

## WEH 202: Intentional, Deadly Negligence in Orlando

- Regina Mahone: Welcome to What Else Happened?, A show for people who want to know what stories this week may have slipped under the radar. I'm Regina Mahone.
- Kat Jercich: I'm Kat Jercich, and we're the managing editors at rewire.news, where we deliver evidence-based journalism for people who are passionate about health, rights, and justice.
- Regina Mahone: This week on What Else Happened? we'll talk about the pollution choking one of the poorest neighborhoods in Orlando, Florida, the fight over installing elevators in New York subways, and how a Portland-based clothing company is taking abortion funding into its own hands.
- Kat Jercich: We'll chat with Rewire editor, Ali Stine, about how for Appalachian parents, snow days may not be all that fun. Let's get going. Regina, what's your first thought when someone talks about Orlando?
- Regina Mahone: Walt Disney World, duh. I was in my high school's marching band, and we went twice! Ahhh, memories.
- Kat Jercich: Oh my God, what did you play?
- Regina Mahone: I twirled — I was in the color guard.
- Kat Jercich: I'm so happy about this information right now. I think of the same thing, although I was not in marching band, unlike some of us. In fact, I think a lot of our listeners, especially folks not from Florida, probably think of Disney when they think of Orlando. But Orlando resident's neighborhoods that tourists might ignore are experiencing air pollution that may be leading to chronic health problems, like asthma, and cancer.
- Regina Mahone: Where in Orlando are these neighborhoods?
- Kat Jercich: This week, Huff Post ran a story about Paramore. Up until the mid-1900s, as Huff Post puts it, the Orlando neighborhood was once a bustling, middle-class community, full of Black-owned homes, schools, businesses, churches, and hotels, but then after reconstruction, railroad tracks were built that divided Orlando into a predominantly black west side, and a largely white east side. Then came the highways.
- Regina Mahone: Which have historically been constructed at the expense of communities of color.
- Kat Jercich: Yeah, when I-4 was built 20 years after reconstruction, it followed the route of the railroad tracks, and cut Paramore off from the rest of the city. Now, one particular federal housing project, Griffin Park, is literally encircled by highways.

Huff Post quotes a history professor at the University of Central Florida as calling it an, "oval of pollution."

Regina Mahone: Traffic, running 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, is sometimes literally choking the residents with ozone, and smog. Other residents are living close to the former site of their Orlando gasification plant, with toxic chemicals having leaked into the ground, and this is appearing to have consequences for the people living there.

Kat Jercich: Huff Post reports that more than 40% of children in Paramore have chronic health issues. That's in an area the federal government has designated as being medically underserved, meaning there's one physician for every 3,500 people. I just want to let that number sink in. Yeah, there's only one physician for every 3,500 people in Paramore, some of whom have described their air conditioning units "snowing dust" from outside.

A few more numbers for you: one in five Orange County residents have no health insurance, and the median annual household income rate is \$13,700 a year.

Regina Mahone: As we've seen with other environmental injustices, this is setting people up in the area for a lifetime of health problems, and what are they supposed to do about it? What solutions can people turn to when the problem is so much bigger than they are?

Kat Jercich: I don't know. As a city, Orlando is planning to do its own air quality studies to compare with an air quality index done by the county last year. That quality index, by the way, said the ozone and particulate matter levels were good, and moderate. I know, right? Somehow "good, and moderate," but local scientists say that's not actually a good indicator of the air these folks are breathing every day, and some local activists like Lawanna Gelzer have organized rallies, and taken the issue before Orlando City Council in an effort to see some change.

Regina Mahone: As we've seen around the country, fighting environmental racism like this takes so much time, and resources, especially considering ... Well, we've seen how the Trump administration has proposed slashing the EPA's budget, and doing away with federal regulations that are supposed to keep people safe.

Kat Jercich: Right, and I think it's important too, to note that this is a national epidemic. As the Huff Post piece says, "Black people are about three times more likely to die of air pollutants than white people." This is intentional and deadly negligence. Julia Craven, the author of the piece, puts it this way, "The pollution in Griffin Park, and its low income Paramore neighborhood, is violence of a kind, Americans tend to ignore, but it is as deliberate, and as politically determined, as any more recognizable act of racial violence."

Last year Senator Cory Booker introduced the environmental justice act to try and protect communities of color from this kind of systematic danger, but it didn't go anywhere.

Regina Mahone: I can't help but think of Flint, Michigan, which by now, is one of the most well-known examples of environmental racism. Those residents have been sounding the alarm about the water for years now.

Kat Jercich: Yeah, as of today, and this is another number that makes my stomach hurt, people who live in Flint will have gone 1,372 days without clean water in their pipes. That's *with* all the media coverage, that's *with* promises of reform, that's *with* residents organizing, and unifying on the ground, and the people in power still can't get it together enough to make sure vulnerable people have access to some of our most basic needs: clean water, and clean air.

Regina Mahone: On Monday, while many in our bubbles were out celebrating the anniversary of *Roe v. Wade*...

Kat Jercich: Has it really been 45 years?

Regina Mahone: It feels like just yesterday that our rights were being defended by the Supreme Court.

Kat Jercich: Defended?

Regina Mahone: Today, who the hell knows. But I digress. On Monday, while that was happening, Sara Maslin Nir, a reporter for the New York Times, about a fight over elevators in lower Manhattan.

Kat Jercich: What's going on over there?

Regina Mahone: Thanks for asking. So a real estate developer wants to build new subway elevators nearest to the World Trade Center. It feels important to note they're glass elevators.

Kat Jercich: Okay, glass elevators, got it.

Regina Mahone: Obviously, the developer gets something out of this deal. I won't go into the specifics, but the developer is using the elevator project to maximize another project on the same street. Unsurprisingly, the elevator has the support of disability rights advocates and subway riders.

Kat Jercich: Not to mention the city, right? The developer would've had to give its approval?

Regina Mahone: Well, it's a community board, but yes, it appears as if the board's members approve the project. According to the Tribeca Tribune, which first reported about the elevators, fewer than one in four subway stations are handicap accessible. Sara Maslin Nir further pointed out, that my hot mess of a home, New York City, with all this other subway shenanigans, is far behind places like your hometown of Chicago, and Boston, where one of our colleagues lives.

Kat Jercich: Woo-hoo.

Regina Mahone: The failure to make subway stations wheelchair accessible is so great, the subway system has seen at least two class-action lawsuits. In an April 2017 New York Times report, Eli Rosenberg pointed out that more than 75% of the 472 subway stations, New York City do not elevators, lifts, or other accessibility mechanisms for people using wheelchairs, or other mobility devices. Seventy five percent, Kat.

Kat Jercich: That is a huge number, this elevator project sounds like it's desperately needed, so why isn't it happening yet?

Regina Mahone: Well, there's definitely a catch. In this case, residents of buildings near the site of the proposed elevators are concerned for — get this — this security reasons. They argue the elevators could become a target for terrorist activity, because I guess there aren't police or other official agents monitoring them. Those residents hired an independent security analyst who said the proposed elevators could pose a security risk, meanwhile, the New York City subway authority, the MTA, and the local police department city, say the elevators do not pose an extra risk.

Kat Jercich: Ah yes, elevators, that hotbed of terrorism, so it's basically the residents against the developer and the disabled subway riders?

Regina Mahone: You got it.

Kat Jercich: Cool, given how few elevators there are available to riders, it seems like a no-brainer, but there's some important context missing here too.

Regina Mahone: Yeah? What's that?

Kat Jercich: As Robin Powell's reported for Rewire, the Republican-controlled Congress is considering legislation that would completely undermine the Americans with disabilities act.

Regina Mahone: Can you remind listeners about that legislation?

Kat Jercich: Yes, it's actually one of the reasons that the city has been sued for those class-action lawsuits you talked about. It's a federal law that protects the rights of people with disabilities, it allows people to file complaints with the Department of Justice against businesses and other entities that fail to provide reasonable accommodations, or outright discriminate against a person, because of a disability.

Regina Mahone: Got it, and so you're saying that if that bill being considered is put into law, it can get harder for people with disabilities to have their rights taken seriously?

Kat Jercich: That is exactly what I'm saying. The proposed law would put barriers in front of people seeking to file ADA complaints. It's already difficult to do so, and the

person filing a complaint could now wait as many as 180 days before seeing any change addressing their concern. That's a solid six months, and as Robin Powell has pointed out for us before, given that President Trump's real estate properties have violated the ADA numerous times, it's pretty likely he'll sign the legislation should it make it to his desk.

Regina Mahone: I guess we'll see if that bill goes anywhere, and what happens with these elevators in New York. I will, however, leave you with this quote from Edith Prentiss, the President of Disabled in Action, who told the Times that the pearl clutching over this supposed security threat is total NIMBY, a.k.a. Not In My Backyard. She said, "It's, 'Don't affect my property values, don't affect my iconic view.' I can understand that they paid a lot of money, I'm sure, but that does not abrogate my civil rights," she said. In case, you're wondering, a one bedroom apartment in that area goes for over \$2 million.

Kat Jercich: I was wondering.

Regina Mahone: It's that time of year when snow is falling, people are layering up to stay warm, and for many, schools are closing. My colleague, Ali Stine, who edits much of our content about the Appalachian region, explained in a recent piece at Rewire, that she and her son have seen six continuous snow days this year. Fortunately for Ali, she works from home, but that doesn't mean she hasn't had to negotiate childcare with friends and neighbors in the process. As Ali points out in her piece, school can be one of the safest places in the community for children, so repeated snow days do more to, "Reveal the cracks in our infrastructure," than to keep students out of harm's way.

Ali joined us this week to talk more about the issue, and what Appalachian communities should be doing to better prepare for winter weather, which thanks to climate change, is expected to get more extreme in the years to come. Hey, Ali, thank you for joining us this week. Can you tell listeners where you're based?

Ali Stine: Sure, I'm based in rural southeastern Ohio, which is part of Central Appalachia.

Regina Mahone: Gotcha. And so the weather has been pretty brutal there for the past week, or so, right?

Ali Stine: Yeah, we had a pretty rough January, more snow days, more snow than has been seen here in the past. It's been very cold, we had an ice storm, and we've had a lot of cleanup to do.

Regina Mahone: Wow, I don't usually talk to folks I'm interviewing about the weather, but this is important context for the issue we'll be discussing today: the surprise snow days in your home of southeastern Ohio. What's that been like for you, and other families, single parents in particular.

Ali Stine: Well, it's been rough, parents don't get snow days of course, and the idea that snow days are this fun, good old time, is an antiquated one. It just presumes that

there are two parents in every house, and one parent, usually the female one, stays home with the kids, and that's just not the case. We have an overwhelming number of single parents, like most communities in America, and all the parents I know work. I've had to call in a lot of favors. I've had to rely on my family a lot.

My parents actually retired early when I became a single mother, when my son was a baby, in large part because they knew I was going to need that help. I work from home with very understanding feminist bosses, thank you, but most parents don't have that. Most people will be reprimanded, or lose their pay, or get fired if they don't show up to work. I know a lot of parents who've used up all their vacation days, or sick leave on snow days.

Regina Mahone: Wow, and so what's the reason for the snow days, do you know? Is it just because there's snow on the ground? What's going on?

Ali Stine: Well, there's been a lot of reasons, including cold, and ice, but the overwhelming one, is that the community just can't clear all the roads in time for the buses to run. We're a rural community, and an underserved one, and we have a great deal of poverty. We also have a rugged terrain. We have really steep hills, and ridges, we have country roads, and woods, and gravel roads, and those roads aren't always maintained so well. Historically, I'm not sure that we've had a lot of money for maintaining the roads, especially when it comes to snow, and ice removal, but as you said at the beginning, it seems like the weather is only going to get worse, and more unpredictable, and we're still operating on the idea that we have a milder climate here, and I think we're finding that's just not the case.

Regina Mahone: Earlier this month you noted to me, and our other colleagues, that your seven-year-old son hasn't had a full day of school since December, is that still the case?

Ali Stine: Well we're speaking right now on a Wednesday, and he has gone to school every day this week, fingers crossed, it is snowing at the moment, so you never know about tomorrow, but I also really feel for the teachers who have had to scramble to adjust their lesson plans.

Regina Mahone: That's not something many people think about, the impact of snow days on teachers, and their lesson plans. I'm wondering if you can share possible solutions for communities, including educators facing inclement weather, so that they may be better prepared for the winter, and its cost to families just making, or barely making ends meet.

Ali Stine: Well, some school districts in the area are starting to do a schedule, where they have on severe weather days a group of roads they decide in advance that school buses will not be going to. If you live on that road, your child will not be counted absent if they can't get to school, but school will still be open, and if you can drive your kid to school, and a lot of folks around here have trucks, have four-wheel drives, or even drive from the main road to their house on ATV. School will still be open.

You can also meet the bus driver at a main road, and they will drive your kid to school. Another option is virtual school, where there's a site online for learning activities to do on snow days, but that might be hard for us, and other rural, more impoverished areas, since a lot of people don't have Internet, or don't have reliable, fast Internet, which is a whole other issue.

Regina Mahone: Right.

Ali Stine: Another idea is Blizzard Bags, some schools are doing that. The day before the weather is expected to get bad, teachers will give students backpacks with school activities to complete if there's no school the next day. I'm imagining we could probably also include some food with those bags, which is another issue. Students from food insecure households who depend on weekend food, and school meals to help feed themselves. Finally, I wonder if maybe it's time to have more conversations about year-round school, my son would probably not like that, but I know some schools in Indiana, not too far away from our state, have gone to that schedule.

It doesn't mean kids don't have vacation, they just have longer vacations spread throughout the year, that might help with the winter weather issue, and also help with feeding food insecure kids as well during those long summer months.

Regina Mahone: Absolutely, and so what advice do you have for parents in particular in this situation?

Ali Stine: Get to know your neighbors, get to know the parents of your kid's friends, see who's out on a snow day playing, and see who you can talk to you, and this is an area where Appalachia really shines, because we're very community-based, we're very resourceful, and we really help each other out. It's been a team effort, trade-off watching each other's kids, is really the only way to get through it.

Regina Mahone: Thank you for joining us this week on What Else Happened? Ali! Where can people find you on the Internet?

Ali Stine: On Twitter, I'm @alistineed, that's A-L-I-S-T-I-N-E-E-D.

Kat Jercich: I have some good news this week! But first, the Bummer Background. This week, legislators in South Dakota introduced a new measure that would basically – the only one word I have for this is lecture – abortion providers, for not giving pregnant people seeking abortions misleading information during pre-abortion, and I say this with the strongest air quotes I can, “counseling.”

Regina Mahone: Why the air quotes Kat?

Kat Jercich: You know why the air quotes.

Regina Mahone: Yes, I do. Often the state mandated counseling usually contains misleading information about abortion's risks to mental, or physical health. In South Dakota,

providers of the state's only clinic are required by law to tell patients that abortion may cause a higher risk of suicide – it doesn't – and that a person's existing relationship with the fetus is constitutionally protected, which I guess it is, and that no one can force you to have an abortion. That sure sounds like some “your fetus is a person with legal rights” rhetoric to me.

Kat Jercich: Right, and according to this measure, the providers are saying those things, or close to it, but they're basically doing what we're doing right now, which is noting that the statements are required by politicians, and they're false. For some reason, South Dakota legislators don't like that.

Regina Mahone: What are they proposing?

Kat Jercich: Among other things, that providers give patients a printout that says, "An abortion will terminate the life of a whole, separate, unique, living human being."

Regina Mahone: Doesn't this seem like this violates some free speech laws somewhere?

Kat Jercich: That's a question for Team Legal, not for me, but yes, it does seem like that. Anyway, this is just the latest attack on abortion care in a state that's already so hostile to abortion rights that there is only one freestanding clinic in the whole state. By the way, there's a 72 hour waiting period, which means someone who needed care might have to drive across the whole state, get that “counseling,” drive home, then drive back again three days later. If you have an inflexible job, or need childcare, or just don't have gas money, that's a hell of a way to stop you from getting an abortion.

Regina Mahone: Yikes. So what about that good news?

Kat Jercich: Oh yeah, sorry, the good news. A Portland clothing company called Wildfang, has taken it upon themselves to fundraise for abortion access in South Dakota. Their stretch goal is to raise \$750,000, which would completely fund the clinic for a year. If you donate \$600 specifically, you can pay for someone's abortion, which I think is a great direct way to help someone who needs it.

Regina Mahone: I don't think I've heard of Wildfang, but I do like the way you say it.

Kat Jercich: A lot of queer folks like it. I can usually spot one of their suits from across a room.

Regina Mahone: How is the fundraiser going?

Kat Jercich: They've already hit \$50,000, which covers the annual cost of a security guard for a clinic. All this is really neat, it's cool that a clothing company I already like is turning their energies toward an issue I care about, but it does make me sad at the same time. Abortion is healthcare. It's a vital medical service that can, and does literally save lives, yet instead of the government funding it, or at least

helping to subsidize it, we're relying on private companies, and individual people to be moved by their consciences, all while policies like the Hyde Amendment actually prevent these crises from being addressed any other way.

Regina Mahone: So much for your good news, huh Kat?

Kat Jercich: I'm a regular ray of sunshine.

Regina Mahone: Kat, what's bringing you joy this week?

Kat Jercich: I've been really concentrating since the weather's been so cold on weightlifting. I fell off it last year. I'm really bad at most exercise, I don't truly enjoy it, I get very winded. Even when I've trained to run long distances, I still spend the entirety of those long distances complaining in my head about it. Weightlifting is actually something that I get a huge endorphin rush from, and I can usually listen to young adult queer books, or a podcast while I'm doing it, and so I've been really leaning into it, and it's just on my mind, because last night I finally got my squats back up to where they were.

Regina Mahone: Nice.

Kat Jercich: Thanks. I'm now squatting my body weight plus 20 pounds, which is not a lot for some people.

Regina Mahone: Oh my God, that's so impressive.

Kat Jercich: Thank you. I have a secret goal to be able to squat various people in my life.

Regina Mahone: Oh my God.

Kat Jercich: Or two times that many people, anyway, and I was also listening to a very inspiring podcast episode recommended by you, the Call Your Girlfriend "Inspire" episode.

Regina Mahone: That one is so good.

Kat Jercich: I know, so I was listening to all these wonderful, accomplished people tell me their goals for 2018, while I was really getting swole, so it was nice.

Regina Mahone: I'm impressed that you're able to listen to people talking while you work out. Whenever I run, I have to listen to the most like drum and base-y dance music, because it helps me continue running, because otherwise I think I would just stop.

Kat Jercich: Yeah, I had that problem this morning, I was trying to listen to The Daily on my run, and I did a really bad job, but with weightlifting it's a little easier, because it's not quite as ...

Regina Mahone: Yeah.

Kat Jercich: You don't have to push through things in the same way.

Regina Mahone: That makes a lot of sense, yeah.

Kat Jercich: I'd recommend it! I recommend, it's a fun time, and then you can threaten people when you're able to squat them.

Regina Mahone: I will wave at you from afar as you squat, and weight lift, and dead lift, and do these things that I feel like I'm too fragile emotionally to handle.

Kat Jercich: That's fair. You're just going to look up one day, and see me squatting around Queens, just back and forth.

Regina Mahone: That sounds good.

Kat Jercich: How about you, what's bringing you joy?

Regina Mahone: Vision boards are bringing me joy this week. On Friday, a good friend of mine, Shavan, came over, and we made vision boards together, you may remember, because I posted a picture of Shavan with my cat Autumn, because he was helping her, he's very sweet, and helpful. It was my second year making a vision board, I find the whole process to be incredibly inspiring, because the way that I've done it, the way that I've learned to do it, shout out to my friend Angelique, who showed me how to do it.

You just page through magazines — I generally enter the process with a list of goals, or terms, or what I'm looking forward to for the year to come — and then you just page the magazines that you have lying around, or you can get from your chiropractor's office, which is what I did. You just pull out ... I prefer sayings, and things — surprise, I like words — but also people who inspire me, things like that. Yeah, and so I feel pretty good about my vision board this year, it's been inspiring me already.

Kat Jercich: Do you keep it on your wall, or something, or do you frame it, or where do you put it?

Regina Mahone: I do, so I keep it on my wall, I put it in a place that I'll see at least once a day, so it's right above my dresser with all of my clothes, and stuff. Yeah, so I can see, because it's in my bedroom in New York City, small apartments, like I'll see it multiple times a day as I'm walking from my bedroom to the living room, or something like that.

Kat Jercich: That's so cool, you very much inspire me to do more productive planning toward my months, and years, so maybe this time next year I'll make a vision board, as supposed to writing out a to-do list, which is about all I have so far.

Regina Mahone: That's a lot in and of itself, but if you want to do a 2019 vision board party, you let me know, I'm there.

Kat Jercich: Maybe Autumn will help me.

Regina Mahone: He absolutely will.

Kat Jercich: That's our show for this week, if you liked it, please rate it on Apple Podcasts, and subscribe wherever you get your podcasts.

Regina Mahone: Thanks again to Ali Stine.

Kat Jercich: You can follow her @alistineed on Twitter.

Regina Mahone: You can follow Rewire @rewire\_news, and me @byreginamahone.

Kat Jercich: I'm @kjercich on Twitter.

Regina Mahone: Good luck with the headlines, and we'll see you next week on What Else Happened?

Kat Jercich: What Else Happened? Is a Rewire Radio production for rewire.news, created, and hosted by Regina Mahone, and Kat Jercich, the managing editors at Rewire. Nora Hurley is our producer, Mark Faletti is our executive producer, and Rewire's editor in chief is Jodi Jacobson.