like, middlemen to make this happen, and ends up in countries where it's supposed to be illegal for those countries to even accept it. Part of the reason this is happening from the United States in particular is that around 2019, the United States declined to sign on to a global pledge that would stop this kind of, you know, like shadow dumping in these countries. And because we have not ratified this agreement, we just, American companies are continuing to send waste to countries like Malaysia and Indonesia, even though it's illegal for them to accept it. Oh, and PS, at least a third of that waste is coming from California, where all those, you know, well meaning people put into place these waste bans, right, like, oh, you can oh, you can only have a certain amount of waste in the dump in California. But didn't. This is just like, this is like one of my favorite fun things that people do, didn't set up a mechanism to either recycle or legally dispose of that waste. And so all of these, like, happy liberals in California just recycling away are literally sending a third of the world's plastic to like, these countries where they shouldn't even have to take it. It's just delightful. I think everyone should read this great piece, actually, in the Washington Post, also, that I just thought was so interesting about American Airlines cancellations, and how it's a window into why Americans are so upset with economy, why even though things are, are empirically, right, according to jobs reports, and the stock market and all the economic analysis that you hear on marketplace every day, empirically getting better. The truth is, most of us feel rightly like nothing is working. You can't get like, a doctor on the phone. You can't, your airline, you know, your flight keeps getting canceled. The things that you used to pay for you pay the same amount and it's like smaller, right? They're calling it skimpflation, the idea that like, things are crappier and you're paying the same, and I just thought it was such a good point, which is like, I feel that all the time. I'm like, I just need the systems around me to help and everybody's telling me it doesn't work because of COVID but like, I still have to work as hard as I ever did. So why? Okay, and then before we get to official make me smile. The thing that just like thrilled me this weekend, thrilled me, was this guy on Twitter, green pointer. Calls himself Charlemagne the gourd because why wouldn't he? Who made a Twitter thread ranking all of the 46 Imperial Faberge eggs. Yeah, I know, I didn't think I cared about this either. The house of Faberge, turns out, made 52, who knew, as Easter gifts for

Tsars Alexander the third and Nicholas the second to give to their wives and moms, 46 survive. And this person on Twitter ranked them all and it's fascinating, all of these links.

Kimberly Adams: I went so deep into this thread this weekend that it's one of those things like I absolutely did not know that I cared about it. But I decided that it was worth a good chunk of my time this weekend. I like

Molly Wood: I like, cared so much I had to look up the part where he made the like throwaway reference to how the Romanov children are missing which was a little on the nose. So what happened to the Romanov children? You know, it is wonderful. I know, I just couldn't remember all the details.

Kimberly Adams: Okay, fair. It's a great thread and very interesting.

Molly Wood: And I feel like I had to end on a slight happy before we go to official make me smiles, coming up next. What did we miss Monday is no joke, guys. There was like, three links in there that I just had to skip. But for today, this is so wonderful, we have two. Are you kidding? No, those were all the best. The first one is from listener Jennifer in Mountain View, California who shares a literal smile, a Twitter thread and a news article about a smiley face that was planted in plants on the side of a mountain using Douglas fir and hybrid large trees in Oregon, overlooking highway 18. Literal smiles made out of trees. I mean.

Kimberly Adams: I also love that the story we have for this is from the Yamhill county news register. Yay, support local journalism all the way.

Molly Wood: I was just gonna say, we know this a rule. Yep. Let's make it a rule that we always have to link to a local news source that isn't owned by a hedge fund, ideally.

Kimberly Adams: There's not a lot of those. But uh, hey, super big fan. It's so cute. It's so cute. And, you know, it's interesting, I guess everything does come back to climate change. Because the, the whole reason that there's this giant smiley face on the hill was that they knew they needed to harvest these trees because it's land designed to be logged, but they also knew it was going to look really ugly once they cut a section of forest from the side of the hill. So they were like, let's find a way to make it not look so terrible. And so they planted it with different types of trees to make a smiley face.

Molly Wood: That is absolutely delightful. Absolutely delightful.

Kimberly Adams: Okay, and the second make me smile comes from listener Renee, who sends us a YouTube video by the ever wonderful owl kitty in which the dinosaur in a scene from Jurassic Park is replaced by a cat. You know that scene where they're like in the car, and they're trying to hold like really still as the T Rex coming. And then somebody moves and it's like, he goes after them and all that stuff. Imagine that T Rex is a kitty cat, a giant fluffy cat. It's, it is, as you say, delightful.

Molly Wood: And it's so well done.

Kimberly Adams: Owl Kitty does pretty great videos, I must say. Those are, those are well done. And I'm very grateful for green screens every time I watch one of those.

Molly Wood: Bravo, once again, Owl Kitty. and thank you to those of you who sent us make me smiles. These are both so good.

Kimberly Adams: Yes. And we needed them for sure, for sure. Because it's about to be a week if today is any indication. Oh, my god. But that's it for today. Tomorrow we are going to do a deep dive on the unprecedented number of Americans who are just saying, forget it. And they're quitting. They're leaving their jobs. It's being called the Great insert the--well, I don't want to say the R word. It's a lot of people leaving their jobs. And I know Kai feels some kind of way about this.

Molly Wood: Who cares? It's being called the great resignation. I have no feelings about it. That's what it's being called, so now you know we're talking about everyone. I just typed it into the script.

Kimberly Adams: Into the scripts. Great resignation. Got it. So, yeah.

Molly Wood: Yeah. We would love to hear from you in advance of that episode about this idea. I guess if you have something else you want to call it, sure makemesmart@marketplace.org. Or you can call us and leave us a voice message. Our number is 508-827-6278 or 508-UB-SMART. I literally fixed it. I really am snotty.

Kimberly Adams: Make Me Smart is produced by Marissa Cabrera. Today's program was engineered by Lianna Squillace. Tony Wagner writes our newsletters.

Molly Wood: Our senior producer is Bridget Bodnar and the interim director of on demand is Donna Tam. Our newsletter, by the way, I believe is where you will find some of the links that were skipped today because Tony has been diligently collecting them and keeping them.

Kimberly Adams: Yes, Tony is awesome. He is, in fact, not Satan.

Molly Wood: Unlike someone on the Zoom, Tony is not Satan. I think we can all agree Satan is the trending topics embodied.