

What Else Happened? 106: Prison Injustice, a Rural Water Crisis, and Philando Castile's Legacy

- Kat Jercich: Welcome to What Else Happened? A show for people who want to know what stories this week may have slipped under the radar. I'm Kat Jercich.
- Regina Mahone: I'm Regina Mahone, and we're the managing editors at rewire.news where we deliver evidence based journalism for people who are passionate about health, rights and justice.
- Kat Jercich: This week on What Else Happened? We'll talk about jails around the country banning in person visits. New evidence of a cancer causing chemical rural America's water and how a tragedy in Saint Paul has led to fighting child hunger.
- Regina Mahone: And we'll chat with Sofia Resnick, an investigative reporter at Rewire about just how much a group of anti-choice activists paid to shut down an abortion clinic in Maryland.
- Kat Jercich: Let's get going.
- Earlier this month Jefferson Parish Correctional Center in Gretna, Louisiana announced that it would no longer allow in person visits. Instead, people inside the jail will communicate with their loved ones via video call, similar to Skype.
- Regina Mahone: But unlike Skype, those calls aren't free. A 20 minute call will cost \$13, making it impossible for some people to talk to their friends, family members and children behind bars. And this is an issue all over the country. By 2015 nearly 3/4 of jails and prisons in 43 states had banned in person visits after setting up video visitation.
- Kat Jercich: The announcement was met with public outcry all over the country. Advocates pointed out that in person visits help people feel connected to their communities which makes it less likely that they'll end up back behind bars and as you and I know from doing this podcast, tech issues and just not being in the same room with each other can make it really hard to communicate. But Jefferson Parish is going ahead with its plan.
- Regina Mahone: What should listeners know about it?
- Kat Jercich: Well it's not all bad news, maybe, I'm bringing all this up now because after that Jefferson Parish announcement, an independent monitor in Denver released a report recommending that the Sheriff's department reinstate in person visits at the two jails. Like Jefferson Parish, Denver had forbidden people behind bars from seeing their visitors in person and that'd been the case since 2005.
- Regina Mahone: Visitors still go to the jail, right? They just stay in the lobby and call people inside from that lobby?
- Kat Jercich: Right, or they can use their home computers but it costs extra, which again, might prevent people from connecting at all. Honestly, I know that officials claim that this

is reducing contraband but as the Denver Independent monitor pointed out, at least one study shows that in person visits reduce the likelihood a person will commit another violent crime but up to 47%. And in Denver one out of every two people released from the jails returns to department custody in a year. It just seems like a no brainer than instead of investing millions of dollars and tons of time into video visitation systems, jails and prisons could let people inside, see their loved ones, especially their children once in a while.

Regina Mahone: Was there a response in Denver after this report?

Kat Jercich: No. The Sheriff's department is still banning in person visits, but the report also noted that in Texas, Mississippi and DC, county or state governments have actually moved in the opposite direction to reinstate in person visits. I'm hoping that with more official reports and more public pushback, that trend will continue.

Regina Mahone: The issue of water contamination has gained wide coverage in recent years. Since the Flint water crisis drew national attention.

Kat Jercich: It's worth noting that residents in Flint Michigan still use filters and bottled water while their bills remain high for water they can't safely use and for health problems related to the high levels of lead in their water supply.

Regina Mahone: Right. A new report from the Environmental Working Group titled, Trouble in Farm Country, exposes another source of drinking water contaminants, farm runoff. From my understanding, farm runoff happens when there's a storm or some other external force that can transport potentially life threatening fertilizer into underground sources of drinking water.

Kat Jercich: That's sounds about right.

Regina Mahone: This has been an ongoing problem but the Environmental Working Group is most concerned with ending farm runoff that might contaminate drinking water. Meaning it wants to address the cause of the issue before it's an issue. Once the damage is done, the process for treated contaminated water is very complicated and expensive. So what does this have to do with reproductive health you might be asking yourself? Good question.

Kat Jercich: I was asking myself that.

Regina Mahone: Due to an overuse of fertilizer that contains a cancer causing chemical, millions of people in rural America are at risk of being exposed to nitrate, which can be fatal to young children who ingest too much of it. There's also the issue nitrate presents for pregnant women who are typically eligible for free bottled water in affected areas. But when water is treated to remove these cancer causing chemicals, there's likely to be chemical byproducts that had been linked to reproductive harm among other things.

Kat Jercich: The Environmental Working Group found that the states with the most people at

risk are California, Iowa, Illinois, Wisconsin and Kansas.

Regina Mahone: And the report comes as Congress is considering a new farm bill and the Environmental Working Group is asking lawmakers to include a provision requiring farmers and landowners to take precautions and eliminate runoff. I don't know about you, but I definitely prefer my water without a side of cancer.

Kat Jercich: Yeah, I do.

On Tuesday, Dr. LeRoy Carhart, one of just a few doctors in the country who openly perform abortions in the third trimester, started practicing at a new clinic in Maryland. But not everyone in the area's happy about it. Especially the people who paid a million dollars to get his last clinic shut down. I'm speaking with Rewire investigative reporter Sofia Resnick about her story for us this week.

Hey Sofia, how's it going?

Sofia Resnick: Hi Kat, I'm doing well, how are you?

Kat Jercich: Pretty good. So what was the thinking of the folks in the anti-choice movement who bought out the clinic where Dr. Carhart was practicing?

Sofia Resnick: The thinking was they were hoping to get rid of this abortion provider, Dr. Carhart, who is one of the most maligned abortion providers in the country. Essentially our story is about the deal making that went on between anti-choice activists and the long time abortion clinic owners. Basically these activists in Maryland around Germantown where the Carhart clinic was, they in this very calculated effort to shut down Carhart's practice, they petitioned specifically this pastor, petitioned the owner of this clinic in Germantown and they didn't think the clinic was particularly thriving and they asked him, "Hey, we'll pay you bunch of money if you shut down this clinic and your other clinic nearby in Maryland," and this way we'll get rid of this doctor. But at the end of the day, even though the deal went through and as we reported, to the tune of \$1.2 million, Carhart has just rebooted another practice just this week.

Kat Jercich: How would abortion access have been affected in the area had Dr. Carhart not reopened a practice?

Sofia Resnick: One of the reasons that Dr. Carhart is so maligned and vilified is because he's one of the few abortion providers in the country that will perform an abortion late in the third trimester. In some cases, beyond 28 weeks, into the 30s. And often the very few women who want these abortions, it's estimated by the CDC, less than 2%, even less than that, they generally seek out these types of abortions because of extreme circumstances, such as a late diagnosis of a serious fetal anomaly or problems with their own health. And there are other reasons too, often it's very young women who haven't been able to access an abortion earlier. So he's certainly not the only one who does this but he's one of the few who provides these abortions very openly. He makes a political point to do so in the open. And

that's why for years, activists have been trying to get him to shut down through various tactics.

Working to shut down permanently he was one of the few providers on the east coast so it definitely would have had an impact to people living on the east coast, even though there are other providers in Washington DC and in New Jersey.

Kat Jercich: Got it. Speaking of those tactics, you spoke with a lot of people in the anti-choice movement for this piece. What did you learn about their strategy in terms of targeting Carhart, in terms of targeting other abortion providers to get them to shut down as well?

Sofia Resnick: This week, on the day that the new clinic was being opened, a bunch of these people, some of whom had helped coordinate this deal, others who are just abortion opponents, they all gathered in front of the new clinic, which is now in Bethesda and talked about all the ways that they're not going to back down. And some of these new tactics include calling up the leasing agent of the new building and telling them that Carhart is bad for business and giving a lot of skewed information about him and his practice. Other strategies involve going to all the different DC area airports, DC and Maryland area airports because famously, Dr. Carhart usually flies out of his hometown in Nebraska through a different airport to avoid abortion protesters. They're planning to stakeout all of them and spend all day every Sunday, to try to thwart him and to harass him and to hold signs in the airport. These are some of the tactics specifically against Carhart.

Kat Jercich: Oh man. What about other providers? Are they also going to try to buy out other clinics in the area or around the country?

Sofia Resnick: Yeah, that's something generally that some of the anti-abortion activists I talked to said that, yeah, they're going to try to replicate this strategy in other cities and one tactic that they want to try is to convince medical office parks to ban abortion providers the way that some office parks can ban different types of businesses that they don't want like strip clubs or tattoo parlors. That seems to be something that they're going to be pushing on across the country.

Kat Jercich: Oh, wow. Thank you so much, Sofia. It's a really great piece and I enjoyed reading it and we'll definitely look forward to watching what happens in Maryland.

Sofia Resnick: Thanks so much.

Regina Mahone: Earlier this year, Jazmine Walker wrote a piece at Rewire detailing an ongoing problem facing families and school systems: unpaid meal charges.

Kat Jercich: That piece was a response to the news that the Trump administration was relaxing nutritional standards on school meals because no one was eating the grits.

Regina Mahone: That's the one. Jazmine pointed out, students may not have been dissuaded from eating the healthy foods solely because of their unusual appearance. The Secretary

of Agriculture noted the black flakes in the whole grain variety in his announcement of the relaxed standards. But because of this larger issue at play, the issue of unpaid meal charges has grown so big it led the US Department of Agriculture in 2016, to require school administrators to come up with unpaid meal charge policies by July of this year.

Kat Jercich: Child hunger is a pervasive issue and it affects young students that can be detrimental to their development. As Jazmine noted in her piece, it can cause depression, anxiety and social withdrawal.

Regina Mahone: Our good news story this week is that a memorial fund set up to honor Philando Castile, a Minnesota resident who was shot and killed by a local police officer in July of 2016, has raised the funds needed to erase school lunch debt in St. Paul for a year.

Kat Jercich: Before being killed by a police officer during a traffic stop, Castile worked as a nutrition supervisor at a school in St. Paul and would sometimes pay for students' lunches if they were short on cash. Pamela Fergus, a local college professor, set up the fund in August, saying in a recent interview with the BBC that she felt like she had to something to honor his memory.

Regina Mahone: J.J. Hill Montessori where Castile worked prior to his death, had a lunch school debt of about \$1,000 a year with last year increasing to some \$4,000 for nearly 900 kids. The fund has collected nearly \$76,000 and will pay off the debt of all students in public schools, spanning all grades in the entire St. Paul region for one year. But at the end of the year, the fund isn't going anywhere. As Fergus explained on the fundraising page, "We are set to help pay off lunch debt this school year but we'll keep asking for donations and sharing of this site because we plan to always find a way to help. Philando Feeds the Children is going to be around a long time."

So Kat, what's bringing you joy this week?

Kat Jercich: I get to see Kesha. I'm very excited about that. This will be my third attempt to see Kesha because the last two times I had to get to her shows she canceled for pretty understandable reasons. But it's going to happen. Her new album is really good. I'm very excited about it. It's literally, I've been thinking about my outfit for three weeks. Which crop top am I going to wear? I don't know.

Regina Mahone: So this, just to clarify, this is the TiK ToK Kesha.

Kat Jercich: This is, not just TiK ToK Kesha, she's really so many songs after that. Her new album is really good.

Regina Mahone: This is a judgment free zone.

Kat Jercich: Oh my gosh. It's fine. TiK ToK, A, is a great pop song. I also really like Die Young, that one's in my head a lot today. It's really peppy. Been listening to some Hymn. Check out Kesha's album. I think it's called Rainbow, I don't even know what it's

called. I've been listening to it on my bike as I bike around town. It is effervescent and glittery and I'm going to wear glitter and probably a tutu. If I can find one.

Regina Mahone: That's amazing.

Kat Jercich: Also, the show is all ages so it's going to be a bunch of 18 year olds and me just losing my mind about how excited I am.

Regina Mahone: I'm very happy for you, it sounds like it's going to be a good, fun time.

Kat Jercich: I didn't know that you weren't up on Kesha. I feel like I've failed you as a friend. I'm so sorry.

Regina Mahone: The extent of the my Kesha knowledge is probably, what's that show? Why am I blanking on that show?

Kat Jercich: The Voice.

Regina Mahone: No it's the show where the kids sing. The choir.

Kat Jercich: I don't know.

Regina Mahone: Oh my god, what is it called? Okay, it doesn't matter anyway. I know some Kesha, I'm definitely, I will run to some Kesha, anything that's upbeat and poppy I'm here for. Definitely free zone.

Kat Jercich: Glee, Glee, right?

Regina Mahone: Glee.

Kat Jercich: Glee? Glee.

Regina Mahone: Why was that so difficult?

Kat Jercich: I don't know.

Regina Mahone: Glee, thank you. Performing some Kesha songs on Glee and I enjoyed that. I love that show.

Kat Jercich: I'll have to re-watch that part. How about you? What's bringing you joy?

Regina Mahone: Well Kat, it's funny, I realize whenever I listen to this podcast I always start my joy part with well. But anyway, I'm getting married this week and so that's bringing me lots of joy.

Kat Jercich: Yay, congratulations.

Regina Mahone: It's a pretty big week for Gina and after we get married, we're going to go to Hawaii

for 10 days, which means no What Else Happened? for a few weeks because when I get back then Kat, you're also heading out of town. Where are you?

Kat Jercich: Yes I am. I'm going to Germany.

Regina Mahone: Woo hoo.

Kat Jercich: Exactly overlapped with your trip so we won't speak to each other for three weeks. You'll get a break from me.

Regina Mahone: We'll just hand the baton and I'll, it'll be great.

Kat Jercich: I'm so excited for you, congratulations.

Regina Mahone: Thank you.

Kat Jercich: It's going to be so good.

Regina Mahone: I'm very excited to see my family and friends who are coming into town, it's going to be great.

Kat Jercich: Yeah.

Regina Mahone: And I hope that our listeners miss us. They better miss us. And we'll be back in a few weeks.

Kat Jercich: Yeah, and I'm excited to come back and I think we can both agree that our joy bringing topics are equal. Kesha is equal.

Regina Mahone: To getting married? I think that sounds right.

Kat Jercich: That's about right.

That's our show for this week. If you liked it, please rate it on Apple podcasts and subscribe wherever you get your podcasts.

Regina Mahone: Thanks again to Sofia Resnick.

Kat Jercich: You can find her @sofiaresnick on Twitter.

Regina Mahone: You can follow Rewire @rewire_news and me @byReginaMahone.

Kat Jercich: And I'm @KJercich on Twitter.

Regina Mahone: Good luck with the headlines and we'll see you in a few weeks on What Else Happened?

What Else Happened? is a Rewire radio production for rewire.news. Created and

hosted by Regina Mahone and Kat Jercich, the managing editors at Rewire. Nora Hurley is our producer, Marc Faletti is our executive producer and Rewire's editor-in-chief is Jodi Jacobson.

Kat.

Kat Jercich: Sorry, my mouth is very dry.

Regina Mahone: It's all that Kesha talk, it's getting you thirsty.

Kat Jercich: It's true. I gotta hydrate.