

## Getting Curious with Jonathan Van Ness & Representative Sharice Davids

**JVN** [00:00:00] Welcome to Getting Curious. I'm Jonathan Van Ness and every week I sit down for a gorgeous conversation with a brilliant expert to learn all about something that makes me curious. On today's episode, I'm joined by Representative Sharice Davids, where I ask her: How are you making history in Congress? Welcome to Getting Curious, I'm so excited I can't stand it. We have one of my very favorite people of all time. Welcome to the show Congresswoman Sharice Davids who is representing Kansas' 3rd district since 2019, you won re-election last year. Yes, yes, yes. I also just have to say I am flooded with such happy memories of going into your office in 2018 with literally Michelle Kwan, the most decorated American figure skater of all time, and we, like, we literally went and knocked on doors like we, like, I had so much fun meeting you and you have the most amazing team and I'm so happy to virtually see you today.

**REP. SHARICE DAVIDS** [00:01:54] I know, I'm excited too. I'm really glad that we're getting the chance to do this. And can I say something about when you guys came to visit the office?

**JVN** [00:01:01] Yes.

**REP. SHARICE DAVIDS** [00:01:02] So my, one of my best, very best friends, he, like, literally quit his job and moved to Kansas, his name's Jason, to help on my campaign. Like, he quit a big law job to come help on my campaign. And he was not in the office when you all arrived. So he walked in and you were, and you guys were there and he was like, "Oh my God!" And then we were all dancing around and jumping around. I think you were trying to teach--

**JVN** [00:01:31] [CROSSTALK] Yeah, I wanted you to get, I wanted you to get your waltz jump, I think.

**REP. SHARICE DAVIDS** [00:01:36] Yes. Yes. Wow. As one does.

**JVN** [00:01:40] As one does. It's ok. I mean, you do have a great rink in your, I think there's a really good ice skating rink in your district.

**REP. SHARICE DAVIDS** [00:01:48] Yeah. I think the one in Shawnee. I don't know if, I don't know where you, which places you went to because you were in the area for a while.

**JVN** [00:01:58] We were there for a hot minute, which was so much fun, and I had so much fun meeting those people. And the constituents of the 3rd district of Kansas are just such incredible people, as evidenced in the last few years. I'm just, like, so proud. But you have an amazing project. I devoured it, thank gosh it didn't take me super duper long. I just love a children's book, they're fun. I need 'em. But Congratulations on: 'Sharice's Big Voice.'

**REP. SHARICE DAVIDS** [00:02:22] First book, first children's book.

**JVN** [00:02:25] But this book can be enjoyed by everyone. I loved it! I also just wanted to say one more thing that's really major that I left out in the intro, which is, when you were sworn into the 116th Congress, you became one of the first two Native American women to serve in Congress and the first openly LGBTQIA+ person to represent Kansas, which is, I wanted to mention that because it is so incredible. And that's part of what I think is so cool about this children's book, 'Sharice's Big Voice: A Native Kid Becomes a Congresswoman,' which begs the question, what were you like when you were a kid? Like, did you know you were going to turn out to be a congresswoman? Did you want to be?

**REP. SHARICE DAVIDS** [00:03:04] Oh no. Not at all. I, no, I don't know what I thought when I was a kid actually about what I would be like as an adult, which maybe meant I was present, I don't know. But I talked a lot, I had a lot of energy. Almost immediately in the book I go into how I talk a lot. I talked a lot then, I talk a lot now. And frankly I don't know how my, I don't know how my mom handled how much energy I had. She must just be the most patient person. Also, just I was obsessed with Bruce Lee, I was a picky eater then, I'm a picky eater now. Yeah, I think but I think I probably was, like, more fun when I was little, than I--

**JVN** [00:03:54] Who's not?!

**REP. SHARICE DAVIDS** [00:03:55] Yeah, yeah, but I'm not jaded as an adult. I feel like I should say that.

**JVN** [00:04:01] Well, you do have such an optimistic, can-do spirit, which is, I think, one thing that people love about you. But going back to, like, baby kid Sharice, like, what were, so Bruce Lee was an interest. What was, like, what were some of your other, like, just, you know, to me it was obviously Michelle Kwan, it was figure skating, it was gymnastics. What was your version of figure skating and gymnastics? Not that I could do either of those things, but I was obsessed with them. So, like, what were your biggest interests growing up?

**REP. SHARICE DAVIDS** [00:04:27] The martial arts stuff, really. I, I watched all the martial arts movies. I would run around, like, dressed up, and I would find black belts and white shirts and put them on and put headbands on and, and just run around, like, punching and kicking. And then also my mom was very much into tennis and so I remember watching a lot of tennis when I was growing up. And then when I got to high school, I started playing tennis and, and I, I really like tennis. It's, like, it's expensive when you have to, like, in the wintertime if you're gonna play, or the rackets can get expensive, too, but it's just something that I like. You know, and then of course, we watched a lot of, like, professional women's tennis.

**JVN** [00:05:27] I love tennis! I have to ask you who your favorite player was?

**REP. SHARICE DAVIDS** [00:05:32] I'm more of a, what do you call it, like, a rivalry type of person.

**JVN** [00:05:42] Oooh who was your rivalry?

**REP. SHARICE DAVIDS** [00:05:44] So you know Steffi Graf and Martina, Martina Navratilova.

**JVN** [00:05:49] I was like a Steffi Graf, Monica Seles. I love that moment.

**REP. SHARICE DAVIDS** [00:05:53] Oh I was about, and then I was going to say that too.

**JVN** [00:05:56] That double handed forehand was epic on Monica Seles; major. I also loved Martina Hingis. I did, I really liked her until she did that underhand serve in the French Open. And I was like, "Girl, get it together! Come on!" So in the book, you revisit the younger version of yourself, what was that like to do that, knowing now who you've become? Was that, was that cathartic? Was it healing? Was it a little, like, was it kind of, like, surreal? What was that like?

**REP. SHARICE DAVIDS** [00:06:27] Well first of all, it's, it's really interesting to, to do this sort of thing with someone else. So when I say someone else, I both mean Nancy [Mays], who helped with, she's a creative writer and, like, knows how to do a bunch of this stuff and so talking with her about, like, the story arc and which stories to include, but also lots of conversations with my mom, you know and, when you're a kid you remember things differently than your parents do and so it was really interesting, that part was really interesting because there were some stories that my mom and I hadn't really kind of, like, talked about, like what her impression of what was coming out of that meant.

And so there were some stories, actually it was my mom's idea to include the story about the-, there's a story about when one of my classmates got really upset and ran out of it, ran out of the classroom and because of my gift of gab, you know, I end up talking with them and, and, and it's kind of like a learning moment, but it was my mom's idea to include that one because she was able to see as an adult like, "Oh, that, like, around that time," and then after we talked about it, I was thinking, "She's so right." And I think in a lot of ways that part was interesting to, to talk to my mom about what my progression as a young person was.

**REP. SHARICE DAVIDS** [00:08:08] And then I was also thinking, so I am not, I'm not shy about talking about how important it is for us to get rid of this stigma around mental and behavioral healthcare access and, and, and, so I have gone in, like, had counseling or therapy or some version of that over the years and one of the things I was thinking about is: how probably much more impactful thinking about those, like, little Sharice, like, "What was little Sharice thinking and doing and how did it feel?" Because so often we don't learn those skills, and, when we're little kids, you know, and so I, I've been thinking about how interesting it is to think, "Oh, if I had learned this coping mechanism or how to, how to recognize feelings when I was at that age, I wonder how big of a difference it would have made." And that's not, you know, that's not all stuff in the book but there's a little bit of that, you know, recognizing that.

I was really intentional about including the story about, you know, being at school and, and my, and classmates saying: "What are you?" And I think that's probably something that quite a few people hear, and not just when you're a little kid, it's harder to interpret, I think, when you're, when you're little. But, you know, making sure that people can see that those kinds of, those kinds of questions, there's, there are things that happen after that. It's a cascading thing. It impacts you. It lands on you in a different way. And, and sometimes, like, it leads to, I mean, that's like a question of what are you is almost like, like, a question of humanity, right. And so I was really, I really wanted to make sure that that was like one of the stories that I definitely wanted to make sure it was in there because it can help sometimes when you see that you're not the only person who experiences something, even if it's slightly different or whatever, and then making sure that, to say, "That that's actually not a very nice question to ask somebody."

**JVN** [00:10:33] Yeah. So you got to talk to your mom a lot with this, which I think is so special. In those conversations with your mom, did anything come up of like when she first, like, was like, "I think my kid is going to go on and really be like do something major?" Or did you ever think about, like, when was the first time when being in service, being in public service, like, ever crossed your mind as a possibility? And did your mom ever suggest that?

**REP. SHARICE DAVIDS** [00:10:58] No, she didn't that I can remember, that doesn't mean she didn't, it just means that if she did, I don't remember it. My mom was stationed at Fort Leonard Wood, which is in south central Missouri when I was younger she used, she used to joke all the time, "I joined the army and thought I'd see the world and we were mostly in Kansas and Missouri," and we lived, and it was about an hour, a little over an hour to Springfield, Missouri, where, what's now Missouri State University, it used to be Southwest Missouri State University. And we would go watch the Lady Bears play basketball, and it wasn't until, like, well into adulthood, this was only a few years ago that my mom told me that part of the reason she would take me to those basketball games was not just because she enjoyed basketball, we both did, but because she thought it would be helpful for me to see women in college and women who are, like, playing sports and and being athletic because I was very athletic. And, and, she thought it would be a way for me to just see examples of people going to college if, in case that's what I, if I wanted to go to college, that I would have seen examples of that. And because I'm the first person in my family to go to college.

**JVN** [00:12:14] Major!

**REP. SHARICE DAVIDS** [00:12:14] But I call myself a former first generation college student because my mom got her bachelor's degree about four years ago now.

**JVN** [00:12:20] Yes!

**REP. SHARICE DAVIDS** [00:12:21] So it's, yeah, I mean, she's a pretty determined person. So I think that, I think that my mom's approach, this actually would be a good question for me to ask her, so I'm going to leave this interview with a question for my mom, is that she was more of somebody who supported ideas that I had versus saying, "Oh, you should do this, you should try this, you should want to do that." Which maybe is part of why I have, why I even realized that, like we get to decide what success means for ourselves.

You know, I remember there were all kinds, I, I joke about all the, like, wild ideas I've had over the course of my life. I remember one time I asked my mom when I was little if-, "Do you think I could be a professional tennis player?" And her response was, "If you practice enough, like it, you would have to work really hard but it's possible." "Do you think I could play professional basketball," because the WNBA started. So, keep in mind, I suck at basketball, and my mom's response wasn't: you suck at basketball, it was, you know, "You'd have you, you would *really* have to put in a *lot* of work," and I think, I think we talked about like being a point guard or something, like, you, "I'm so short, though, but if I'm, but if I'm a point guard, then maybe that's possible." And she's like, there, "There's

some pretty short people who have become like, very good point guards." And so, of course, the first thing I did was go into the garage. We lived on post in Fort Leavenworth and I was in the garage just like practicing dribbling and, and I did that for a little while and then, and then I probably came up with some other thing that I wanted to practice.

But, she never, she never shut down any of my ideas, even though, like, now as an adult, I, like, that's not, it wasn't, it wasn't *for me* a realistic thing to be, like, a professional basketball player, but my mom didn't tell me that wasn't realistic. She let me figure out whether or not it was going to be a realistic, and for me it wasn't, you know, and I think that that's a really, I've always felt very fortunate to have that kind of experience because a lot of, you know, a lot of people don't get that, a lot of people get told, and we get told by society all kinds of stuff, right. But, we, a lot of people don't, don't get to have an experience where you say, "Maybe I can do this thing, maybe this will make me happy, or I might thrive in this thing." So often you just get shut down.

**JVN** [00:15:13] So she let you explore your possibility; that's so beautiful, that's so important. And I mean, I think it goes back to that idea that, like, our parents are, you know, we're half of each of our parents, we're half of who raised us, or if you're raised in a single parent household, like, you are so much of who raised you. And so having her allow you to explore that possibility, it's, like, obviously you're a majorly hard worker and you're an incredible person, but your mom helped you get there. And so that's beautiful; I love that sentiment and that's just amazing.

One thing that you've mentioned in this book process that I was just, like, "What?!" about, is that only one percent of children's books published in the United States featured Native American or Indigenous characters. And one thing that we learned about on Getting Curious with one of our past guests, her name is Dr. Elizabeth Rule, I love her so much, she's amazing. She, she's actually, we need to hook you up with her because she did this thing in D.C. for Native Americans where it's, like, you can go around to all of Washington, D.C. and you can, like, see all these different sites.

**REP. SHARICE DAVIDS** [00:16:14] Oh yeah I know who she is, yeah.

**JVN** [00:16:17] She basically says, you know, that for so many people that are advocating for their tribes and their nations in D.C. that are, like, representing their tribes in D.C., they feel, you know, really homesick and kind of lost. And, and so that's part of why she put together this app, because you can go around D.C. and you can get more involved in, like, what your nation's history was in D.C. And, but her, my biggest takeaway from working with her and interviewing her is that, like, Native Americans, contemporary Native Americans are thriving. There's so many different communities and so many different

nations like, doing the most, being amazing. And that's just something that I think especially, like, in school, you know, we, maybe it's, like, a paragraph or two, it's just not something that we really, you know, dive into. And so, what does it mean to you that you are, I mean, that was kind of a two-fold thing, but as far as the one percent of children's books published in the U.S. featuring Native American or Indigenous characters, what does that mean to you to be, to be changing that statistic?

**REP. SHARICE DAVIDS** [00:17:16] It's wild. It's, it's interesting because it's the thing that pops into my head when, so I get, I've been asked quite a bit, like, "What inspired you to do this?" And I, and, you know, me being the lawyer and, like, analytical person I am, I'm like, "Well, there's two parts of that. There's the idea and then there's the inspiration and the drive, you know." And I think that, that I, that, that fact of there not being children's books that are reflective of the, the broader diversity of experiences that we, that we have in this country, of course historically and *now* is, I mean, that's enough of a reason to do all kinds of stuff. It's not, it's not, it wasn't that, it wasn't the impetus for the idea, but it was certainly, like, "What if we did a kid's book?" And then you start to find out only one percent of characters in children's books, there's whole sections, there's children's libraries, children's books libraries, and in the whole library there's only one percent of the characters, that's not even one percent of the books, that's, like, one percent of the characters in the books. That's enough of a reason to want to do that, right.

**REP. SHARICE DAVIDS** [00:18:42] And, and in some ways, I kind of feel like, when, I don't know how, I don't know how to process what any of that means, and maybe I will over time, even, even just like Deb [Haaland] and I getting elected in 2018, like what, the implications, the implications of it more broadly for native people or native women; I don't really even know how to process that. Because it's just, it, because for me, I'm just, like, going and doing, I'm like, putting one foot in front of the next every single day. I imagine you probably feel this, a similar thing. You're like, "Oh, I have this idea, I want to do this thing, and I'm putting one foot in front of the next." And then people come up to you and they're, like, "You're inspiring me to be the person that I actually am." And, and that's a hard thing to process. Yeah, I don't know how it feels!

**JVN** [00:19:42] I hope, I hope that you feel I hope that, I, I, in my own way, I do know what you're saying, but I sure hope that there are some times when you can um, I mean I'm obviously not a Native American person, but when I think about Native American folks, young people who I've talked to, I'm just like covered in chills, I think that you're doing, and, and I guess the thing I would say is, like, sometimes I feel like I don't like to process some of the amazing things that I've done because I feel like if I stopped to really realize how amazing it is, like, it might distract me and, like, throw me off my ability to just keep, you know, doing what I'm doing because yeah, because this is our life. It doesn't seem that

exceptional to us because we're in here doing this work and trying to, to get to where we're going. And so, but I think for both of us, I sure hope that we do, because it's always easier to appreciate someone else's path more than it is your own, because it's like, "Oh, am I being, like, cocky or arrogant or whatever," but you are doing it, girl, this is so incredible. And so, I, I wanted to ask you about the book. What have, what do you hope that readers will take away from, from this story?

**REP. SHARICE DAVIDS** [00:21:00] So I think there's a couple of things, it's, it's interesting because it's, in, 'A Native Kid Becomes a Congresswoman' is, like, because that's in the title, I imagine that some people might think, "Oh, this will be, this, this book will be aimed at inspiring people to run for public office," and that's, that's not what it is. It happens to be that that's what ended up happening with my journey. But I am, but I think that this book, or at least I hope that when people read it, they see that all of us have this, like, unique journey, even if our experiences you know might be sometimes similar or even the same.

I think a lot of us, if not all of us, know what it's like to feel invisible or to feel small or like, like we're never heard, and I think that "What are you?" can be the kind of question that makes you feel invisible, you know. Or, or, like, getting in trouble for talking too much, which is, like, part of your life, it's, it's really part of my personality, right, that can be a way of, like, squishing people and making them feel smaller, making them feel like something's wrong with them and there's not, you know. And, and I think that my hope is that, just, even by seeing more stories of people who have, what I, I mean, I think my, my story is actually, like, pretty ordinary. Like, it's not, it's not uncommon to be raised by a single parent. It's not uncommon to be like a chatty little kid. It's not uncommon to, I mean, unfortunately, I think it's not uncommon to be asked "What are you?"

And, and I think that, or at least I hope that, that if, if kids or anybody who's reading the book can see, like, "Oh, actually, yeah, I know what that feels-," like, "That happened to me." And, you know, like, yeah, I think sometimes just having that little bit of validation of your experience can, it can just help so much because then you don't feel as alone, you recognize that, like, you know, all of our journeys have ups and downs or twists and turns, we all have doubters. And, and then you know, again, I was, like, pretty intentional about making sure to recognize that we doubt ourselves sometimes. I know I certainly doubt myself. And I think it's important to acknowledge that, so that, so that none of us feel alone in this experience. And I, I hope that people, I hope that people take that away from it, that none of us are alone in this wild experience of life.

**JVN** [00:24:14] That is so beautiful. One thing that Brené Brown talks about is this idea of shame resilience. And that's really, like, what we have to do in life is, like, you have to



become resilient to shame, because whether it's from society or family or even ourselves like this, like, shame can really derail us. So becoming resilient to shame. One thing that really came up for me, as you were describing that, one of my challenges with writing 'Peanut Goes for the Gold' is, like, how do you decide how to talk about some of these tougher issues with the younger audience. I wouldn't necessarily say what I'm about to say in a children's book, but one thing, "What are you?" that is such a dehumanizing question because it's, like, "I'm human, like, I'm a person just like you are." I remember being, like, 16 in a grocery store in my hometown and this little girl being in front of me with her mom and this little girl turning around and looking at me and then looking back at her mom and saying, "Why does he talk like a girl, and why does he act like a girl? And like but saying that that loud in front of me to their mom. And so just--

**REP. SHARICE DAVIDS** [00:25:15] Especially when you're a teenager, everything feels like--

**JVN** [00:25:20] Huge! But it's these, but it's these dehumanizing things where it's, like, I just think culturally we don't really, we are not taught to, like, humanize each other, like, we're not taught to, like, hold people in closer and to, like, be more loving and more compassionate. And so I think that's one thing about the book and your story that I think is beautiful is that it's really about humanizing and loving ourselves and realizing our potential and our possibility and I just think that's so incredible. And I just, I love this book and I love that you decided to do it.

**REP. SHARICE DAVIDS** [00:25:54] I think that that idea of humanizing people is something that it, in, in conversation, it seems so simple, right, like, "Oh, just recognize people as humans and treat them as such with the respect and dignity that they deserve as a human." In practice, it can be really, really hard, and I think that any time we, any time we can get just like a little bit of practice at that, it pays, like, it pays dividends in the long run, you know, any time we can recognize that, that something that we're saying or doing might be dehumanizing to somebody and, and catch ourselves and and think, like, "Oh, I, like, it's not my intention to make someone else feel less than," and, and if we, if we have more practice at making sure that we're, we're always trying to, to, to be respectful, to recognize people's humanity, then, then we'll be more likely to to avoid those kind of situations in, in the future or, and recognize when it happens to other people.

Like, when you were, when you were telling the story about the, the 16-year-old you standing in, you know, the grocery store and someone saying something that like, you know, it's a little kid who's already like thinking in a, in a binary, in a gender binary, it's a parent who has, who has the opportunity in that moment to say, "Oh, actually, like, let's, let's figure out a way to ask a question that you're curious about without maybe hurting somebody else's feelings," and, and then for the, like, young person who, you know, as 16,

you don't know how to navigate that kind of thing and it can, like, not only is it hurtful but then it gets internalized and then in the future, it's one of those things that pops up, you know, someone says something and, and, and oosh you're right back to being 16 and someone saying something in a grocery store and it's just like, there's so many places there where if, if we learn how to just slow down a little bit and recognize people's humanity, we might be able to avoid some of those, some of those really hurtful times.

**JVN** [00:29:52] Yes! Absolutely! Yes, yes, yes! Ok, so you represent, you represent Kansas's 3rd district. Can you tell us about who lives there, what are the issues that matter most to voters? Where is Kansas' 3rd district? I think there's a lot of listeners here who would be very interested to know about that.

**REP. SHARICE DAVIDS** [00:29:12] Yeah. So the Kansas 3rd is in the Kansas City metro area. And then for folks who aren't familiar with which rectangle state Kansas is, we, we border Missouri. And so Kansas City, the Kansas City metro area sits on the border of Kansas and Missouri. And for folks who have spent any time there, like yourself, you, you probably know that when you're driving around, if you're not from there, you wouldn't know if you're on the Kansas side or the Missouri side. But the Kansas, usually when people say Kansas City, they, they're thinking of Kansas City, Missouri. But there's also, on the Kansas side, and this is the district that I get the chance to represent out here in D.C., there's two full counties in the district, Wyandotte County and Johnson County. Johnson County essentially has what folks would think of as the suburbs of Kansas, of the Kansas City metro area.

And then Wyandotte county has Kansas City, Kansas, which is its own, its own city with its own unique history and even what I would say is, like, character and culture of, of, of Kansas City, Kansas. And then, and then there's a little bit of Miami County, which is where you start to think, probably what people might imagine more of Kansas, it's, like, it starts to be more rural, there's more agriculture in that direction and, I, so I got elected in 2018 along with the most diverse freshman class ever to be elected to Congress, and it was really cool to be able, it was cool as somebody from Kansas to be able to be part of that, because I think, I think there are a lot of misconceptions about Kansas. I think that, we have a lot more, we have a lot more diversity than people would maybe imagine.

And particularly in the, in the 3rd district, we've, we have this, like, hotbed of entrepreneurial activity. We've got, we've got some great public schools. And, we're still recovering from the damage that Sam Brownback did as our governor. You know, he, the, the damage that his policies did to our public school system, and as somebody who went to public school, you know, I started off and then I, when I went to college, I, I have an associate's degree, it took me four years to get that. I have a bachelor's degree; it took me

four years to get that, but both of those were public universities and community college. And so I, I think that a lot of folks might not, just might not realize how vibrant the area is and, you know, some of that is just by nature of how our, how our country is. People think of cities and, what you were saying earlier you know, I think that, I think it's a really interesting-, I think it's a really interesting and nice place to live and to visit. So folks who haven't been to Kansas City or to, to Kansas in general, you should come visit us.

**JVN** [00:32:42] So we're going to be, like, lightning round adjacent [CROSSTALK] because I know you got stuff to do, honey! So what are the issues in Kansas City's 3rd district that the constituents are most concerned about, like, what are the issues that you hear about the most?

**REP. SHARICE DAVIDS** [00:31:59] So of course, a lot of things have been exacerbated because of the pandemic. Healthcare has been, like, access to healthcare, fear about, you know, access to healthcare and getting to and from places and that sort of thing. I'll say for sure, too, the mental and behavioral health, like, this year has been traumatic. This has been a super traumatic time for everybody. And then you stack on top of things like the racial justice conversations that have, have been going on and people have been experiencing, but are now part of a mainstream conversation and it's happening in a lot more spaces than it used to, but the pandemic's stacked on top of that, you know, for a lot of people, they were already feeling the trauma of that stuff and then you stack on top of it, the trauma from the pandemic.

People are definitely talking a lot more about mental behavioral health. And then infrastructure is very important to a lot of folks. And then tackling the climate crisis, you know, we have this thing called Climate Action KC that is, it's a, a, a group of stakeholders, it's local elected, it's community members, it's activists, it's advocates, and they're doing a lot of work around that. And, and it's because so many people in our area care about that. Education is a really big issue. And some of that is because of the, you know, the failed Brownback tax experiment. And then, and then I would say, you know, just like how we get to a thriving economy and grow jobs, like, coming out of this, coming out of this economic crisis that was caused by a public health crisis; those are probably the biggest things.

**JVN** [00:34:57] So this is, like, a massive question I'm about to ask you so, like, just think about, so just, that's a problem, but I'm asking it. One of the things that I've been most concerned about that I've talked a lot about on this podcast is that, like, after 2020, the election, there was such a schism in our party between centrists and progressives and this, like, mudslinging match that was, like, post-November, pre-runoff in the Senate, that it really pitted a lot of, like, centrist Democrats versus progressives. But you occupy this place where you, you won your second term, I think you've been incredibly effective. And I think

one thing that we learned is that, like, it's all about, for Congress people and people that are, you know, you're in federal office, but you're, you're serving a district. It's about local issues and staying focused on local issues. But how can we do that without, how do we do this?! How do we bring the center and the left together?

**REP. SHARICE DAVIDS** [00:35:54] So I actually think, there's two things I think about this. One is, the, I think the reason that Democrats have better policy is because of all of these conversations, it's because we go into uncomfortable topics and spaces and conversations where we, you know, like if you, it's a big tent, people always say, "Oh, it's a big tent party." If you look at the way that we approach issues, it's with an eye toward: "How do we actually make things better?" It's not just, it's not just, "How do we win an election?" It's, "How are we going to make things better for the people that we are here to serve?"

And if that's really the, the goal, then it's messy to get, it's messy to get to that place. So I guess, and maybe this is because of my having had the chance to go to law school, I don't, I don't think of us having policy disagreements and like, you know, I mean, there are ways to have conversations that, that might be more productive or whatever, and we do that in, like, in real life, but I don't think of disagreements about policies as being a bad thing.

**JVN** [00:37:27] You're so right, because you know what my therapist always says, like, our relationships grow closer through disruption, like through having conversations, we actually become closer. I think where my fear comes in is that, like, you just, because even when that happened, it's, like, MSNBC made it into such a big deal, it's a really big deal on Twitter, like, but maybe I just watched too much MSNBC and too much Twitter, and it's actually really good that we're having these conversations, so it's actually a really good thing.

**REP. SHARICE DAVIDS** [00:38:53] Yeah. And I think that, yeah, I, I definitely, so that's one piece is, like, I don't actually think us disagreeing about stuff is, is a bad thing; it's how we get to better policy. Because at the end of the day, you know, when I'm, when I'm showing up, if I'm disagreeing with somebody on something, it's because what I'm trying to do is advocate for the district that I was sent to Washington, D.C. to represent. I'm, I'm out here to represent, to advocate for, to push for policies that are going to be good for the people in the 3rd district, for the people in Kansas and then ultimately for our entire country. And I think that so, so I guess I just, I guess I just don't accept that if we're not out here holding hands and singing all the time, that that means that things are bad. It just means that we're trying to figure out what, what the best path forward is.

Yeah, and then I think, and then I think so much of it is making sure that, at least for me, the, the, the cool thing about Congress is that there are 435 seats in Congress and every,

we're all human, we're all different and, and everybody shows up. Some people show up and they're like, "If, I, like my goal in life is to get this bill passed," you know, and some people show up and it's more of a portfolio of things like, "I want to work on X, Y and Z issues or I want to serve on this committee." Or "I really want to, I really want to be out in front taking the lead on issues of," and you can insert healthcare, climate change, like, making sure that, making sure that our infrastructure system is, is modern and and we're leaving something for our great grandchildren to thrive on, you know, like, it just, every single one of us is different. We all show up with different priorities and different ideas. And of course we're not going to agree on everything but the point is not for everybody to constantly agree on every single thing. It's for us to work all that out and then come out on the other side of some legislation that's going to be good for as many people as possible.

**JVN** [00:40:09] Ok, so now what we're going to do because I love talking with you so much and, but you literally are like representing, like, tons of constituents in D.C. and you've got meetings, you've got people to see, you've got things to do so we're rounding third base Ok, are you ready? Ok. What was your proudest moment from your first term?

**REP. SHARICE DAVIDS** [00:40:27] I have to say two different things [CROSSTALK] it was really cool, it was really cool to preside over the floor during the Violence Against Women Reauthorization and then, because we got some MMIW, Murdered and Missing Indigenous Women and people amendments in there, Deb and I did. And then the second one is probably, like, the Equality Act, even though, even though, like, Mitch McConnell, we can just--

**JVN** [00:40:56] Well, we're reintroducing both of those into this Congress to repass--

**REP. SHARICE DAVIDS** [00:41:00] Yeah, and we've done that out of the House, so hopefully we'll see movement on those. But the Equality Act, I, the reason that I love it, even though, even though, like, I would love it more if we got it passed, we have a president now who would sign it, is, is the message that it sends that there's, like, a whole body of decision makers in the federal government who who have said, "It is not ok to discriminate against people who are part of that LGBTQIA+ community."

**JVN** [00:41:31] What is your top priority in office right now?

**REP. SHARICE DAVIDS** [00:41:37] Ooh, right now, in this very moment, it's an infrastructure package.

**JVN** [00:41:41] Oh fuck. I almost didn't want you to say that because I had so many questions about it but I have to move on, oh my God! [CROSSTALK]

**REP. SHARICE DAVIDS** [00:41:45] We could, we could do a whole podcast about infrastructure.

**JVN** [00:41:52] Or maybe we could do an Instagram Live about the infrastructure things so that people could be more, like, engaged because there's so many questions about it. Ok, what are your broader hopes, what are your biggest hopes for your second term?

**REP. SHARICE DAVIDS** [00:42:02] I want us to get an infrastructure package done that is, like, has a lot of, a lot of provisions in it for sustainability, resiliency, tackling climate change, growing jobs, growing green jobs, and we got to get a, we got to get the For The People Act or H.R.1 passed [CROSSTALK] because it cuts to the core of our democracy and the [CROSSTALK] foundational.

**JVN** [00:42:28] This is voting rights act, right?

**REP. SHARICE DAVIDS** [00:42:31] This is voting rights, this is big money in politics. This is, this is, like, cleaning up the corruption, like, all that stuff. We got to address that.

**JVN** [00:42:40] What do you think would most surprise listeners about how things work in Washington, D.C., from legislation to lunch breaks?

**REP. SHARICE DAVIDS** [00:42:46] It's like high school.

**JVN** [00:42:48] Makes sense. What do you think is the most effective way for listeners to have their voices heard in Congress?

**REP. SHARICE DAVIDS** [00:42:53] Hopefully you have a representative that is listening to you. Write, call, email their offices. The numbers are all online.

**JVN** [00:43:05] And this is our final question, so you don't have to lightning round with this one. What recommendations would you have for listeners looking to get more involved in their communities through electoral politics or other forms of service?

**REP. SHARICE DAVIDS** [00:43:17] Mhmm, that's a really good question. You know, one of the things that I think a lot about is how, how many different ways there are to be of service to your community and I think part of the reason that I'm, that I think that is because I spent so much time talking about running for office. You know, lots of folks, like, and of course, it's natural, people will say, "What are your recommendations for people who want to run for office?" But there are so many people who literally like they couldn't

think of anything further from desirable than running for office. People hate public speaking, they don't want to be out in front, they don't want their name on everything, which I totally get.

So I always, I always think if, if you can find something that you care about and it can be electoral politics, it can be just the policy around that, running for office is absolutely, absolutely a way to do it. And if you have the thought, "I think I want to run for office," you should do it because, especially if you're, if you are someone who doesn't fit into kind of the mold of what people think of a senator or congressperson or a state council person looks like, or what kind of background they come from or something, you should absolutely do it if you're thinking about it.

**REP. SHARICE DAVIDS** [00:44:48] But also, if it's not your thing and you want to be engaged, you can, there are so many ways to be helpful on a campaign. You talked about knocking on doors earlier, go knock on doors for somebody, and then if you don't want to interact with people in person, there's so much going on behind the scenes. Data management, like, keeping track of the money, like, helping with the website, helping with the social. There's all kinds of stuff. You could get a little group of people together, figure out who you like, and just have, like, a little army of people who retweet every single thing that some you know elected official that you love says or does. So there's all kinds of stuff like that.

And then I would also encourage people to think about the ways to, to be helpful that might not be electoral politics but will necessarily have an impact on that. You know, things like, just like other types of civic engagement and community building, you know, I think one of the ways that we offset disinformation is community building, because folks, so many folks don't feel like they have anybody to trust. And the way we build up trust is by building relationships and electoral politics isn't, it can be a method of building a relationship, but there are lots of other ways too, you know, and that could be non-profit work, it could be it, it could be book clubs where people are, like, learning about things so that they can then share it with, with their family members and schoolmates or coworkers or whatever. And then there's also stuff, like, if you have the means to help other people to, to do stuff that's not necessarily, like, "I'm, I'm showing up to tell you how you should live your life," but, you know, stuff that's, like--

**JVN** [00:46:54] Just like being of service to other people.

**REP. SHARICE DAVIDS** [00:46:57] Yeah, I mean, some of the stuff that I think is kind of the coolest is, like, community gardens and mutual aid networks and, like, those kinds of

things, because that's, like, a bunch of people coming together and saying, like, "What do we need? What do we need to do?" And let's do it together.

**JVN** [00:47:14] Ah! Because especially when you engage in mutual aid and community building, it's very, I mean, and this is like a, kind of reminds me of, like, when you're, like, "Oh, I really want a partner," and then people say, like, "Oh, but if you're looking for one, you're not going to find one." But when you do engage in mutual aid and community building, you will quickly find that there is one party that, like, makes those things more possible, right. So it's, like, we want to engage in community building and engage, and engage in mutual aid because it's the right thing to do and because people need help. But then also, like, the icing on that cake is that you will quickly find that there is one party that's more working for, like, the top one percent, and then there's another one that's really working for everyone else.

Congresswoman Sharice Davids, thank you so much for your time, I really did not even get to, get to your committee work, which we're going to have to do on our IG live. We're going to have to talk about voting rights, we're going to talk about the, about our infrastructure plan, we're going to talk about your committee on transportation and infrastructure and your being on the Committee on Small Business, we'll talk about that on our IG live. We love you so much. Congresswoman Sharice Davids. your new book is called 'Sharice's Big Voice: A Native Kid Becomes a Congresswoman.'

**REP. SHARICE DAVIDS** [00:48:17] I've really enjoyed this. This is a great start to my day. Thank you for having this conversation with me today.

**JVN** [00:48:24] I just want to do it more often. I want to talk to you more often. I love you so much.

**REP. SHARICE DAVIDS** [00:48:28] We should be, we should be er, er long distance besties!

**JVN** [00:48:34] Ahhh well I'm so here for it. You've been listening to Getting Curious with me, Jonathan Van Ness. My guest this week was Congresswoman Sharice Davids.

You'll find links to her work in the episode description of whatever you're listening to the show on.

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