

S4 E22: Each One Teach One

(AJ II & Akela Lacy)

Previously recorded on Thursday, August 29th, 2019

0:00 AJ: This week: *The Intercept's*, Akela Lacy, gives a crash course on U.S. government and Politics. She also informs us about the next election cycle, and bills to pay attention to during the upcoming legislative session. Stay tuned, you're listening to *Max Out Time!*

0:16 Intro Song: 'For The City'

0:52 AJ: Akela, how are you today?

0:55 Akela: Arthur, I'm great, how are you?

0:57 AJ: I'm good, how you been?

0:59 Akela: I've been good, I've been good, enjoying the rest of the summer.

1:02 AJ: So what's new with *The Intercept*, tell us more about what you do there?

1:07 Akela: So I am a politics reporter at *The Intercept*, I cover congress and a variety of other things like, politics at the state level, I cover immigration and criminal justice as well.

1:21 AJ: So you've been kicking it AOC a little bit and her staff, you know –

1:25 Akela: A little bit!

1:26 AJ: NDP...

1:27 Akela: [laughs] Yeah!

1:28 AJ: The speaker ...

1:30 Akela: Here and there...

1:31 AJ: Here and there? So as a politics reporter, you mentioned Congress, you mentioned a variety of other things, because of *The Intercept* as a smaller outlet. For you though, what exactly does that mean when you cover, when you say a variety, what is the spectrum? From the Senate Judiciary Committee to the House Armed Services Committee, give us an idea.

1:56 Akela: So, our bureau is quite small in DC, which means we cover a variety of different committees you just named. I'll cover a Senate Judiciary hearing or we'll be covering House Armed Services' mark up of a reauthorization of the National Defense Act –

2:17 AJ: The National Defense Reauthorization Act?

2:18 Akela: Yeah, those are two very specific examples, but then we also cover basically splits within the democratic party, we cover close door meetings, and kind of try and chronicle the tensions that are playing out alongside all of the whole legislative business that's going on in those communities.

2:39 AJ: So, you cover a lot of the storylines on Capitol Hill, is what you're saying?

2:42 Akela: Yes, exactly.

2:44 AJ: I I think one of the reasons why I brought you here is because, I would like for you to kind of break down some of these terms. Like, the nat...say it for me again?

2:54 Akela [laughs] The National Defense Reauthorization Act.

2:57 AJ: The National Defense Reauthorization Act. Like, I'm pretty read in about what Congress does in in Capitol Hill issues, but I don't really know the first thing about the National Defense Reauthorization Act. I know a lot of people listening might not know - you know - where that act will even take place, and how that'll be enacted, so break it all the way down. If you're talking to a foreigner, somebody who knows nothing about United States government, what are the Halls of Congress? Like, what does that even mean? Where is Capitol Hill? Why are these uh places and entities, and the things that these people do here, these legislators do here, why's that so vital?

3:42 Akela: Okay, so, yes, as if I were talking to someone who has no idea what this is -

3:47 AJ: None whatsoever.

3:48 Akela: The Capitol is the seat of the legislative branch of the United States government. So, alongside the Executive and the Judicial branches; Executive is the White House, the Supreme Court is the top of the judiciary branch, and the Capitol, located in Washington DC -

4:09 AJ: The Capital of the United States.

4:10 Akela: The Capital of the United States, the actual capitol building is located on the east side of the mall, the National Mall, for people who aren't from here, the National Mall. Basically it is the seat of power for 535 legislators, 100 senators, 435 members in the House of Representatives who are responsible for making, and amending the laws that govern our lives.

4:40 AJ: So, what's the difference between the senate and the house? Why are they called that? If I saw a congressional member, one of the 500 you just named and it wasn't Kamala Harris or Nancy Pelosi, like why should I know what they do, who are they are, and how would I know?

4:58 Akela: Yeah, that's a good question. A lot of people really have no idea, aside from some of like the star names that you've just mentioned, who is operating in these spaces. Every state has two senators and then they get proportional representation from members in the House. Essentially, these are the people who are supposed to be able to speak for their constituents, advocate for issues that matter to people in their states, and and make sure that the interests of people they are representing are reflected in legislative that are being developed that will affect the nation at federal level.

5:36 AJ: So, like California has a whole bunch of congress people?

5:40 Akela: Yes.

5:41 AJ: But, Rhode Island has very few.

5:44 Akela: Right.

5:45 AJ: Right, so if you're from Rhode Island, you got to know those very few people because they have an impact on your life, right?

5:51 Akela: Exactly. They have influence also on how State level politics play out, which might have more of a direct impact on people's lives, but legislators that are at the national level are making decisions about how much funding certain agencies get. They do everything from that from, you know, to giving the president power to declare war, so there's a lot of things that they are responsible for.

6:21 AJ: But, why care about these national legislators as opposed to your city mayor, governor in your state, your city council. What's the discrepancy between those two things?

6:33 Akela: Yeah. So at the State level, your representatives are more responsible for making decisions like when the garbage is going to get picked up, who's going to go on your school board, when the school year is going to start, funding for everything to tax breaks for people within certain municipalities, and representatives at the federal level. It's a question that is raised a lot, why should people care about what they are doing. I think it's less about, you know, advocating for things that will affect people's everyday lives from within the walls of congress, and more about making more top line decisions about budgets and how agencies are going to operate, and how to keep the president and the Executive Branch in check on a lot of things –

7:31 AJ: Is that the system of checks and balances that we –

7:35 Akela: That we all heard of and love, yes exactly. That's a question that comes up a lot especially being part of the Washington Press Corps. A lot of the issues that we are talking about, as far as what bills are being passed and the NDAA that we were talking about. It's like the average person, if you walk into a town or a grocery store or somewhere, they're not going to care about the juicy details of those kinds of things. It is also the seat of an immense amount of power, and are a lot of important decisions are made, or broken there.

8:14 AJ: So there's a huge election coming up, 2020, all different types of races, presidential is obviously the biggest. But, how do a lot of these elections and races work in the different states for the senators and congress. Can you describe what goes on and who's going to be up next and the kind of flow, if you will.

8:39 Akela: Senators serve six year terms and about a third of the senators are up for re-election during any given election. Members in the house serve two year terms, and those election are every even year. So in 2018, there were a ton of seats up –

8:55 AJ: The huge mid-term election?

8:57 Akela: In the house, in 2020, there will be a large number of seats up, well not a large number of seats up, there will be a more significant number of seats up in the Senate, than they have been in the past election cycle. Then there's also special elections, so when the senators retire or something happens, and even members in the House, if something happens and they're can no longer serve their term, or they decide not to, there will be special elections that will pop up in between those official cycles.

9:32 AJ: So just reading some of your articles, one of your last pieces, "Progressive Candidates Are Carving A Path to the Senate in 2020, No Thanks to Chuck Schumer." You spoke a lot about and also you have a clip on Hill TV that I were admiring, you did a really great job on that, that platform. You name a number of states that can be swung in the next election year, can you describe how important some of these states are, and what does it mean to swing from blue to red, red to blue, and how that helps or hurts the Senate in the House and causes.

10:09 Akela: I want to clarify; we're talking about red seats in the senate that can be flipped to blue and then, we are also are talking in a lot on our other coverage about actual states that will flip. States that went for Trump in 2016, that are potential to flip blue in 2020.

10:30 AJ: So you are specifically talking about the seats?

10:33 Akela: Yeah, so we were talking about senate seats, flipping senate seats in that article. There are a number of seats up for election in Alabama, Arizona, Maine, Georgia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Texas, Iowa and I'm probably forgetting a couple... uh Colorado, Montana, and basically the democratic senatorial campaign committee picks its preferred candidates, and helps them fundraise with name recognition, basically boost their campaigns. The republicans do the same thing, it's just how the party is structured and so, our article was about how Chuck Schumer, Senate Minority Leader, Chuck Schumer –

11:22 AJ: And he's a Minority Leader because –

11:24 Akela: Sorry, yes, he leads the Democratic Party in the senate. He is a senator from New York, so he is essentially the top democrat in the senate. He is not the official head of the body that I am talking about – the democratic senatorial campaign committee, that's another senator named Catherine Cortez Masto, she's a democrat from Nevada. Schumer effectively controls that body and decisions of who to recruit for his team in the senate. Basically the article was about how he talked about how he has had a hard time recruiting people for these – flipping a seat is tough, it's not an easy thing.

12:07 AJ: Are they scared? Do they think they'll never win because they're in Senator Graham's state or what's the idea behind that?

12:15 Akela: Yeah, I think a lot of people are unsure. Obviously, votes have been kind of volatile, in the past two election cycles, as far as what posters and strategists are saying and what actually happens when voters go to the polls. Despite the gains that we saw democrats make in 2018, even in States where senators might have a better chance than they have had in the past to flip a seat. It's putting a lot on the line, it's risking a lot of resources, and potentially making a huge decision about how the rest of your career will go if you don't end up winning your election. I think people have been sceptical about making that decision. Then, a lot of the candidates that they wanted are in the presidential race, so it remains to be seen. One example would be John Hickenlooper, former governor of Colorado recently dropped out of the presidential race. After about a week, [AJ II: He said he is running for Senate.] He said he is running for senate, this is after they had hoped he would jump into senate race before he decided to go to run for president. This is the same for Steve Bullock, who is another presidential candidate, governor of Montana, and there are hopes within the democratic party that he will eventually drop out and run for the senate in Montana. But, we wanted to talk about progressive candidates that are popping up in that void, so in Montana, for instance, one of those people is Wilmot Collins, who is the mayor of Helena, he is the state's first place black mayor and he is actually a refugee from Liberia and he has –

14:04 AJ: Say his name one more time?

14:06 Akela: Wilmot Collins. He is a really interesting candidate for a lot of reasons, he is a veteran, he ran a really grassroots campaign in Montana. They knocked on thousands of doors in the state.

14:27 AJ II: I read that. Thousands of doors. A Black man knocking on thousands of doors in Montana...

14:29 Akela: Something that he is really passionate about is having - you know - tough conversation with people in his state about issues that are really touchy for him and for them. Like immigration and talking about the rhetoric that is coming from the white house on immigration and countering people's beliefs in a way that doesn't alienate them from voting for him, and that's something that he talks about a lot. He also talks about educating people on what the immigration process in the U.S. is actually like, because he spent close to two years, going through the process. To immigrate here, applying for humanitarian status, coming from the civil war in Liberia, and he's running on what we would call progressive policies. Swearing off on corporate money, addressing the climate crisis, addressing veteran homelessness, treating mental health and crime in a -- like a holistic approach. I didn't articulate that well but you know what I am saying.

15:45 AJ: So what about other black progressives that you spoke about in your article? State Senator Erica Smith from North Carolina, remind me the name of the senator in North Carolina who she is apparently is leading in some of the polls?

15:58 Akela: Yeah, so Republican senator Thom Tillis is up for re-election in 2020, she's running up against him. I call her senator Smith because she is the state's senator right now, she is serving her third time She is a former Boeing engineer, an ordained minister, a former Math and Science teacher. She is also swearing off of corporate pact money, something that she has done in the past. She's running on the Green New Deal, Medicare for all, addressing gun violence, and some pretty advanced gun control legislation. She's leading Tillis in the latest polls, which I think is surprising to a lot of people. Surprising in some ways and not in others, Tom Tillis has the lowest approval rating of any republican in the senate and this is another state where the DSCC has not yet officially backed anyone, but there are whispers that they are backing another candidate and so it has positioned Senator Smith in kind of this insurgent place. She's raised \$80,000 so far which is not enough to topple Tillis but is impressive and it's early.

17:22 AJ: What's the main significance though, like what's the key importance of flipping states right now? Because republicans are in the majority, and they have 53 seats and democrats have 47?

17:35 Akela: Yes, I believe so.

17:37 AJ: What democrats would need to flip back the senate if you will, would be four seats?

17:45 Akela: Right.

17:46 AJ: So, what are the four states or where do you think democrats may help themselves best?

17:52 Akela: I just want to clarify, it would be four seats or if they were able to get three seats at the white house, because then the Vice President can break a tie at the Senate. The States that are looking likely right now are – it is predicted that they will probably win in Arizona, where Mark Kelly is running –

18:15 AJ: Astronaut

18:16 Akela: Yeah, Astronaut Mark Kelly, thank you. They would probably lose in Alabama, where Doug Jones, who was appointed to, or not appointed – he won a special election and he's up again, and that turned a senate seat blue in Alabama for the first time in a very, very long time.

18:33 AJ: And just let everyone know who Doug Jones beat.

18:36 Akela: I don't even want to say his name, but I will, Roy Moore [laughs]

18:41 AJ: And he....?

18:43 Akela: Do I have to say it?

18:45 AJ: I mean, for transparency.

18:47 Akela: Yeah, Roy Moore assaulted young women basically, in the 70s.

18:55 AJ: He's a bad person.

18:56 Akela: Yeah, he dated underage girls –

18:58 AJ: Yeah, went to high school football games and found cheerleaders.

19:03 Akela: Yeah...so, not cool.

19:07 AJ: So go cousin Doug!

19:09 Akela: Doug. Yeah, Doug's a good character in this dystopian plot line. Not least of all because he was up against Roy Moore, but because he was a lawyer in an important case against the KKK.

19:27 AJ: Well okay, and he read a book about that. he wrote a book about it. It was on CBS This Morning, we interviewed him, but that's neither here nor there [laughs].

19:37 Akela: [laughs] We're getting way off track.

19:49 AJ: You were laying out what the significance was with the seats in the States.

19:45 Akela: Yeah, so, all I had to say is if they lose Alabama and pick up Arizona, that cancels each other out. So after that, we're looking at potentially Colorado, Maine has I've heard moved to a tossup, which can mean a lot of things or nothing. Texas potentially, potentially Iowa, and again these are pretty like uphill battles –

20:22 AJ: Got you, it's not going to be easy, but the democrats are in the fight, if you will.

20:25 Akela: Right right and to your other question about why it's important for them to have a majority, is that it's important, in their perspective, to have the majority because then they would be able to make decisions about what legislations come to the floor for a vote – move bills.

20:43 AJ: Which would actually affect the people.

20:45 Akela: Right.

20:46 AJ: And laws in this country.

20:47 Akela: Right, so essentially what's been happening so far in the first half of this legislative session is that the House, which is controlled by the democrats, has been passing a series a pretty aggressive and progressive pieces of legislation, universal background checks was one of them earlier on in the year. Basically the House is passing a lot of legislation that can't go anywhere if they don't have either a cooperative republican counterpart or democratic majority in the Senate:

21:18 AJ: So I think you layered up in pretty good detail what the importance of the halls of congress, what the people, the legislators on Capitol Hill do and why it affects us. Outside of

the races and the election year, I think the most important thing is the legislation, the actual laws that are put into place in this country. As people of color, and and younger millennial, people who are first few times voting, what bills and legislations should we be keeping an eye out for?

21:56 Akela: So a lot of it is really--will be unclear until the first couple of weeks. One thing I think that's important to keep an eye on is that the house actually cut short its recess to come back early, and vote on a series of pretty strict gun control measures. This is in response to the series of mass shootings this summer and so it'll be interesting, it'll be important to keep watch on whether the Senate decides to move on any of these things.

22:26 AJ: Bump stocks, what other things? Bump stocks, high magazine rifles...

22:31 Akela: The legislation would ban high capacity magazines, establish a process for states to keep people who are deemed to be a quote on quote high risk to themselves and others from getting firearms and keep people being convicted of misdemeanor crimes from possessing guns. Those are indirect responses to the types of shootings that happened at the profiles of the types of shooters themselves.

23:01 AJ: So anybody with manifestos out there, beware.

23:03 Akela: Right. There's another hearing scheduled in the House on December 25, focused on military-style assault weapons.

23:13 AJ: So these are hugely important issues because people are dying out here, people are being slaughtered and massacred because of usually men writing manifestos, and getting kicked out of school and having history with women, and all different factors and all that the whole nine. These are hugely important especially for people who want to see people like us stop dying. So, I really appreciate you outlining all of that. But as we wrap up, I want to get you into my lightning round where, I want you to – the first thing that comes to your mind when you hear these people's names and their significance, kind of quick one liners um and I think you'll be pretty familiar with most of them. So you ready?

24:00 Akela: Okay, I'm ready.

24:02 AJ: Alright. Congressman Will Hurd.

24:05 Akela: He resigned from Congress and now there is no more black people in the Republican House.

24:13 AJ: Congresswoman, Maxine Waters.

24:15 Akela: Auntie Maxine, reclaiming our time [laughs].

24:20 AJ: Congresswoman, Sheila Jackson Lee.

24:24 Akela: Whoo, woman always has a good hairstyle [laughs]

24:28 AJ: What was the 'whoo' for?

24:29 Akela: She has a commanding presence I will say in the halls, in the Speaker's lobby.

24:35 AJ: She threw my high school Spanish teacher off of the plane, out of her seat, first class window.

24:42 Akela: Wow, I was like that's really a lot [laughs].

24:45 AJ: Senator Kamala Harris.

24:46 Akela: Oh this is hard because I cover her –

24:52 AJ: Tell it to us straight.

24:53 Akela: She is, she's a little wishy washy [laughs].

24:58 AJ: Okay! Moving on! Congressman Jim Clyburn, what's what's he known for?

25:05 Akela: He was actually asked to pray recently over a meeting over the house of democrats and pray for healing within the divisions of the party. So I'll let that speak for itself [laughs]

25:17 AJ: Okay, and he's the top, second, third?

25:21 Akela: He is the house Majority Whip.

25:24 AJ: House Majority Whip. Got it. Senator Tim Scott.

25:28 Akela: Tim Scott, argh, I don't want to say it.

25:31 AJ: He's the only...

25:35 Akela: He's the only black republican Senator. Yes, it's that what you wanted me to say? [laughs]

25:41 AJ: You don't have to describe all of your interactions with them! [laughs] Congressman Hakeem Jeffries

25:49 Akela: He's the Chair of the House Democratic Congress.

25:53 AJ: Pretty big deal.

25:54 Akela: Pretty big deal.

25:57 AJ: Cory Booker?

25:58 Akela: Everyone's favourite Senator who's a vegan.

26:07 AJ: Congresswoman Ocasio-Cortez, Omar. Pressley and Tlaib.

26:14 Akela: The squad.

26:14 AJ: They're the squad.

26:15 Akela: They are.

26:16 AJ: And what does that mean? Squad? Squad goals? What does that mean? To us that means *squad*, you know, it's little different.

26:23 Akela: I love and hate the term squad because, it's great, because it empowers them, and the policies that they come into the house on, and the deals which they ran on which are quite similar. But, they're really different in a lot of ways. It creates this monolith whereas they

embody qualities that are a lot of people, not just in the federal government, but in state houses across the country are representing, and embodying every day. I think when you think about it like, where's the squad in you? Then I like that better [laughs].

27:04 AJ: The four progressive congress women who are all very, very outspoken[ly] against President Trump.

27:14 Akela: Yeah, they're not afraid of him.

27:16 AJ: No, nobody should be afraid of him, of anybody, no, they're not afraid at all, 'impeach the mf'er'....

27:23 Akela [laughs] Rashida Tlaib is a bad ass actually, I don't know if I can say this. There's a video of her before she ran for congress getting escorted out of a Trump rally, and yelling at everyone like, "you people are crazy!" It's just amazing.

27:42 AJ: They're some bosses. And now this one is very close to all of us here, Congresswoman Eleanor Holmes Norton.

27:53 Akela: Yes, ah, if only she had a real vote [laughs].

27:58 AJ: I don't want to end on that, but as always my special guest, politics reporter at *The Intercept* Akela Lacy. Is there anything you want to leave us with, and let us know how we can find you and how we can find *The Intercept*, and support your course?

28:15 Akela: I will say register to vote, A. B, figure out when election day is, I think it's November 5, 2020.

28:26 AJ: You're supposed to tell us.

28:27 Akela: I'm supposed to tell you guys.

28:28 AJ: That sounds about right though, it's usually a Tuesday, right?

28:30 Akela: November 3rd, Tuesday November 3rd, 2020, election day. Be there or be square! And yeah, follow *The Intercept* if you would like to read investigative reporting. Follow me @akela_lacy on Twitter.

28:45 AJ: Scoop, she's got all the scoops.

28:47 Akela: I got the scoops [laughs].

28:49 AJ: She's got the congressional scoop. Thank you so much Akela, we really appreciate it.

28:52 Akela: Thank you for having me Arthur.

28:54 AJ: Please continue subscribing at *Max Out Time With AJ II* on iTunes. Add @akela_lacy on social media. Like us on Facebook, follow on IG and Twitter, and rate and review this podcast on all podcast streaming services today, AJ out!

29:11 Outro Song: 'For The City'

29:38 -End-

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