

All Ears with Abigail Disney
Season 3 Episode 9: Jessica Ramos
Food Is The Great Unifier
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JESSICA RAMOS: Is this thing literally on? Is this thing on? I just want to make sure you can hear me, I guess, through the microphone.

ABIGAIL DISNEY: Yes.

JESSICA RAMOS: I am one of those geriatric millennials that everybody's talking about, unfortunately. So-so she says that she hears me very loud. And I'm telling her that I'm just loud.

[ALL EARS THEME MUSIC]

ABIGAIL DISNEY: Hi all, Abby Disney here. Welcome to All Ears. Today's episode is rooted in New York city politics, but in many ways it's a national and even an international story. We'll be talking about food with my guest, New York state Senator Jessica Ramos. After her election in 2018, Jessica began to tackle food politics from the vantage point of those with the least power: street vendors, farm workers and delivery workers. It makes sense. Her district in Queens has the largest percentage of the city's food workforce, more than 24,000 food workers in just three square miles. But she doesn't just love and fight for the people who keep us fed. She also loves food. And she says her district in Queens has some of the best eating in the country. While my producers, Alexis Pancrazi and Chris Schomer, were learning about Senator Ramos, they got a hankering—an understandable hankering—for some of those very eats. So they took their microphones over to Corona Plaza where dozens of street vendors from all over the world set up every day. And they ate, but they also met a couple of hardworking vendors who talk about what it's like trying to make it out there on the street. Take a listen as Chris Schomer reports from her day at Corona Plaza. And I'll be back with my interview with state Senator Jessica Ramos in just a bit.

[START: A VISIT TO CORONA PLAZA VENDORS]

CHRIS SCHOMER: There are not many places in the tri-state area where you can find tripa mishqui.

JOHANNA: Sí. El más popular...

TRANSLATOR 1: Yes. The most popular, people come a lot for the mishqui tripe. They come from many places.

JOHANNA: Bronx, Brooklyn, Long Island, New Jersey, Newark.

CHRIS SCHOMER: That's Johanna.

JOHANNA: Mi nombre es Johanna Chacha y soy de Ecuador.

CHRIS SCHOMER: Tripa mishqui in case you were wondering is of course, tripe. Cow's stomach. It's an Ecuadorian delicacy. And it's said to have healing properties.

JOHANNA: La mishqui tripe es, en nuestro país...

TRANSLATOR 1: Tripa mishqui, in our country, they eat it a lot. There are many people in Ecuador, especially in Quito, in Cuenca who eat it for gastritis.

CHRIS SCHOMER: Her tripa mishqui is one of the things she sells in a small triangular plaza under the seven train in Queens.

JOHANNA: Pues Corona Plaza en el 2018...

TRANSLATOR 1: Corona Plaza in 2018, when I started selling at that time, there were about five people selling. During the pandemic, more and more vendors began to come out. I think we're about 60 stalls. Well, I counted 60, but I think we're already at 90.

CHRIS SCHOMER: Johanna is right. Corona Plaza has become a very busy place, especially on a Saturday night. Nearly every available space is taken up with beautiful arrays of produce, grills or tables with scarves and purses. Narrow passageways wind around through them, clogged with people waiting for grilled corn or empanadas or tacos. Every few minutes, the rumble of the elevated train overhead drowns out the sound of meat sizzling, kids yelling, orders being shouted.

JOHANNA: Más que todo...

TRANSLATOR 1: Most of all, it is a family job, my daughter helps me, she helps me cook, my husband sometimes helps me peel the potatoes. So the whole family works together as a group.

CHRIS SCHOMER: Like most of the people selling in the Plaza, Johanna was not born in the United States. She's undocumented.

JOHANNA: Yo vine, la primera vez, entré en el 2008.

CHRIS SCHOMER: She came to the states in 2008. Before she started vending she

worked in construction cleaning, a job that involves doing a deep clean on new homes or office sites before people are allowed in. She says she prefers to be a vendor. The hours are better and she can bring her kids.

JOHANNA: Al vender la comida...

TRANSLATOR 1: Selling food gives me time to be with the children, to be more attentive to them. I would not go back to construction.

CHRIS SCHOMER: But being a street vendor is not easy either. It's a tenuous position to be in. Not only is Johanna undocumented, but she doesn't have a permit to be vending legally. And that means if she gets caught by the police or the health department, she'd be slapped with some hefty fines, sometimes as much as a thousand dollars, which she can't afford. So Johanna feels like she has one option when she sees a health inspector:

JOHANNA: Siempre me he corrido.

TRANSLATOR 1: I've always run.

CHRIS SCHOMER: The Street Vendors Project, an organization in New York City that advocates for vendors, estimates there are as many as 20,000 total vendors. But there aren't nearly enough permits to go around.

In 1983, New York City set a cap on street vendor permits at 5,953. That year, Ed Koch was mayor, Flashdance and Tootsie were hit films, and we still used subway tokens. Since then, the city's population has grown by 19%, its real estate industry has consistently flourished, and if it were a sovereign nation, New York would have the 10th largest economy in the world. The number of vendor permits 38 years later? It's still 5,953.

[SUBWAY SFX]

CHRIS SCHOMER: Of those newer vendors is Rosario.

ROSARIO: Mi nombre es Rosario, y soy de México.

CHRIS SCHOMER: She's undocumented as well. And when the pandemic started her job cleaning houses dried up. Without papers she wasn't able to find work and her husband, who works in construction, was also laid off. Their savings dried up. They found themselves online at food pantries. And doing everything they could just to scrape by.

ROSARIO: Cuando me quedé sin trabajo...

TRANSLATOR 2: When I was out of work here during the pandemic, I looked for a way to sell something to survive. I decided to sell in Corona Plaza.

CHRIS SCHOMER: But she had to stop in the winter months.

ROSARIO: El frío era muy intenso...

TRANSLATOR 2: The cold was very intense. I am asthmatic and diabetic and the intense cold at that time was affecting me a lot.

ROSARIO: Si, también yo tuve cáncer de seno...

TRANSLATOR 2: I also had breast cancer and my treatment was very strong. And that also contributed to me to stop working.

CHRIS SCHOMER: But even in the summer months, it hasn't felt safe to be vending. Rosario is also undocumented and she's watched as police and other enforcement agents come through the Plaza and issue tickets.

ROSARIO: Yo ya no vengo de lunes a viernes...

TRANSLATOR 2: I no longer come from Monday to Friday because I'm afraid they will arrest me or give me a ticket that I will not be able to pay.

CHRIS SCHOMER: The lack of legality has created a black market for permits. Here's Johanna again:

JOHANNA: Queremos hacer las cosas legalmente...

TRANSLATOR 1: We want to do things legally but I see that we cannot. I do not know what to do. I think we have to stay like this until God allows us and hopefully we will not be removed from the square.

CHRIS SCHOMER: According to data compiled by the Street Vendors Project, street vendors in 2012 added nearly \$300 million to the city's economy, they created some 18,000 jobs and paid \$71 million in sales and income taxes.

JOHANNA: Lo más difícil es el trabajo en el invierno...

TRANSLATOR 1: The hardest part of the job is the winter... the cold. But I will continue doing it as God allows me because I like it

CHRIS SCHOMER: In January of this year the city council passed a bill to add 400

more mobile food vendor permits every year for ten years. The law was the result of years of work by the Street Vendor Project and immigrants' rights groups.

JOHANNA: He sido comerciante desde pequeña...

TRANSLATOR 1: I have been a merchant since I was a little girl. Difficult, but I like it.

CHRIS SCHOMER: For Johanna and Rosario and others like them, they're stuck in New York City's 38 year old holding pattern on street vending permits. But with the new city law going into effect, 400 new permits are scheduled to be released in January. 4,000 over the next ten years, maybe they'll be among the lucky ones. For now they can only wait.

TRANSLATOR 3: My name is Johan. I am four little months old.

TRANSLATOR 3: And I sell at the stands with my mom.

TRANSLATOR 3: Lo más chiquito de la plaza, huh?

ABIGAIL DISNEY: Corona Plaza is just a few blocks away from the office of my guest today, state Senator Jessica Ramos. Lucky her. Ramos made headlines in 2018 as part of a wave of young and mostly progressive politicians who ousted a small but powerful and pesky group of New York Democrats who had been crossing party lines in the state Senate to caucus with Republicans. It was a very big deal in New York politics when all this went down and she's been making waves ever since.

State Senator Ramos lives in Queens, where nearly half of the borough's 2.3 million residents were born outside of the United States. The district she represents is brimming with people who make our food systems run. In 2018, she helped pass a bill in the New York state Senate that granted farm workers some very long overdue rights: overtime pay, unemployment insurance and collective bargaining rights. She's also partnered with the New York Street Vendors Project, the group that helps vendors in New York to organize collectively, know their rights, and run their businesses well. Jessica, welcome. I'm so, so happy to be able to talk to you today

JESSICA RAMOS: Well, thank you so much. Talking about food is almost as great as eating it, so I'm-

ABIGAIL DISNEY: 'Almost.'

JESSICA RAMOS: -happy to be here and talk about how we've been thinking about food as policy.

ABIGAIL DISNEY: Yeah. In my family, we were so into food that we would eat food and the whole time we were eating food we would talk about food. Do you do that too?

JESSICA RAMOS: I think that in a district where we speak nearly 200 languages, that's probably one of our universal commonalities, is that we love to talk about food, how we make it, how it tastes.

ABIGAIL DISNEY: Yeah. I came here to New York in the mid 1980s, and I loved the vendors. I was like, this is the best thing I can imagine, that I can just walk up to one of these vendors and get an amazing tamale or something. But it hasn't always been peaches and cream for the vendors, for reasons of bureaucracy and competing agendas and interests. Can you try and explain the catch-22 that the street vendor community is in these days?

JESSICA RAMOS: Well, it's hard to find where to begin. But I will start by saying that the rent is too damn high in New York. In these huge big cities part of the issue is real estate. It makes it so hard for somebody to open their small business. And certainly lack of immigration status plays a role as well. Being able to apply for loans, access capital and being able to register, get certified for all of these things. Unfortunately, I think many people sometimes forget that street vending is as old as New York. Street vending has always existed in the city of New York. But unfortunately, the city's response has traditionally been to criminalize street vending, to limit street vending in order to help the real estate industry. We've had the limits-the same street vending permit caps that we did in 1983 when Ed Koch was mayor. The laws need to keep up with the entrepreneurial expression of its people, because, you know, especially from the consumer perspective, you want to know everything that's being sold on the streets of New York, we need to create a system for how people are behaving, how, what people are doing instead of ignoring and just criminalizing them, because people will always sell things whether we like it or not.

ABIGAIL DISNEY: Right, right. Well, I think that bureaucracies tend to look upon things they're managing as problems that need to be suppressed rather than as businesses that should be facilitated. And like, if they could just switch from one thing to the other and look at the street vendors as this incredible gift to the city and I mean, I can understand the city needs to kind of make sure that the sidewalks aren't blocked and that you know there's ingress and egress from buildings and so forth but there's nothing that's not enriching about a wealth of street vendors in New York.

JESSICA RAMOS: I also believe in honoring honest work, you know, and honoring entrepreneurship and innovation and creativity, you know, I don't think any of us want to live in a world that's completely dictated by big box stores and that we don't have that choice, between makers and producers and chefs. In the end, it's these small businesses, quite often the street vendors that give neighborhoods it's character or else everything's just going to be cookie cutter.

ABIGAIL DISNEY: Yes.

JESSICA RAMOS: And also as a human race, this is how we advance is by allowing human beings to create, to innovate and to push their ideas forward.

ABIGAIL DISNEY: I think that that street vendors in general just are really important to the wellbeing of any city

JESSICA RAMOS: Right. And most of them don't necessarily want to be street vendors. They would love to have their own restaurant. They would love to, you know, have their own clothing store. They would love these things. But, you know, one, there's a demand because of the price point, right? As wages have stagnated and the cost of living has skyrocketed, well, it becomes, this becomes the source. Where, how people eat lunch, where people get dinner, because they can't necessarily always afford to sit down at a restaurant or don't have the time to go food shopping and cook themselves. Right?

ABIGAIL DISNEY: Yeah.

JESSICA RAMOS: As the pandemic really picked up and we saw so many great restaurants, particularly in Manhattan, have to shut down, have to close their doors, most of those workers live in my neighborhood. Like you said, 24,000 food workers live in just a few miles that I represent and, you know, having lost their jobs, their culinary skills being their talent. Well, they took it upon themselves to start cooking and selling their goods. People are finding creative ways to be able to provide for their families.

Street vendors are essential workers. They have put their bodies on the frontline to make sure that our communities continue to eat in many ways, whether they're selling fruits and vegetables or cooked meals, that remind us all of our home countries or allows us to learn about other countries and build bridges in that way.

ABIGAIL DISNEY: Hm. You just named one of the most important pieces of food and mental health too, is having the food from your home. That's one of the hardest things, I think, must be, about being an immigrant. This is the alienation that comes with not recognizing your food.

JESSICA RAMOS: Well, you know, my parents of course were undocumented. And there apparently only used to be one supermarket in the late seventies, on 82nd street in Jackson Heights that sold plátanos, only one supermarket. And people would come from all over the borough to come to this one store, to get their plantains in order to cook meals that remind them of their home countries. Clearly that's not an issue anymore and we've come a long way. But yeah, of course, a home cooked meal nourishes us, and reminds us of our families, of the streets we grew up on. And that nostalgia gives us a lot of warmth.

ABIGAIL DISNEY: And strength.

JESSICA RAMOS: Strength for sure.

ABIGAIL DISNEY: So wait, with so much great food in Queens, how do you know where to go? Do you have a special way of being able to figure out what's the good spot?

JESSICA RAMOS: Well, I would, I would first say that in order to find the good spots, you have to try all the spots, right? I do rely on recommendations and friends all the time, or you have to meet, you know, Doña whoever Doña Flor, she makes such great tamales and then I'll walk over and they are indeed great. You know, it might sound a little cliché and a little corny, but you really feel the love that a chef puts into food. I almost feel as if food is a transfer of energy, right?

ABIGAIL DISNEY: Right. It is.

JESSICA RAMOS: That we ingest and that comes into our bodies.

ABIGAIL DISNEY: Yeah. Yeah. And if it was made with love, you kind of-

JESSICA RAMOS: It's a real ingredient you can tell-

ABIGAIL DISNEY: Yes!

JESSICA RAMOS: You can tell when things are rushed, you can tell when things haven't been stewing long enough or simmering enough, you know when the stew is going to be better the next day. I mean, food is a love language.

ABIGAIL DISNEY: So you grew up in Astoria, And food became central to your life. You learned how to cook pretty young. And I read somewhere that Julia Child was an inspiration for you.

JESSICA RAMOS: So I was a PBS kid. I was introduced to Sesame Street and I never stopped watching PBS. And one day, Julia Child came on and I just, I was mesmerized. She was brilliant. And she actually liked to use a lot of butter, which-I've always been a big fan of butter and buttery foods. I took it upon myself to start experimenting with recipes and asking my mom how to do things. By the time I was 12 or 13 my parents would come home from work and I would have already cooked dinner for the whole family so that my mom didn't have to worry about that. And while it made me feel great to help my family, also I started to become more aware of the price of groceries, of how much it really takes to feed a family of five. Right? You know, once you start cooking it's kind of your introduction into how it is that you're able to access food, how affordable things are, who's able to purchase them. And the like-

ABIGAIL DISNEY: Right. The word economics comes from a Greek word for household management. It was a word to describe the work of keeping your family fed and taken care of and all the rest of it. So it's kind of interesting that that was like the birthplace of something that feels so far afield from feeding our families and taking care of everybody, but also there's something about putting food on the table for people and them loving it, it just-it's magic.

JESSICA RAMOS: I also find the chopping of vegetables to be particularly therapeutic. I really do.

ABIGAIL DISNEY: Yes!

JESSICA RAMOS: That feeling of putting the knife through that head of onion or that carrot is very stress relieving but I also love the creativity of, particularly when you're not following a recipe, of figuring out what flavors go well and deciding kind of where you're headed. I relish in that.

ABIGAIL DISNEY: So you've said that your mother was undocumented when you were growing up.

JESSICA RAMOS: Both of my parents were undocumented for a good while when I was very young. I wasn't alive when my mom crossed the Mexican border by herself, she was 24 years old, and had left my older sister back home in Columbia with my grandparents. My dad overstayed his visa. When he was undocumented, he worked at a fabric factory in Seacaucus, New Jersey. He was caught in an immigration raid. And back then obviously technology didn't really allow for us to get information very quickly. It took a few days for my mom to figure out what had happened and where he was being held. Luckily, my dad got his papers through the Reagan amnesty. A lot of people don't realize that the last time our country passed truly comprehensive immigration reform was in 1986. That was 35 years ago. And millions of folks contributing to our tax coffers and certainly contributing in their communities with their talents and their hard work were finally given the opportunity to legalize their status in this country. I actually was just in Washington DC to rally because we're in the same place, right. We were looking for some sort of reform that includes a path to citizenship for people like my father, who haven't been able to legalize their status in decades in this country, despite their hard work and raising their families.

ABIGAIL DISNEY: What is the right immigration policy? I mean, if you could write the bill, what would it look like?

JESSICA RAMOS: I mean, if I could write the bill, I would take into consideration everyone who's been paying taxes, have a tax ID or have work permits, right? To make sure that they are given a path to citizenship. And at this point I would take into consideration how long people have been here, even if they haven't been able to obtain a tax ID, so that they can legalize their status and be able to participate in that way. We've given very special consideration to dreamers. We should definitely make sure that their lack of immigration status is not a hindrance to fulfilling their potential. I think in the end what we want is for everybody to be able to give us their best. And taking into consideration that, you know, we haven't done this in a serious way for the past 35 years. There's a lot of people who have been left out and it would benefit us all if we include as many of them as possible.

ABIGAIL DISNEY: Right, right. So both your parents were from Columbia and you used to go there in the summers. What was that like?

JESSICA RAMOS: Well, I always looked forward to the summertime when my parents would ship me and my sisters off to Columbia to spend time with our grandparents, aunts and uncles and cousins. I think in that way, that very much is the immigrant story. We tend to not be able to grow up with our extended family because they live somewhere else. But I got to spend a lot of time in my mom's side of the family, their

farms. We have been growing coffee for a very long time and avocados, mango trees, spending that time in nature always gave me peace. It also allowed me to see how workers were treated, how they were paid, how dangerous the work can be, depending on whether they're exposed to pesticides, what their lodging looked like. I didn't of course know this at the time, but it has greatly informed my work and inspired the improvements that I have sought for farm workers right here in New York.

ABIGAIL DISNEY: Right. In an impressive feat, you managed to pass a bill in the New York state Senate, which gave farm workers in the state a few frankly, overdue rights.

JESSICA RAMOS: Yes. Farm workers were carved out of these labor laws because they were largely black sharecroppers who were doing the agricultural work in our state. In that way, really, that was one of the last vestiges of the Jim Crow era in New York. We cannot function as a state and believe that we're fighting for equality and justice at every corner if we were going to continue leaving out a hundred thousand workers who today, are not just Black and mostly Haitian and Jamaican immigrants, but also Mexican and Guatemalan people. New York does import some labor from overseas, But the vast majority of workers are people who are raising families here in New York state. And they did not have the right to a day off. They did not have the right to overtime pay. They did not have the right to unemployment and disability insurance, and they did not have collective bargaining rights and a voice on the job. These are some of the basic rights that every other worker in New York has been able to enjoy for decades. So in 2019, my freshman year in the state Senate, I knew that this was one of the first things I needed to correct. So in 2019, when I picked up the bill, my freshman year in the state Senate, um, I learned that I was the seventh state Senator to carry this bill. I promptly declared that I would be the last one to do so. And I realized that in all of those years, we had never had a hearing on the bill.

ABIGAIL DISNEY: Wow.

JESSICA RAMOS: Isn't that wild?

ABIGAIL DISNEY: That's insane.

JESSICA RAMOS: And look, I knew what I was up against. Particularly my Republican colleagues from upstate would ask, you know, why does this girl from Queens care about farming? How is she going to tell our farmers what they should do? And I wanted to make sure I was doing my due diligence and I wanted to see working conditions and talk to the workers and the farmers themselves. So I went on a tour of many farms, I

saw horticulture and nurseries. I saw apiaries, I saw dairy farms, onion and cabbage farms, and apple orchards.

ABIGAIL DISNEY: Yeah.

JESSICA RAMOS: So, I decided that it was really important to have hearings in order to give farmers, farm workers and, you know, all sorts of different advocacy organizations the space in which to testify and share their experience. After that I started to gain the support of many of my colleagues. And we decided to bring all of the stakeholders into our office and begin to hash out a compromise. See, the thing about farming is that it's obviously not a nine to five job. It depends largely on the weather, you're working from dawn till dusk. So a 40 hour work week, which is the usual standard for a worker, doesn't exactly work that way.

ABIGAIL DISNEY: Yeah. Yeah, I can't imagine that most people don't understand the level of work that goes into farming and preparation and shipping and so forth. But we're so alienated from that by the supermarket, which kind of wraps everything in a nice piece of plastic. How do you imagine we'll ever get people alive and awake to all of what it means to put the dinner on the table?

JESSICA RAMOS: Well, I definitely feel that the pandemic has helped highlight food insecurity in a way that we never thought possible. Right? I think most, if not all, communities have experienced very long food pantry lines, given the loss of work, the loss of wages, the loss of family members. I think people really are starting to think more about where their food comes from, how it's sourced. Not only in terms of reducing our carbon footprint and whether the chickens were free range, whether it's grass-fed cows but also about how the human beings behind the food have been treated. I think that that had been missing from the equation for a very long time.

ABIGAIL DISNEY: It's really unusual for someone to talk about food a lot on a political platform. And that's part of the reason it's so refreshing to talk to you. So let me ask you, why is food so important? Not just politically, but why is it so important? And so binding.

JESSICA RAMOS: Well, to me, food is the great unifier. Every human being, no matter who you are, how you identify, where you come from, we eat food. I truly believe that food nourishes our bodies, nourishes our minds and nourishes our souls. I mean, what we eat really does inform our moods and informs our decisions. This is why, of course, we're told as a kid to have a good breakfast before going in to take a test in school, for example. I like to talk a lot about actually prison food, because we pretend to rehabilitate people through this system while we're serving them rotting bread and

expired products. Nobody's ever going to get better like this. And when we think about it from that perspective, we start to see how the food system has not quite worked as effectively as it could, to ensure that every human being is able to access healthy food and therefore we can improve our health outcomes.

ABIGAIL DISNEY: Low-income people tend not to have access to healthy food. Right?

JESSICA RAMOS: You know, we have a lot of food deserts in New York city. And even in my district food can be out of reach for many families, especially during the pandemic, when so many have been struggling economically.

ABIGAIL DISNEY: I know in your district you were hit so hard with COVID. How are you trying to recover from that? I mean, is there any effort to help people come back from that incredibly hard period?

JESSICA RAMOS: That's a really good question. You know, once we saw what-how the Coronavirus was just wreaking havoc in our communities, we quickly realized how food insecure so many of our neighbors, particularly our undocumented neighbors, who of course have less access to capital, less access to good jobs than most folks. And I started to see a few articles that said that farmers were forced to dump milk and their produce was rotting because restaurants had closed down and weren't buying anymore. So what I did was I put my team together and we divvied up the list of every single farmer who had testified against my farmworker fair labor practices act bill, and asked them if they would donate the food that they had left over, you know, instead of letting it rot and sell it, instead of letting the milk spoil, would they be willing to help us bring it to Queens, to feed our folks. And I have to say every single farmer said yes.

ABIGAIL DISNEY: Wow.

JESSICA RAMOS: Despite having testified against my bill, I think that speaks to, you know, the relationships that we were able to build with people who started out disagreeing with us, but ended up sending truckloads of produce, sometimes of beef, of eggs, of milk, of cheese. We would have lines that were 2000 families long. And it was especially hard to see people who worked in the food industry themselves, right? Men who work as deliveristas for GrubHub and DoorDash and Ubereats online for our pantry, with their bicycle.

ABIGAIL DISNEY: Yeah. Over the last four years especially, the Washington culture has been so dysfunctional and melodramatic. As a state level politician, do you feel like you fight for attention to local issues?

JESSICA RAMOS: I mean, one of the biggest reasons I was able to get elected was that after 2016, after the election of he-who-shall-not-be-named, you know, it was this jaw dropping thing one after the other that I think people started to finally realize, oh my God, our state government here in New York has a false Republican majority because a group of big D Democratic Senators, were voting for a Republican majority and many of us got fed up. If you know anything about my district, you know, we're the Latino district, we're the South Asian district, we're the LGBTQ district. If there's a melting pot, it's this one. We all felt so disrespected and unseen and unprotected.

ABIGAIL DISNEY: Yeah.

JESSICA RAMOS:- And though it took me a year to get the courage to do it. I ended up running against him. I primaried him and ended up winning by 2200 votes. Now, I think it's more of a question of how do we keep people engaged in the electoral system and also in policy work, right? And my biggest fear has always been well, now that he-who-shall-not-be-named is not in office anymore, that people will think, 'Oh, okay. Everything is fine now.' And no, everything is not fine! There's lots of things that we need to fix. And we need folks to keep paying attention.

ABIGAIL DISNEY: Yeah, absolutely. Absolutely. Well, you've been wonderful to talk to. I really, really, really enjoyed this conversation. Thank you so much.

JESSICA RAMOS: Me too. Me too. Thank you.

ABIGAIL DISNEY: I hope we meet face to face someday in the real world.

JESSICA RAMOS: I would love that.

ABIGAIL DISNEY: Keep up with Jessica Ramos on her Twitter @JessicaRamos. And you can of course find her on Facebook and Instagram, to find out more about what she's doing in the New York state Senate.

[THEME MUSIC AND CREDITS]

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