The Plan to Defeat Critics of Israel in Congress

Transcript:

0:01

from New York Times I'm Michael babbaro this is the [Music]

0:09

daily a powerful group supporting Israel is trying to defeat sitting members of

0:15

Congress who have criticized the country's deadly war against Hamas in

0:21

today's Democratic Primary in New York it appears that strategy may

0:28

work my colleague Nick fandos

0:34

explains it's Tuesday June [Music]

0:42

25th Nick by the time people listen to this episode voting will have begun in

0:48

this Congressional race that Democrats across the country are watching really

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closely because in a way it feels like it's become a test of what a Democrat in

1:01

office in Congress can or can't say about the war in Gaza so let's start at

1:07

the beginning with the congressman who is at the center of this race so we're

1:12

talking here about Congressman Jamal Bowman he represents the district just

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north of New York City that includes parts of the Bronx and cities like Yonkers and Mount Vernon but also

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suburbs like Larchmont and Scarsdale he's a former Middle School principal lifelong educator who was never in

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politics until 2019 and 2020 when he decided I'm going to take on a big

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powerful incumbent in my district why run for Congress the simple answer is I want to

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do everything in my power uh to meet the needs of my students and families beyond the classroom and he did it from the

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left when you look throughout the district you see pockets of the district where poverty is higher than 20% right

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you see Pockets where the rent burdens are as high as 57% while other parts of the district you see incredible wealth

2:02

and incredible affluence and incredible opportunity so remember this was right at the height of the co pandemic the

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election actually took place in the weeks after the killing of George Floyd and the whole country was up in arms was

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really thinking about race and Equity was thinking about power and whether the

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United States was moving quickly enough towards the goals that it professes to have I want to put my run for Congress

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on the side for a moment and just speak to you as a black man in America and as

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someone who's lived there his entire life and Bowman was really able to capture that energy as a younger black

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man who was not in politics speaks like a real person I've never I I never saw

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anyone that looked like me that sounded like me that came from the places that I've come from that spoke the language

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that mattered to me for Bowman the race was about race and policing and Donald

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Trump and the feeling that the Democratic party was not fighting hard enough fast enough on all of these

3:05

issues I never saw anyone centering poverty and the working class and

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immigrants and those who are most vulnerable in our country and his slogan was jobs and education not bombs and

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incarceration thank you so much my name is Jamal Bowman I'm running for congress

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in this District the 16th District please go Ahad and vote and thank you for considering us as your next

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[Applause] [Music] Congressman now his opponent Elliot

3:38

Engel was in his 70s he'd been in Congress more than 30 years wow he's a

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committee chairman who was definitely more moderate than Bowman so in a sense

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this becomes a perfect distillation of the outsider versus The Establishment

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Insider at a moment like you just said where that is the question of the moment

4:01

exactly and Bowman was really able to capitalize on a couple of instances where angle looked out of touch in one

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case he was caught having stayed in Washington for the early weeks and months of the pandemic in from his

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district yeah far away from his district and then when he does show up he's caught on a hot mic begging for a speaking slot at an event and there's

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just too many folks here if I if I didn't have a primary I wouldn't care say that again I didn't have a primary I

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wouldn't care don't do that we're not going to do this say something to the effect of I

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wouldn't care except I've got a primary right I remember that moment it was incredibly embarrassing because

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here's a congressman already Under Fire for being Mia from his district in the

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pandemic saying I need to talk at this news conference not because I necessarily care but because I'm in a

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primary battle against Jamal Bowman and I need voters to see me speaking and to

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think that I care right that's certainly what it looks like and Bowman on the other hand seems so in and of this

5:03

moment that come election day he sails he beats angle by double digits and it's

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received at the time as kind of proof of the left's ascendancy this is only a

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couple years after Alexandria Ocasio Cortez won her seat the squad formed in

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Washington that far-left group of lawmakers right and when Bowman arrives in Washington he reinforces their ranks

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and adds to this kind of growing Progressive block that in the early days of the Biden Administration seems to be

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exercising a lot of power and one really emblematic moment where Bowman and the

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squad try and flex their muscle is around President Biden's signature infrastructure Bill remember this is a

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big trillion dollar program to build roads and bridges and replace lead pipes

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and originally there had been a democratic proposal to pair it with another bill more focused on climate

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change and some social policy that progressives really really liked and the

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two get split apart and the left is really upset about that so in order to try and get negotiating leverage to get

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that other climate bill passed Bowman and a bunch of the squad and other progressives vote against the

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infrastructure bill but against one of Biden's biggest legislative priorities

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and say it's not that we're against it but we need to have both so far Nick all of this very much feels in keeping with

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the way Bowman campaign he's governing as The Outsider Progressive that he said he

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would be yeah I think that's right he's pretty consistent and frankly is getting along all right in Washington I mean

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some people don't like those positions but generally speaking he's in good standing until two very consequential

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weeks last fall and what happens in those two weeks so let me just set the scene

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here it's late September conservative Republicans are pulling Congress towards

7:00

a government shutdown they're in on a Saturday things are a total mess nobody knows if the government's going to be

7:06

able to pay its bills or find a solution and in the middle of all of this Jamal

7:11

Bowman is trying to rush to the capital to get to a vote he gets to a door that he usually expects to go out it's locked

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he tries it and then what does he do he pulls a fire alarm New York Congressman Jamal Bowman the former School principal

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caught red-handed pulling the fire alarm inside a house office building it sends the capital basically into chaos becomes

7:32

a two-day news cycle absolutely he's a principal in my schools we did fire drills you know exactly what happens

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when you pull a fire alarm all these National cameras are already paying attention and now here's this crazy

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Sideshow that he violated the exact same law that January 6 defendants are being

7:49

prosecuted for every single day interrupting an official proceeding he said after the fact that he was trying

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to open the door but generally you don't pull a fire alarm to open a door and his explanation that he did this by accident

8:02

also false it's the reason that I've asked the house Ethics Committee to review this and eventually Bowman is

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actually charged and pleads guilty to a misdemeanor for a false fire alarm listen you know I pulled a fire alarm I

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did not do it to disrupt a court proceeding like I said I was trying to get out the door I was rushing to a vote

8:22

um I'm thankful that you know we have an agreement in place I'm thankful in 3 months it's going to be dismissed and

8:28

now let's move on he has to pay a fine and apologize and so it's just a real kind of black eye on his Public

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Image right embarrassing ill advised but at the end of the day not anything

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that's going to necessarily endanger his career yeah no that's right I think if it had just been that alone he gets past

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it but almost exactly a week later is October

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7th when h attacks Israel brutally takes hostages leaves 1200

9:05

Israelis dead and really ushers in a new moment

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in American politics and particularly for Democrats who have been divided on

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Israel for quite a while particularly this kind of the leftwing squad from the rest of the

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party and those divisions are just kind of blown up in the days and weeks after

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October 7th and Bowman of all people throws himself right into the middle of

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the wreckage we acknowledge the trauma and the pain and the fear he condemns

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hamas's attack on October 7th but then just Days Later calls for a ceasefire in

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the region essentially saying Israel should not defend itself and that's a position I should note by the way that

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is way out ahead of President Biden who hadn't even gone yet at that point to Israel to give Benjamin Netanyahu that

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famous hug and say that the United States was sanding with Israel you're calling for some weird ceasefire that

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isn't going to accomplish anything other than Hamas give Hamas which is basically an Isis organization time to regroup and

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kill more Jews never say ever that I'm okay with the killing of Jews ever say

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that ever because no one this is insane now from Bowman's point of view this is

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consistent with the way that he views International politics remember the no bomb's part of his slogan right he wants

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Israel here to not meet violence with violence to find some sort of diplomatic or political solution let me just be

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very clear it's one thing to support Israel which the US has always done and will continue to do it's another thing

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to never hold Israel accountable for their behavior whether it's related to

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the occupation the open air prison that is Gaza or the war crimes that are

10:57

taking place right now during this Siege I mean Israel Bowman sees this as a

11:03

clear moral case I think he relates what's happening in Israel to the racial Justice struggle in the United States

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that he's familiar with to the economic struggle Israel to him is a powerful nation that is not making good on its

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own promises as a democracy and is oppressing Palestinians and the Muslim Community the Arab community and

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Palestinians receive that as eraser and even further receive it as

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dehumanization so it sounds like in this moment Bowman is becoming the public face of left-wing

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Congressional Democrats weariness and skepticism of Israel at an exceptionally

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sensitive moment yes and in the weeks that would follow he goes there again and again and again so he's one of the

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first lawmakers not only to call for a ceasefire but then to accuse Israel of committing genocide in Gaza once its

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counter offensive begins he begins calling for the United States to cut off all all military aid to Israel which is

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one of its closest allies in the middle of this war saying basically American taxpayer dollars shouldn't be going to

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bombs at one point he's caught on video saying that claims that Hamas use sexual violence against women around October

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7th is quote propaganda later he apologized for those remarks and all of

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this really adds to Bowman's prestige on the left he becomes a big figure a

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galvanizing figure really in this energized anti-war movement around Gaza

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but at the same time he's taking a huge political

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risk his district which remember is just North of New York City is quite diverse it's got a big black and Latino

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population but it also is home to one of the largest Jewish populations in the country and many of his constituents in

12:51

that Community feel betrayed and not only that back in

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Washington pro-israel groups who exercise a huge amount of Power are furious at

13:02

Bowman they look at everything that's happening and they think he's got an election coming we might be able to

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defeat him and in so doing make an example out of him [Music]

13:22

[Music]

13:30

we'll be right [Music]

13:42

back so Nick tell us about this well funded effort by supporters of Israel to

13:48

try to make an example of Congressman Bowman to answer that Michael let's take

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a a little bit of a step back in time and talk about APAC the American Israel

14:00

public affairs committee which is a bipartisan group that's been around for a long time whose mission really is to

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advance Israel's interest in the United States traditionally they've had very

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strong relationships with presidents and legislative leaders in both parties

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they've been really effective frankly at creating a consensus in Congress and in Washington more broadly to send military

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aid and defense to help protect Israel in the Middle East from its neighbors they pay for lawmakers to travel to

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Israel and see the country and they've long endorsed candidates they see as friends of Israel and even made small

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donations and then more recently they began to take much bigger overt political

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steps a couple years ago they formed a super PCT for the first time and they're doing it because they're watching that

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consensus that they work so hard to build start to crumble and particularly on the left among young voters and

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particularly young Democratic voters and Democratic voters of color who no longer see Israel in the way that maybe their

15:04

parents or grandparents generation did M and for apek the embodiment of that change is the

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squad then October 7th happens and intensifies all of these Dynamics in Apex senses a real existential threat

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and so they go and they survey the Electoral landscape they look at all the members of the squad and other

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progressives in Congress who are critical of Israel and are trying to change the American relationship to it

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and they figure out okay where could we go in electorally and could we knock some of these people

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out and how do they end up zeroing in on Bowman of all people so beating

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incumbents is not the easiest thing to do so in many cases they look at some of their biggest critics people like

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Rashida Talib or Alexandria Ocasio Cortez and they simply can't find a

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viable Challenger these guys are smart they've run political campaigns before they don't want to put good money after

15:59

bad and waste it but Bowman they look at him and think this guy is beatable not

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only do they not like what he's saying about Israel but in this case they are able to find a primary Challenger who is

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not only credible but is deeply popular in the district and who's that I'm George ladimer the opponent is

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George laimer I've served in my local city hall I've served in the county and the state legislature and now as

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Westchester County Executive to focus on getting results not just rhetoric a well-known Democratic fixture who first

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entered politics in the Reagan Era and now serves as the county executive of Westchester County which is the biggest

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County in the district we've seen Israel created 75 years ago as a valid country it has a right to exist and it has a

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right to exist on defensible borders and he's also importantly staunchly pro-israel I think the Israeli people

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need to see that they have a partner for peace and they don't see a partner for peace right now I think a Democrat

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frankly in the mold of that old consensus model who is willing to stand by United States Ally Israel through

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thick and thin and I I have taken the position for a legislator to take a future legislator is to work through

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your legislative bodies and try to influence the president in that

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fashion so in the fall he starts getting Outreach from local rabbis and Jewish

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leaders in the district to jump in and APAC gives him some encouragement as well H so in a sense APAC is is helping

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to recruit ladimer to run against Bowman right and not only do they help to

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recruit him but once he does get in the race and establishes I'm a supporter of Israel they begin raising very large

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amounts of money directly for his campaign and in time their Super PAC starts spending far far more to advance

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his candidacy and what does it look like for apac's superpack to advance

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Latimer's candidacy in this primary so since miday apack superc has spent

18:00

upwards of $14.5 million in this race just over a

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month yeah it's a huge amount of money something like almost $177,000 an hour at one point and if you

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add it all up it's actually not only more than APAC has ever spent in a single race it's more than any outside

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group any Super PAC has ever spent in a house race George ladimer is putting people ahead of personal agendas and

18:25

delivering real Progressive results so some of that money actually goes towards a positive ad trying to improve

18:32

Latimer's image as a good Progressive who stands by President Biden George

18:37

ladimer will take on mag extremist and he'll work with President Biden to keep delivering Progressive results but most

18:44

of it is reserved for attacks on Bowman here's the deal I used to be for Jamal Bowman but not anymore Bowman put his

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extreme ideology ahead of us one of only six Democrats to oppose the historic infrastructure bill so they bring back

18:57

that infrastructure vote and the idea is basically to try and paint Bowman as a

19:02

disloyal Democrat somebody who's attacking the president and is a Chaos Agent in Washington Bowman called

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President Biden a liar Jamal Bowman has his own agenda and he's hurting New

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York now notably notice I have not mentioned Israel because none of these ads at least none of the ones on TV

19:21

mention Israel why would that be why would APAC which is clearly in the business of protecting Israel run a

19:29

bunch of TV ads against Jamal Bowman who they object to because of his views on Israel and not mention those views about

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Israel the ads yeah it's a great question and it's one that's inspired Bowman and his supporters to be like what gives so from Apex point of view

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the logic is that voters in the district who really care about Israel no matter which side they're on have probably

19:48

already made up their mind about Jamal Bowman they're not going to be persuaded but there's a big bunch of primary

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voters who may not be following the war that closely but they are loyal Democrats they like President Biden

20:02

they're interested in beating Trump this fall and they are susceptible to seeing ads about a guy who seems to be bucking

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the president who's out of the mainstream and not representing them interesting so an effective strategy

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from a group supporting Israel is not necessarily to talk about Israel in this

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campaign but to talk about the way that a Democrat Jamal Bowman in this case is

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letting down his party's president is letting down his party is basically

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being disloyal to the Democratic party not necessarily asra yes and so far from

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what we can tell it seems to be pretty effective explain that so when I'm out in the district talking to voters a

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really interesting thing has started happening many of them when I ask them their views on Latimer and Bowman start

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quoting back to me or citing facts that are very prominently being featured in these commercials now often they think

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it's their own idea but in political advertising this is a sign of real success voters are thinking about

21:03

infrastructure they're thinking about loyalty they're thinking about Bowman as a Chaos Agent and I don't think it's an

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accident that they're thinking about those things it's not an accident because they're getting those views you're suggesting from these now

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ubiquitous ads exactly so ubiquitous that some households are getting dozens of mailers a week reinforcing these

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points and some of these Apex ads have been viewed upwards of 180 million times

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wow 180 I mean it's astonishing it's complete saturation what you're describing here is anecdotal reporting

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that you've done in the district what are the polls telling us about the state of this race between Bowman and ladimer

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there has not been as much credible polling in this race as we would like but what we have seen in polls that have

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come out is that laimer has opened up a very large lead double digits and well

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it's hard to exactly attribute cause and effect here I think everyone would agree that you spend 15 million is going to

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have an impact on the way voters think and eventually pull on the ballot right

22:05

AKA these ads do seem to be very much hurting to ma Bowman they're certainly not helping okay what does Bowman have

22:11

to say about the fact that he has become the target of a group like APAC in this

22:19

race Bowman's response has been really interesting because where other politicians I think faced with this set

22:25

of circumstances who want to get reelected might kind of pull back back or moderate some of their harshest

22:31

positions Bowman has totally stood firm where he is and he has actually leaned into to the APAC ads and made APAC a

22:38

central point of his campaign arguing that they are the representation of everything that's wrong with big money

22:45

in American politics that they're coming in and have basically not only bought his opponent but are now trying to buy

22:51

an election and oh by the way they may be a bipartisan group but they're doing with big checks from Republican MEGA Don

22:59

and they're coming after me not just because of my position on Israel but because those donors don't like the

23:04

other things I stand for the progressive values my outspokenness as a black man

23:10

he's really made this a kind of referendum in his words of the money versus the many and by what he means by

23:17

that is all this money versus the people who don't have that much money but are fighting against entrenched corporate

23:24

interests he's basically taking it back to his original 2020 Democrat primary

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when he was running on a message of Me versus The Establishment exactly and he

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says the establishment never liked me and this strategy has really worked to kind of galvanize the national

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Progressive Movement they've really rallied around him they've donated money groups like justice Democrats have

23:47

emptied their bank accounts to try and save him what's up what's up what's up

23:52

and all of this came together this past weekend at a rally in the Bronx what's up New York

24:00

where representative Ocasio Cortez and Bernie Sanders joined Bowman and a bunch

24:06

of other progressives some of whom flew in from as far away as Florida and Bowman was really fired up and because

24:14

they see the power of our movement they are spending more money than has ever

24:20

been spent in American history y'all he framed as if their whole

24:26

movement was on the line hey pack is scared to death we are not going

24:33

to stand silent while us tax dollars kills babies and women and

24:41

children and profanely again and again ripped into APAC and what they're doing

24:46

in this race people ask me why I got a foul mouth what am I supposed to do you

24:55

coming after me you com I just want to say Michael as I was there Bowman very

25:00

well may keep this seat mhm but the man on that stage was certainly acting like

25:05

he was up against the wall and had nothing to lose he was letting it all rip nothing that apack can do is going

25:13

to stop our Liberation nothing they have

25:20

already [Applause] lost Nick if Bowman does lose and we

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have to be really clear on the ifess of that question it's a summer primary

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turnout's going to be who knows we're in the middle of a heat wve here the polling's been kind of subpar but if

25:39

Bowman loses I have to imagine APAC will claim this as a big victory for its

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cause will say we have made an example of this member of Congress but taking

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out a lawmaker I have to think is very different than rebuilding a consensus

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around support for Israel which is apac's real goal isn't it

26:02

absolutely this is such an important Point Michael because as we've said apac's real goal here is to maintain or

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reinstate a consensus support for Israel and the United States and that has to do

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with both who's in Congress and who the people electing them are and you can take people out of Congress and they may

26:21

succeed in taking out Bowman they may succeed later this summer in another Primary in Missouri in taking out

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representative Cory Bush another member of the squad exactly but if they're not

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changing the minds of the people who elect them if they're not actually

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running ads that are trying to change those people's minds running candidates that are trying to change those people's

26:43

minds who's to say that in the future when circumstances are different or

26:48

candidates don't have the flaws that Bowman maybe did that those voters aren't just going to keep electing more

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politicians that APAC doesn't like and it seems to me that in this race not

27:00

only have they missed an opportunity to try and move voters in the direction

27:06

they won they may actually be spawning a bigger backlash that could cause them

27:11

further problems down the line the very people that they're trying to win back I think have only seen their distrust for

27:18

apack grow right and perhaps by proxy Israel itself exactly and in the long

27:24

term that seems to make the problem worse not better H but at the same time for APAC a win's

27:32

a win and they seem to be saying that they are willing to let that longer term battle over Democratic hearts and Minds

27:40

play out another day because right now they have a much more urgent question and problem in front of them and that is

27:46

the war that's going on with Hamas and the need for American military aid and

27:52

so the composition of this Congress matters a lot to Israel right now and it matters a lot to APAC and a defeat of

27:58

somebody like Jamal Bowman not only takes out one of their critics but it sends a message to everybody else in

28:04

Congress who may be considering voting to cut off Aid or criticizing Israel in other ways that you're either with us or

28:12

we're coming after you next and that chilling effect for APAC may be the most

28:17

important victory of [Music]

28:24

all well Nick thank you very much always a pleasure

28:30

[Music]

28:42

Michael we'll be right

28:50

back here's what else you need to another day Julian Assange the founder

28:55

of WikiLeaks has agreed to plead guilty to to a single felony count of illegally

29:00

obtaining and disclosing US National Security material in exchange for his

29:06

release from a British prison where he spent more than 5 years the deal would

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end assange's long standoff with the US which began after he released highly

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sensitive American Secrets including documents about military activity in

29:23

Iraq and Afghanistan and confidential cables shared among diplomats under the

29:30

deal Assange will serve no additional prison time and for the first time the Supreme

29:38

Court has agreed to decide the constitutionality of state laws Banning

29:44

Medical Treatments for transgender youth the court will examine a Tennessee law

29:50

that prohibits three types of transgender medical care for minors

29:56

puberty blockers crosssection hormones and gender transition

30:01

surgeries its ruling expected next year could have broad ramifications for the

30:07

roughly two dozen states that have enacted similar

30:13

bands today's episode was produced by Jessica Chong and muj Zi it was edited

30:20

by Liz o balen with help from Rachel quester contains original music by Maran

30:26

Lozano Rowan nisto Dan Powell and Alicia bitu and was engineered by Chris Wood

30:33

our theme music is by Jim runberg and Ben Lansford of

30:43

[Music] wonderly that's it for the daily I'm

30:48

Michael babbaro see you tomorrow [Music]

English (auto-generated)