

Getting Curious with Jonathan Van Ness, Celeste Watkins-Hayes, Jenna Bednar, Maurielle Courtois & Hillary Poudeu Tchokothe

JVN: Hey, curious people. Welcome back to Getting Curious. I'm Jonathan Van Ness and let's get going. This is what I've been curious about lately. I am seeing all of these videos on my tiktok of these college age people and they're talking about who they're going to vote for. And it made me realize what's it like to be a college student in a swing state right now? In 2024 I went to school in Arizona in 2004 during the election of 2004 where I was 17, couldn't vote yet. Um, graduated early from high school, but things have just changed so much in the last 20 years. I'm really curious about how this election is showing up for students. How is it changing their identity? There's so much more access to information now than there was 20 years ago. And that's made me wonder like, what is this election doing to the college experience or just we're seeing so much take place in um advanced education right now. And I'm just curious what these students experiences are like. So I'm going to the University of Michigan to find out what it's like to be a college student in a swing state where I'm going to interview Maurielle Courtois and Hillary Poudeu Tchokothe. And we're gonna find out all about how it is for these college students, but they're going to be joined by two people who I also love so much. The dean of students, Celeste Watkins Hayes, who's also one of my favorite all time Getting Curious guests. And University of Michigan Political Science Professor Professor Jenna Bednar, these four are going to give us a gorgeous conversation today. This, this live recording was so much fun. These students are so engaged, learned so much. Um, and I encourage you to listen to this episode because there is and, and stick around for the end because there is some huge takeaways um especially when I'll, I'll leave you with this. In 2016, the Michigan election was decided by 11,000 votes. Also, there's 50,000 people at University of Michigan. So university voting is so key. Uh, so we're gonna find out how it's going over there. I also want to remind you guys, this is a live recording but it sounds really good. You guys there. It's giving like if you were there but not so take a listen, it sounds a little bit different than normal, but I think it turned out really good. Also, just a quick little housekeeping. If you're not listening to Ask JVN on Wednesdays, you're really missing out. That is the senior producer of Getting Curious, Chris and my kind of kiki where we get together, we discuss what's going on in the week, we discuss what's in our algorithms. We just, it's giving topical, it's giving our current events. It's giving our like two girls gap. We have so much fun over there. It also reminds me of myself on Game of Thrones. I'm just giving you reckless, unabashed if you wanna come join us. Um, yeah, and we love you. And I think this is like, I think we're, I think we just passed a year of Pretty Curious and Ask JVN. So we're having fun over there building the community, come join. Um, we have so much trouble, but let's get to our guest bio. Let's go to our conversation.

While Dean Watkins Hayes and Professor Jenna Bednar are, are like giving faculty from the University of Michigan. Our students, Hillary and Maurielle there with an incredible organization. It's a nonpartisan voting organization called Turn Up Turn out, they are incredible. I love their activism. I love their work. They are so committed to making sure that people know how to vote, where to vote, when to vote. And there's so much juiciness packed into this conversation. Just wait. Um, so stick around to the end of the episode where we'll discuss what I learned what the biggest takeaways are. And thanks for coming to another episode of Getting Curious. Let's get it going.

Hi, University of Michigan and welcome to a very special episode of Getting Curious Live. Joining us on Getting Curious, we have one of our all time MVP, most exciting guests, we love so much. Welcome to the stage, Dean Celeste Watkins Hayes Celeste is the best we love **audience applause.** OK. Then we also have, let me get to my nose again. The political science icon Professor Jenna Bednar, give it up for Jenna **audience applause.** Uh, yes. One more little hug, hug. And then we have not one but two student leaders from Turn Up and Turn Out. We have Maurielle Courtois. Yes, Maurielle, and we have Poudeu Tchokothe **audience applause.** Yes, come here honey. Thank you. OK. Take a seat. Everyone get comfortable. **Deep exhale** welcome to the stage. You guys, how are you guys doing?

MAURIELLE COURTOIS: Good? How are you?

JVN: Never better.

JENNA BEDNAR: I'm curious.

JVN: So now Jenna tell me just so that everybody knows, what is it like to be a political science icon?

JENNA BEDNAR: I didn't write that text. No, that was our senior producer of Getting Curious, Chris, who we love. Chris is amazing but, but you, you, we teach, you teach political science

JENNA BEDNAR: Totally. Yes, when I'm not teaching public policy.

JVN: So what is like teaching public policy and political science look like?

JENNA BEDNAR: Political science is understanding much more about our system uh about the, the way government is shaped and then public policy is uh what we can do through that government on behalf of others.

JVN: Yes. Ok. I got scared that I drink your water but I didn't you have one right there too if you get thirsty queen? Ok. Ok. So that's, and then Celeste, just in case anybody doesn't know, what do you do? What, what, what's the, what do deans do? Do you just have to like run around and put out student fires all day long?

CELESTE WATKINS-HAYES: So, so let me first say how excited we are that you're here. JVN and we're so so excited to have you here **audience cheers** and the re- and let me tell you why we're so thrilled because you have a show that is based on the premise of curiosity and understanding people and understanding them with love and empathy and bringing that spirit, those spirits of love, empathy and curiosity to everything that you do. And so much of what we do at the Ford School and so much of what I do as Dean is so similar. It's about how do you think about leading an institution whose mission it is to, to drive research and to teach students and to do policy engagement, work for the public good. And we bring a spirit of curiosity of empathy of connection. Because we believe that all of the work that we do adds up to moving the needle forward for equity, for inclusion for um the intellectual life, life of the country and the world. So, so much of what we do is about driving the conversation forward about democracy. So that's what it's like to be dean of a school that is focused on that. And wakes up, we wake up every day thinking about how do we strengthen our democracy through all the work that we do at the Ford School.

JVN: Yes, Ford School. Give it up for Celeste. And so I wanna hear to um Poudeu and Mariel tell me about Turn Up Turn Out, how does it work? What does it mean?

HILLARY POUDEU TCHOKOTHE: Oh yeah, I can start and then Maurielle can continue. Um, so turn around is like the University of Michigan's like official nonpartisan a student group that does initiatives on voter registration, voter education and also voter turnout. So we all kind of operate year round. Uh not only like, you know, during the semester, but also like in the summer too to like make sure students are not only registered but kind of work on like nonpartisan voter education events as well as you know, turnout events like getting students like vote early for example,

MAURIELLE COURTOIS: I think some of our initiatives this fall include um adding on to what Hillary said uh voter registration. So we're tabling uh three times a week regularly at different locations on campus. And that is ultimately how we get a lot of our registrations. We also are doing walk to the polls. So it's an initiative super cool where we bring together departments. So the school, music, theater and dance and health sciences, like kinesiology and school of engineering. So a whole bunch of different departments coming together and all turning out to vote together.

JVN: Now what does because I mean, maybe we don't know, honey, what is a nonpartisan voting group mean?

HILLARY POUDEU TCHOKOTHE: For example, like if someone's like, oh should I register in Michigan? So the battle ground and I should register somewhere else. We're like, we will help you register wherever you want to register. But it's like ultimately your choice like giving students agency to like make their own political decisions and we'll help facilitate them through the process no matter who they want to vote for, no matter what issues care about them.

JVN: Yes. OK. So basically it means that you're not telling people who to vote for it. You're just making sure that people have access to voting,

MAURIELLE COURTOIS: Right, really focusing on the election aspect of it and not campaign.

JVN: So would you say that 2024 feels like higher energy, higher curiosity in terms of this election in 2020 or does it feel pretty similar?

JENNA BEDNAR: I would say that the energy picked up this fall. I think that it was, you know, a lull over the summer. Um, a lot of disillusionment, um, a lot of dissatisfaction with top of the ticket and then I feel like people are getting a little bit more engaged now.

JVN: So what are like the, maybe the surprises or the things that people find out when they come to get registered? Do people ever find out like that they weren't registered or they've been removed from a poll or what are like the surprises that happen for people when they get registered?

HILLARY POUDEU TCHOKOTHE: I would say like, first of all, like a lot of out of state students that like want to vote in Michigan, they're like, oh, I can vote here? That's not something they don't know, people don't know to re-register. So for all the people out there, if you have moved since the last time you voted, you have to register something we should like point out right now because a lot of students don't know that. So they live in a dorm, they're freshman year now. They live in an apartment and they know to re-registered and they go to their polling place and like, you're not registered here. So it's kind of –

JVN: How soon do people need to make their voting plan before an election?

MAURIELLE COURTOIS: ASAP. I mean, um as Dean Watkins Hayes mentioned, like, people who don't have a plan to vote, they might have every intention but day of something comes up and now of a sudden you have barely any time to fix it. We saw this in 2022. Sorry, in midterms but um –

JVN: No please, midterms are very important.

MAURIELLE COURTOIS: Very important guys.

JVN: I love a midterm election.

MAURIELLE COURTOIS: Yeah, if you were here and even if you weren't here, we were in the news because at the Museum of Art, uh, people waited in line upwards of like, six hours because they didn't know they had to re register a new address or they didn't understand that. Um I don't know, they just didn't get certain things and that's why it's important to have that plan, even if you do intend to vote and you think you're all set, sometimes something comes up that you don't realize.

JVN: So is Michigan one of those states where you can register like all the way up to Election Day?

MAURIELLE COURTOIS: Yeah, same day registration, yeah.

JVN: That's awesome because a lot of states don't have that, yeah **audience applause.** There is a cut off and so it is really important if you're not in Michigan to make sure that you know, when the cut off is in your respective state to make sure that you have voted in time or that you've registered in time. Ok, here's another question that's a little, it, it just highlights the importance of voting and we didn't talk about this backstage, but it's on my mind. So I'm gonna ask, do you guys know about the election of 2000?

CELESTE WATKINS-HAYES: Yes.

MAURIELLE COURTOIS: I wasn't alive, I've heard.

JVN: And no, so, no, not really. And then –

MAURIELLE COURTOIS: Al Gore.

JVN: Yeah. Yeah. But I believe it was like 528 votes.

HILLARY POUDEU TCHOKOTHE: Florida right? Bush v Gore?

MAURIELLE COURTOIS: Yes.

HILLARY POUDEU TCHOKOTHE: Ok, I didn't know about it.

JVN: So what about you all make some noise in this auditorium if you know about the election of 2000 **crowd cheers.** Now, there's no shame. There's no shame, no shame in here. So now make some noise if you don't know about the 2000 election **crowd quietly cheers.** Thank you for your honest you guys. So yes, I mean, this election was incredibly close and I believe that in the state of Florida, it was a difference of, I think it was 528 votes. I, I could be wrong but it was like around this number, I just, you know, making wild accusations against Australia in the election of 2000 I, I know um but no, it was really close

and then I also think about like Danica Rome and I think about the um I mean, she got elected that time anyway, but 2017, the Virginia State House or maybe it was 2019. It was an off election year because Virginia always does their state house like the year they do like a year elections and it, their statehouse came down to one vote, they had to draw straws and that determined the election like the control of the house. So it just, I, and I think that was the other point that I was going to say about just remembering 2004. My first time on a campus, I couldn't vote anyway. But I do remember thinking back then in Arizona, I was like, does my vote really matter? And that was only four years after the election of 2000, which just goes to show no offense you guys don't freak out on me when I say this. But when you're 17, not understanding the impacts, not understanding the power of our voice. So I do think it's just so important for us to remember and there's actual data and evidence to suggest that elections can be decided on that thin of a margin. So your voice really is so incredibly important –

CELESTE WATKINS-HAYES: And the polls right now in the presidential race are showing a very, very tight race. So it's really critical that to have your voice be heard, you really need to make a plan and get out there and vote. You absolutely can make a difference. And the nice thing about an absentee ballot is it allows you if you're somebody who likes to, you know, you see the ballot, you want to Google somebody, you wanna check them out before you vote for them. Voting from home with an absentee ballot is a great way to do that because some folks, you know, if you're standing in the voting booth and trying to do that research, it can be hard. So also think about what kind of voter are you, are you a person who you know exactly who you're gonna vote for and you can go into that voting voting booth and get it done and feel informed. But if you feel like, oh, I didn't know I was also voting for judges, I wanna understand who these folks are or, oh, there's a battle initiative here that I didn't realize was gonna be on the ballot and I want a little time to do a little research. Then you might be a great candidate for an absentee ballot. It's not just for people who live far away. It's also for people who have that kind of style and how they vote. So I vote absentee even though I live here and don't anticipate traveling because I like to be able to stop and do that research while I'm voting.

JVN: That's a really good point.

JENNA BEDNAR: But there is some, I don't know if it's true for every state but our state for sure, you can, uh, type in your address and get your ballot and preview it so you could do this homework in advance because I'm the same way. You know, I'm like a professional political scientist and I have to do all kinds of research which way to figure out the judges and that sort of thing. So, uh look up your ballot in advance, like have some confidence. But the other piece of this and I want to turn it back over to Maurielle and Hillary is like, especially when we're trying to encourage the development of a lifelong habit of voting starting at this age. But voting at your age is a very social experience, right? So how do you think about it being a social experience and how we've built what we're doing on this campus with that in mind? Oh my gosh, I'm taking your job.

JVN: No, I loved it. I was like, honey, that was a good question.

MAURIELLE COURTOIS: Yeah, I mean, um as I'm not sure if everyone knows, but there are two voting hubs on campus, one of them is open. So at the Museum of Art on –

JVN: I just went you guys, it's really pretty.

MAURIELLE COURTOIS: They were there. Um super pretty and it is impossible to have that open without the rest of our coalition members. So we have two faculty from the Art School. So Stamps they with along with students design everything. It's awesome and it's super interactive. I would also we should definitely highlight, we're talking about these voting hubs that's super unique and it's unique not only because not every college campus has it, but because we have the city clerk staff on our campus, that's so unique **audience cheers.**

JVN: So I mean, obviously in the last year, we have seen a lot of elevated discourse, elevated big feelings and rightfully so on college campuses across the country. And that is a lot of pressure for a university to be able to like handle that sort of dialogue and make an atmosphere where people can speak their minds and people are safe to speak their minds. So how does the university facilitate open dialogue on political topics? And have there been any challenges in maintaining a respectful atmosphere?

CELESTE WATKINS-HAYES: Our mission and I'll just speak for the Ford School is we believe in what we call the three legged stool policy education. So it's policy analysis, like evidence matters, right? It's policy communication and it's policy leadership. And as, as you know, we see what's happening in the world. The Ford School has really played a kind of um a big role in uh a place that people on campus look to look to as a model, look to as an example of how do you talk about hard, complicated issues and the way we've approached it is the following. Number one, we lean into communities. So regardless of how we feel about a policy issue, we understand that at the end of the day, we are part of a community. So that means empathy, that means respect, that means uh reasoned uh discussion and debate. Um, the second thing that we, and let, let me just say, when we say leaning into community is everything from how we talk to each other to sometimes we just serve food. I mean, just come together and connect and just remind yourself who we're with in community outside of what you see scrolling on social media. Because when the social media stuff starts, it's very, very easy to dehumanize and depersonalize. But when you're sitting right next to somebody eating, you know, mac and cheese or tomato soup together, it's much harder to demonize and to dismiss. So the first thing that we really think about is community. How do we lean into that? The second thing is thinking about how do we bring people together in conversation and expose them to the top thinkers in a field or an area. So it's one thing for everybody to have an opinion. It's another thing to bring in people who are experts who have studied these issues. So the University of Michigan, I mean, the speakers that we bring in, the folks that our students get exposed to on an everyday basis. There's almost too many events to go um to the on campus. But yeah, but the people that you get to be in conversation with and you know, it's just a Friday night or it's just a Tuesday afternoon that really helps to plant the seeds of what is some of the the brightest and best thinking on particular areas that are hard and difficult and thorny. And then the third thing that we do is the satellite clerk's office. I think that that is an act of responding to the tension within college campuses. Because regardless of how you feel about a particular issue, you have an outlet to speak your mind. And it's in that voting booth at the Duderstadt and at UMMA and we've created the context for that to happen. So I think leaning into community, I think, thinking about how we expose people to some of the top thinkers in the world and how we foster that in our classrooms through um the ways that our faculty are leading um conversations with students to saying at the end of the day, go vote and let your voice be heard. That's how we have cultivated um an environment um that I think is really supportive of democracy and really supportive of student voice.

JVN: So basically long story short, y'all have had your hands full on this campus –

CELESTE WATKINS-HAYES: Absolutely.

JVN: And you're, but you're really proud of the work and you're facilitating really beautiful meaningful conversations to with which I do have one more follow up.

CELESTE WATKINS-HAYES: Yup.

JVN: You know, we don't have to get into specifics unless you want to. But I, I also have seen friendships and I've seen a lot of personal relationships just completely break down over the last year through the work that you guys have done through facilitating these conversations. Have you seen any reason to hope? Have you seen people have their relationships repaired have you seen people come together and find each other's humanity again?

CELESTE WATKINS-HAYES: You know, I really have and I really wish that, that made the headlines. I know it's really, you know, attractive to talk about, um, all of the ways that college campuses are being ripped apart and all of the attacks on higher education. But I'm so passionate about higher ed for this reason. What, what other environment do you get to connect with someone who is very, very different from you and get encouraged to have a meaningful conversation, not just a hi and bye but a meaningful conversation, not just about a particular, you know, work sit situation and work environment, but on all the issues of the day, you get an opportunity every day to have a conversation with someone who is different from you who may disagree with you. What a gift that is. So I'm holding up the banner for higher education and the environments that we create **audience applause.** Um one of the things that yeah, give it up for higher Ed –

JVN: Yes.

CELESTE WATKINS-HAYES: Give it up for higher Ed, right? So one of the things that we saw was the, you know, the ways in which people had a lot of ideas based on what they saw on social media, what their families had said, what their friends have said, et cetera. And in the conversations and they often do have to be these smaller conversations. So it's hard to do it at scale at the University of Michigan, but we've been able to do it within pockets all over this campus and all in, in so many of the schools and colleges is to offer that kind of loving pushback and critique to say, well, what do you mean by that? Or can you tell me more about or I hear what you're saying? Let me just add this or let me inspire you to maybe think about it this way. And we've seen people recognize that like I may have my position, but I can see a little bit more of your position. But I can see a little bit, a little bit more nuance. I can still stand in my truth and my and my beliefs about something. But I can see through the nuance of where you might be coming from. And I think that's really what we've been able to see. The challenge is like I said, it's hard to do that at scale. So it's hard to see it at scale, right? What we see at scale is the discord. I mean, the the distrust. But and the struggle, but what I really wanna highlight is how many of those just those quiet moments I call them that are happening on campus. The other thing I wanna highlight is how many of our students now have taken to reading the paper, reading the news, reading, really informative podcasts saying I wanna know more. I wanna know more. I wanna know more. I wanna know more because they're realizing just how complicated things are that people are much more boned up on their history, on particular issues on the current context on what the different sides are saying. And if, if there's anything that has been positive about the last

year, it's been how much informed we talk about misinformation. But a lot of people have gotten in real deep to get informed on these issues because they wanna know more and they wanna be more conversant and they just wanna be smarter on this stuff um for a whole host of issues, whether we're talking about global conflict in the Middle East, whether we're talking about reproductive rights, people have said like, you know what, I need to understand this a little bit better and they've gone and sought out information. So that's what's been inspiring to me, you know what's been inspiring you?

JENNA BEDNAR: Yeah. No, 100%. It's, but I, I think there's something about social media that causes us to like, you know, talk about all, all of the bad stuff because that gets all the attention. We, we had um an event last week uh where we had these uh I think it was called Two Dads –

CELESTE WATKINS-HAYES: Two Dads.

JENNA BEDNAR: Two Dads Defending Democracy. Um, so this was Joe Walsh who was a tea party founder, ok? And Fred Gutenberg who lost his daughter in Parkland. And they uh, they were going after one another on Twitter I actually don't know how that could have started.

JVN: It's a wild place.

JENNA BEDNAR: Bad place. They were going after one another. And then at some point, Joe Walsh made the decision, he was going to reach out to some people who were, um on the other side, he reached out to six people, five of them ghosted him. And then, uh Fred Gutenberg responded. And then, but Joe Walsh said the only we need to take this offline, we cannot do this online. I need to just have a phone call with you because online we're both driven to be awful to one another. And so, you know, it's finding these opportunities to reconnect and see one another as humans, I think is what we need to do to move forward.

CELESTE WATKINS-HAYES: And I think what this generation's going to figure out how to do is how do we do that at scale, right? How do you take those building blocks of those quiet moments where there can be real nuance to a conversation where we do take it offline? How do you build that up? Is it all of the sum of its parts? And that's what elevates or is there a way to do that at scale? That is because that's what's really gonna move the needle in terms of our larger societal culture right now.

JVN: How long should someone think that it could take like this time of day matter? Is it better to try to get their first thing in the morning if you're able to or, yeah, how long?

JENNA BEDNAR: So again, remembering that our students have a choice of where to vote. So they can vote in the city of Ann Arbor if they live in Ann Arbor, um they can vote elsewhere in Michigan or many, many of our students come from out of state. So I just want to, you know, reiterate what Hillary brought this up early, but that's super important because here, if students choose to vote out of state, the way that Maurielle is, you had to make, you had to be on top of it, right? Like because you're gonna be requesting this absentee ballot and track it down if you, you know, if it hasn't arrived et cetera. If you're voting in the city of Ann Arbor, it has gotten so easy. Like the big easy button we and thanks to all the voters because it's, it's been a change recently. So um we, you can already vote in the city uh by going to um a picking up your amnesty ballot going into that lovely room that has been created for people to fill out their ballot and then drop it off at a drop box right there. So

voting has started uh as of last week. If you wanna vote in person, do not wait until the election day. We have nine days of early voting, the nine days of early voting in the city of Ann Arbor, uh, means that you can go to uh four different library locations, I think is true for –

MAURIELLE COURTOIS: At least.

JENNA BEDNAR: At least for the libraries as well as of course, the city clerk's office or to one of our two beautiful, uh on campus locations and I don't think there's gonna be a line. So go for the nine days of early voting show up on campus and it'll be a breeze if it's election day, if it's election day, if you've waited, you have to go to your precinct. So that's the other big hitch that kind of led to some of the long lines in 2022 for us. So we're, we've been working super hard as part of uh Maurielle mentioned, there's a UMich Votes coalition that um a lot of our team is here uh uh that we've been working super hard on getting the word out about uh the, all that's available. The great big easy button, you know, the big easy button is actually spelled early here. You can vote early.

JVN: Got it.

MAURIELLE COURTOIS: October 26th to November 3rd, early voting in Michigan.

JVN: And, and really, it's like what I hear you saying is like if you do wait for voting day, it could vary like it, you might be in and out, but you might be there for hours and hours. So which is why making a plan is so important if you want to do early voting or absentee voting, it just like, couldn't be any more important a question for the group, how do you think this particular election is shaping a student identity?

MAURIELLE COURTOIS: There's a lot of issues happening in the world in our country that are really important to me. And so I feel so strongly about casting my vote in this election. And I think other students are feeling that as well make it as fun as possible as engaging as possible. That's why we have the voting hubs and early voting. We're gonna have so much fun programming where we, there's so much fun stuff.

JVN: Oh, I hope this election is fun!

MAURIELLE COURTOIS: Yeah, I mean, we'll see.

JVN: I'm so hoping for a really fun election!

MAURIELLE COURTOIS: But –

JVN: I've had both types of elections. Yeah. Yeah. Yes, I've had elections that were so fun and I've had other elections where I, like, ate like a gallon of ice cream while scream crying "She Used to Be Mine" by Sarah Bareis. Uh, and smoking cigarettes and I don't even smoke cigarettes. So, I would prefer not to have one of those elections again. But I'm just, you know, that's just what came up for me. Um, uh, so just, you saying that it's like, it's something that's very important for students.

MAURIELLE COURTOIS: I think students really care.

HILLARY POUDEU TCHOKOTHE: What about you queen? I'd also say, like, students do have like qualms, like, I know when talking to my friends. So I think some of them are here right now which is super nice. Yeah. But I don't know, we're talking and we're just kind of like, sometimes we have, like, qualms that, like, who we're voting for. Like, I think there's

something I saw my parents do in 2016 when they voted for the first time. That's when they got naturalized. But, like, I know seeing my parents had to have those qualms and then, like, me as, like, you know, voting for the presidential election for the first time, like, you know, I don't completely agree with one or like some candidates, like, how do I vote when I don't agree from 100%? And I think kind of grappling with that um, as students like something I'm like hearing between my friends, but I know other students are having those, like grappling feelings too.

JVN: That's so good. You know what I do about that. Um, any, you know, I'm non binary and so any time someone tells me that, like, I have to agree with something or someone 100% I'm immediately like, I think, you know, gender, non conforming people were very, like, nuance is like our thing. We really like, we really like gray, you know, like we really like, you know, it's true. We just really do. We're like, oh, gray, there's so many shades, you know? Uh so, yeah, that's, that's why I do that personally because I'm like, what's 100% agreement? I haven't agreed with anything 100% since the double decker Taco at Taco Bell, which I mean, if Doja Cat could bring that back the Mexican pizza, I don't know why we can't bring back the double decker taco. It's like, cause this cheese variant is just not the same thing? Like, I need the refried beans. I want the soft taco, the refried beans, the hard taco. And that's something I'm not non binary about **audience cheers**. Like I'm very like, yeah, like really, like not that much nuanced. Like what's a great double decker taco? It's like pretty straightforward, you know? Anyway. Um ok, so we got that. 000, you know what? I missed this for you, which I think is really important. Michigan and elsewhere, what are the concerns for voter suppression this year?

JENNA BEDNAR: We are so blessed in the city of Ann Arbor with the city clerk and, and the whole office who wants to meet voters where they are? So Jackie Beaudry, they, they are working super hard to –

JVN: Yes, Jackie!

JENNA BEDNAR: 100% to figure out what it is that would keep anybody from voting. Let's solve that problem. And uh just because we want everyone to vote. But uh you know, I think that voting suppression and let's just talk about college campuses, right? Has gotten um, so you hear these excuses, right? You hear excuses like we only have a certain number of machines and so we've got to distribute those machines carefully and we just don't have any for the, uh, for the campus or, um, well, uh, it's not on us to educate the students about the, the options that are available to them. You know, that's a pretty, like subtle form of suppression right? At, at the end of the day when you have, um, when you make it difficult for people who have never voted before to vote, that's suppression.

JVN: Yes. Yes. Yes. **Audience laughs.** Which, you know what, also, I was telling the girls about the story last or about that I experienced in Texas voting last time. And what did you say? Remember you were like you were getting disenfranchised.

JENNA BEDNAR: I said that to you.

JVN: It's true because I mean, but it's true. It's like six hours like they were really trying to make me give up.

JENNA BEDNAR: Now, this said we completely wanna disassociate the 2022 experience here where we had students waiting in line for six hours. I was talking about this the other

day with some people and it's like on the one hand, we were so proud of the students. Uh on the other hand, we were horrified, right? But I think another thing that I we should think about when we're thinking about voting suppression is when things like that happen. How does the system respond? Like what does the city clerk decide to do the next I'm around to solve that problem. That was like priority number one in the city of Ann Arbor. Let's figure this out if, if places are like, oh no, we're good with people having to run back and forth. Like –

JVN: I will say in 2022 in the midterms, I had a really easy time. I like went to a Randalls and I it was like, this is a really cute little like Texas grocery store and it was really easy and fast and cheap.

CELESTE WATKINS-HAYES: See, sometimes it works, right?

JVN: Yeah. Ok. This is for both of our student leaders. What message do you have to impart here? Not only to your fellow students here tonight, but also for anyone listening, who is a young voter, especially in a battleground state?

HILLARY POUDEU TCHOKOTHE: I would say like be proactive about your voting plan number one, like you're going to vote, you know, in Michigan, which is your choice, you're going to vote out of state, which is your choice. Like know where you want to vote, make sure that you're registered, you know, at your most current address and all and honestly, like do the research like either, you know, request an absentee ballot was Michigan has like no excuse, absentee ballot. So it is really amazing and all states have that um like do your research either request an absentee ballot and like, you know, do your research in the comfort of your room, you know, vote, you can go early and like have a phone with you. Like when I was voting in the primaries, like I had my phone with me, I was voting, you know, it's like, it's super nice that you can do that in Michigan for example. So like, you know, be like, be ready to vote but also like know how to like navigate the voting system. So there's so many cool resources like vote four and one and ballot pia. And you know, like um Professor Bear said, you can, you can like look up your sample ballot, for example, like just like take the steps to make sure that you know how to do it for the first time because when you do it later, it's just gonna be so much easier.

MAURIELLE COURTOIS: Yeah, I would agree with doing a little extra research. So Vote 411 is a great resource –

JVN: Ooh, what was it?

MAURIELLE COURTOIS: Vote 411

JVN: Is that a national thing or like a Michigan thing?

MAURIELLE COURTOIS: National. Yeah. So and it's super interactive. So you can literally select like every single, it's basically a mock ballot but online and you can kind of go through see what each candidate or each proposal or whatever it is, what it's saying and see if you agree with that or not.

HILLARY POUDEU TCHOKOTHE: Nonpartisan by the way.

MAURIELLE COURTOIS: And it's nonpartisan.

JVN: Can I tell you like the self control that it has taken me to not like scream like go so and so candidate like every like three minutes this whole time, I'm so proud of my like internal filter.

CELESTE WATKINS-HAYES: You're doing great.

JVN: It is working so well, right. Now it really is. Um, ok, so that's yes, and what I was gonna say 10, I want to stop doing that thing where I'm like, you guys are so young but, but there is this really funny classic movie. It's a total classic. It's called Billy Madison. **Audience laughs.** And in Billy Madison you don't know this movie, right?

MAURIELLE COURTOIS: Adam Sandler, right?

JVN: Yeah, you do?

MAURIELLE COURTOIS: I've heard of him.

JVN: Oh my god, good for you but you haven't seen it?

MAURIELLE COURTOIS: No.

JVN: Ok. Well, how students, how many of you all have seen, have seen it? **Audience cheers** but most of you haven't seen it, right? Yeah. Ok. So there's this part of the movie. So basically, um Adam Sandler has to go back to school to get his degree and he does two weeks in each grade from K through his senior year. And there's this one scene where he, where one of his little school friends pees their pants. And so then Adam Sandler goes up and puts all this water on his pants and he's like, you're not cool unless you pee your pants to make everyone else think that like peeing your pants is cool. I need you guys to continue to do that with voting. Like it's so because it truly like it is so important for young people to know that it actually is really cool to vote. And you know what I also heard the other day which like blew my little mind on my little beauty podcast that I do on Mondays? This is gonna blow your fucking minds, ok? This is like the coolest fucking thing. No, I was like, I was like, I've been doing Queer Eye for seven years and I've never said this or thought of this and it's like shame on me, civic engagement as self care **audience applause.** It is literally is self care. Self care is so much more than like taking a fucking bath. Like I love a bath. I love a blow dry. I love, I mean, I just tried a new blush today, Patrick Ta. It was great. It's not partisan. Ok? Unless he was saying do I like powder blush or cream blush? And you know, and then we could get into a fight if you wanted to. Um, in which case you're like me and you're non binary and you use both. Ok? So um but I forgot what I was saying cause I got distracted. Think about how good that anyway the point is is that we, it, it's so, so important for us to use our voices. It's so important for us to use your voice and for us to make sure that the people in your life, I think to your point on social media like the unintended consequences of like when you shit on voting or when you, when you make it not cool, that's like so important. Like young people have such an ability to like it's cool to vote. So use your voice as such that it is cool to vote. It's definitely not cool to be hmm like I'm not voting, it's definitely not cool. Like I would never wanna hook up with someone that didn't vote ever, you know, access denied! Anyway. Ok. Um I think, ok, so that was that ok. Um ok, let me just, how are we on time? Are we doing good on time? Have I been here for three hours? I have no sense of time. Are we doing good?

CELESTE WATKINS-HAYES: I'm looking around like there's somebody directing us –

JVN: No.

CELESTE WATKINS-HAYES: And there's, I think, I think we're self directed.

JVN: What time is it?

CELESTE WATKINS-HAYES: Ok. It's 752.

JVN: Oh, so that's like we have a few minutes for questions.

CELESTE WATKINS-HAYES: Yup!

JVN: So I have some questions. So I'm gonna ask my, well, actually, these are, I can't do that. You pick. You, you just pick like two questions. I was supposed to pick them myself. But I can't, it feels like Miss Universe. Ok will you read it?

CELESTE WATKINS-HAYES: And these are questions people submitted?

JVN: Yes. These are questions that people submitted.

CELESTE WATKINS-HAYES: Ok, got you. Daniel's telling me 10 minutes.

JVN: There you go.

CELESTE WATKINS-HAYES: Hey, thanks, Daniel.

JVN: Yes queen.

MAURIELLE COURTOIS: All right. This is a long question. So we are living in a highly polarized world and you talk to many people for many walks of life. Have you found that talking to people through your podcast format has given people the space to talk, learn and perhaps change their mind or do you find that even after talking through these issues that people walk away with their same beliefs that they walked in with?

JVN: It's a really good question. Um I have heard, I mean, I think on my podcast I, I'm definitely learning about things that I didn't know. But no, they actually, I have had my mind changed about things but the, but I think what I hear the most is like from listeners who've had their minds changed from something or like you said earlier, Celeste, like, found a new perspective on something that they maybe didn't know. Um, but what my favorite stories have been, like, I've had several women reach out to me after I interviewed Elizabeth Warren after I interviewed Senator Tammy Baldwin. I also don't know why I didn't say Senator Elizabeth Warren. But um where people ran for office themselves and won.

CELESTE WATKINS-HAYES: Wow, after listening to your podcast.

JVN: They listened to me interview a politician and then they decided to run for office and they won. In that I was like, wow, wow. Like that is major. Um, so, yeah. And I think, I think also too, like my dad, like, sticks out in my mind, like my dad and I have like so many fights about politics and I mean, I had to write like a whole chapter about our relationship in my second book. Love that story because we just, my dad is like, he is a good person. He, he really is a good person, but he was like, raised in Central Illinois in the fifties and the sixties. And you know, when I say certain things he it's just been a really long road and um there's been a couple podcasts in particular where he was like, wow, like Dr .Jackie Antonovich was one um that's like the history of abortion access in the United States and like the history of like abortion law in this country because, and it, it went into like, the KKK and I was like, I

didn't know that I was going to be going into that and finding out this history. But I did and that episode, he was like, had changed his mind and I heard it tones in his voice that in my whole life, I've never heard, like, I physically heard the, the gears, like cranking in his head and I was like, oh my God, I did it. I fucking did it! Like he, oh my God. So I think that's a, that's a big one. So people, you know, that I've like never met in real life and then people who I've, you know, had really close relationships with, have like, experienced different views from listening to the podcast that makes me feel really happy because really my only rule or intention by the podcast was that I just, like, wanted to learn and I need to actually be curious about what I'm learning about. That was the rule. So I've accomplished so much more than that, which is like, really cool. What's the next question? I feel like Miss Universe. But you're going to win queen. You deserve it. You were going to win. I'll be the first run up.

MAURIELLE COURTOIS: Yeah. All right. Second question is, hi JVN. Um, their question is uh for you as an LGBTQIA plus voter, what are things that we can be doing to show our support for LGBTQIA plus affirming politicians other than voting and how can we educate those around us about why it's important to consider LGBTQIA plus rights when casting our vote?

JVN: So that's a really good question. I think the thing that so I love the question, but it's also frustrating because LGBTQI plus rights are human rights. And just because you're cisgender or heterosexual doesn't mean that these, that, that won't affect you. Um, and we're seeing that more and more every single day, like trans rights are women's rights. Like there was literally a school in Pennsylvania that's like voted to like put wind like windows in girls bathrooms to make sure that people are using the bathroom that they're supposed to be using, like the incursion on privacy and the incursion on people's rights to self identify and be who they are that affects everyone, whether you are cisgender or trans. Um, so I think that's a really big deal. I mean, marriage equality, like interracial marriage wasn't legal in this country for a really long time, even if it was between, you know, heterosexual people. So we just really have to be careful and making sure that we're showing up for each other because when you're showing up for each other, you're also showing up for yourself. So, like, don't be so secure in thinking that these issues aren't going to touch you because you're straight because they will and they are **audience applause.** Yes. Um, and then the other thing for the poli for the, like LGBTQIA plus allied politicians, um I would say what I've learned from the podcast and from interviewing politicians and activists, it's like the sooner you can get involved the better. So, like, obviously a donation is great any time, but the sooner people can get it the better. So whether that's volunteering your time volunteering your money, volunteering your, like, I mean, I even feel like I'm, I mean, I don't claim like that I'm volunteering when I'm like, educating my dad, but that's kind of volunteering **audience laughs.** So I think just making sure that you're like using your voice, using your platform and also being aware of your platform, which this isn't really answering the question. But I, I hear people say so many times like, oh, I don't have a platform like, and the amount of times where I've been told by a random stranger on the internet that I should speak up for XYZ. But then because I'm petty, I do go and I look at theirs and never, are they speaking up for anything? Very rarely is the person who's telling me that I should use my platform or very rarely are they ever saying anything on their platform. Every once in a while I will give them credit. They do every once in a while, but it's a rarity. And if you think about 11,000 votes in Michigan in 2016, if you think about 500 votes in Florida in 2020 the people in this very room with the followers in this very room, like in this audience right now, you guys do have power to sway an election, whether you have 50 followers or 500 or 5000 or 50,000 or 5 million.

You do have a platform that's an important one to use and to share your knowledge and share what you know, with people. So that would just be the other thing, use your platform like don't sleep on your own platform.

CELESTE WATKINS-HAYES: I have another note we can end it on –

JVN: Tell us, please.

CELESTE WATKINS-HAYES: Because we talked about this because you and I met about five years ago –

JVN: How has it been that long queen?

CELESTE WATKINS-HAYES: And it's been that long. It's been that long. So for those of you don't know, we met through our shared commitment to um ending the HIV pandemic and making sure that people understand the importance of resources and access and self care. And one of the things that I think is so fascinating about your life, Jonathan is the way that through your personal experience, you have made it your mission to connect with others to educate others to make other people laugh, to make other people learn things that they didn't otherwise know about and to do it just where we started with a spirit of love and empathy and curiosity. So we thank you. And in this moment, 12 years later, think about the impact you are making. And we talked about from the one on one interactions in the salon chair with clients and the way that you shape lives to the ways in which you're talking to hundreds and thousands and in fact, millions around the world as you travel and do your podcast. We thank you. We honor you. We love you and we appreciate you. Thank you for being at the University of Michigan. Thank you so much **audience cheers.**

JVN: Thank you, Michigan! I love you guys! Go Wolverines, yes! And Celeste, thank you so much for having me. Thank you for putting this on you guys. Thanks for coming out tonight. Love you guys. Get home safe. Thank you guys!

So did we learn the thing? Look, we have seen students through these like coming together for breaking bread and like these like dinner things that they've had where they have seen students on opposing ideological lines come together. They maybe didn't persuade someone, you know, to fully come to their side, but they created more humanity. They were to learn more about each other's perspective and just create more cohesion, more work, seeing these young people work together better and that just made me feel really heartened that there is people that are healing rifts and coming together and seeing each other as humans and not threats. And I just think that is really important and really beautiful. Um, I think the biggest aha moment and the most interesting thing that I took away from this conversation was the fact that college students can vote where they are at college or where they are from. So let's say that you are from California, but you're living in Michigan, you can legally vote in Michigan, you get to pick. So I I just really hope that anyone listening to this. If you have a college student in your life, please make sure that your college student is voting, that they have a plan to vote, that they know that they are allowed to vote where they go to school or where they are from. When we think about the fact that Michigan was decided by 11,000 votes in 2016. When we think about that Georgia was decided by 11,000 votes in 2020 college campuses alone have the power to swing those elections. And for those of you that have college age people in your life, please make sure that they have a plan to vote. Um Vote411.org is an amazing resource to cast uh to cast a practice ballot and look at the um politics of each candidate. It's a national service, so wherever you are, you can look that up.

Um I think the just the other takeaways. I love to see how proud the University of Michigan is of their voting record. Um, they have four of all the four year public campuses in the US in the top 10, 6 were Michigan schools. All three UM campuses were in the top 10, Flint, Dearborn and Ann Arbor. Um, so I'm, I'm just so proud of Michigan's track record. We love the Wolverines, they have a great gymnastics team, so we love them. Um, thanks for listening to that episode. We love you so much. We love our Getting Curious community, make sure to stick around for Ask JVN. Um, get into it. We love it. Yeah. See you next time!

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