



*In collaboration with*

## **CRYSTAL CAVALIER-KECK**

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**Date:** February 22, 2023

**Interviewer(s):** Amanda Ostuni

<b>00:05</b>	<b>Amanda Ostuni</b>	<b>To start, share the overview of who you are and what it is that you currently do.</b>
<b>00:20</b>	<b>Crystal Cavalier-Keck</b>	Who I am [in Tutelo-Saponi language]. What I did was I gave you a traditional introduction in our language that I am learning. [in Tutelo-Saponi language] but also called [Tutelo-Saponi]. And me, who I am, is first, I am an Indigenous water protector, and I didn't become that—that wasn't what my career was, but I've kind of become that over the last five years. I'm a mom of five, and just a community activist and an organizer, and just—I just really love my community, and yeah, that's just a little bit about me.
<b>01:14</b>	<b>Amanda Ostuni</b>	<b>Ok, so we'll start with your backstory. Where do you consider to be home?</b>
<b>01:18</b>	<b>Crystal Cavalier-Keck</b>	Where I consider to be home is Alamance County—this little township called Pleasant Grove, which is nine miles North of Mebane, and it's the community that my ancestors settled in the late 1700s.
<b>01:36</b>	<b>Amanda Ostuni</b>	<b>And that's the same—so that's where you grew up and have lived?</b>
<b>01:38</b>	<b>Crystal Cavalier-Keck</b>	That is where I grew up and lived—well, lived there recently since 2016. For about 25 years, I lived in Fort Riley, Kansas; Fort Stewart, Georgia; Fort Bragg, North Carolina; Washington, D.C.; and then I moved back home in 2016.
<b>01:58</b>	<b>Amanda Ostuni</b>	<b>Ok. How would you describe yourself as a kid, in terms of your personality?</b>

<b>02:04</b>	<b>Crystal Cavalier-Keck</b>	How I would describe myself as a kid: making mud pies, liked to be outside, outdoors, pretending to cook, copying what I saw my mom and grandmother do, really easygoing, having a real country life, riding bikes, not really swimming in ponds—I don't like dark water. But just having a really easy childhood. My grandparents and mom, they kind of protected me and sheltered me from the world, so just havin' a really easy lifestyle. It wasn't until middle school, when I started to become a preteen and teenager that I started to understand how my life was affected with racism, and then kinda having an identity crisis in high school.
<b>02:50</b>	<b>Amanda Ostuni</b>	<b>What brought that about?</b>
<b>02:52</b>	<b>Crystal Cavalier-Keck</b>	<p>We had to choose—well in high school, well, just going back, we knew we were Indigenous, but we really couldn't talk about it. I always asked my grandparents 'do we have Indian blood?' and my grandma would not talk about it, but my grandfather would. He would say 'yeah, we're Indian,' and back then, if you're on the East Coast, everything was sanitized so all we had were the Washington Redskins and Tonto from the Lone Ranger—those were our only people who we knew were Indians, aside from the Cherokee, the [Eastern Band of Cherokee]. That is who I guess you could say we looked at and we now know that they erased a lot of our peoples' history.</p> <p>So, when I was in high school, you were either White or Black, and I really felt like I was neither, and I would often tell people I was neither. Growing up, especially from middle school to high school, we didn't have a lot of hair products and they didn't really have hair straighteners back then, so I would always get picked on because my hair wasn't straight and it wasn't curly; it was kinda like wavy, in the middle, and it was rough. Teenagers are mean, so you really had to be in a group of your own.</p> <p>So I kind of grew up in a town where it was not a lot of kids living out where I lived and so riding the bus, if you could believe it, the bus, for Eastern, it was like one bus and we picked up a lotta kids that were middle school and high school, and so we all lived out in Pleasant Grove, and we were mostly related, but again, if you were too light or too dark, you really couldn't fit in into either of those races and you got picked on, so I kind of stayed to myself. I did have friends in other high schools, especially at Williams, 'cause I</p>

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		had started elementary school in the city, but then after my mom moved back home from D.C.—not D.C.—from New York, and we lived back out in Pleasant Grove, I went to Eastern Alamance, and so it was pretty rough. It was a lot of race—racial issues, a lot of tension. These were also the kids that were the children of my mom’s generation, so she went to school with—her peers or her classmates who were kind of first integrated, so we were like the second generation. And so, it was a lot of people—it was a lot of people who were just really mean, and now I see them now and how racist they are and how it’s just kind of deflating to see these comments made on Facebook, so just really sad.
<b>06:02</b>	<b>Amanda Ostuni</b>	<b>So, when you were experiencing that prejudice at school, what was your—who and what comprised your community. Where were you able to find that camaraderie?</b>
<b>06:19</b>	<b>Crystal Cavalier-Keck</b>	Who comprised my community probably was my grandparents. We really—I didn’t really trust a lotta people, but we did have, maybe there was one or two people on my street. And you have to imagine we lived in a rural community, so it was a really long street. So, within like six miles, there was only a few girls that were my age, there was a few boys, so we all hung out, but my grandparents and my mom were basically my support system.  Also, during that time, of middle school, I actually had to sue the Board of Education for Alamance County, ’cause at the time, it was just Alamance County Schools, so I sued the school board and I sued my principal and teacher because they discriminated against me for joining the National Honor Society.
<b>07:14</b>	<b>Amanda Ostuni</b>	<b>Where do you think that initiative came from? Had you been inclined to—was there anything before that that suggested you were inclined toward such activism?</b>
<b>07:34</b>	<b>Crystal Cavalier-Keck</b>	Well, my grandmother, she was a schoolteacher, and she always told me that you always have to be better in your—in whatever you do. You wanna be the best of the best, especially if you wanna get anywhere in life. And so, I always had to make sure I was super smart in all of my classes; it kind of built this competition in me. It was almost a little bit in perfectionism, which was—it’s stressful because I knew, where we lived, in the community, if you graduate from high school and you didn’t have a good GPA or you didn’t do a lot of things to get accepted into college, you either went to work in the tobacco fields or you went to work in a mill factory, and I really didn’t want to do either of those. And so, my grandmother made it to where we were super—I was always on my education, always doing extracurricular activities, just to be presentable to colleges, and so she really instilled in me, I guess justice and ‘you do things right.’

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08:39	Amanda Ostuni	<b>How did getting to high school and seeing that racism shape the trajectory that you were on? Was there something that you wanted to do before and then you started thinking of a different path?</b>
08:54	Crystal Cavalier-Keck	<p>So, I did—when I was in high school, I wanted to be a nurse because my grandfather, he had had a stroke when I was in the fifth grade, and I thought I wanted to help people in the medical field. But then when I got to college, at UNCG, and got into the nursing program, I found out that I was really not cut out to be a nurse, and so I decided to change my degree to political science and I started working in that field.</p> <p>And I really didn't know what I wanted to do. I had thought about I wanted to go to law school, but one of my professors, his name was, I think, David Meyers, he worked at the state department, and then he also was a professor, and I was like, 'that's pretty cool,' 'cause he told really great stories about his time at the state department, and I said that's something I wanna do. So, when I graduated from UNCG I had got accepted to Georgetown in D.C., and then I met my ex-husband and he was in the military, and so I chose not to go to grad school, and I moved to Fort Stewart, Georgia with him. So, it kind of changed my whole life goal and my path, so I kind of put civil rights activism kinda on the backburner, but I really picked up supporting his career and doing a lot of Army work.</p>
10:20	Amanda Ostuni	<b>Ok, so, I wanna continue with that in a minute. But what was your experience with the environment? You said you didn't like water—like dark ponds, but was there any kind of affinity you had?</b>
10:40	Crystal Cavalier-Keck	<p>So my experience with environmentalism—or just the environment—was my grandmother was an avid farmer and she really had a lot of plants, and I really picked up her green thumb, because I would help her water her flowers. She had all types of plants. She had ferns and she had snake plants, and then just these things that she would get in the summer, and then we also had a garden, and my grandparents really taught me how important it was to have a garden and to make sure you had food for the winter. So, they kinda instilled in me these Indigenous values, even though they didn't know they were Indigenous—or the stories that they told me. Like, I'll give you an example, is about the black snake. My grandma would always say if you see a black snake, you gotta cut his head off and throw it in a tree, but we really didn't know what the meaning—she would always say it would rain afterwards—but later in life I learned that story was a Haudenosaunee story about the snake and offering it to the tree—to the thunder beings, and they would bring rain after that. But my</p>

		family were farmers, my grandfather and my grandmother came from a lot of farmers. My grandmother's side of the family grew sweet potatoes and then my grandfather's side of the family, they did tobacco, and so it was a farming community where we lived, so that was our life, was farm.
12:02	Amanda Ostuni	<b>What, if any, climate/weather incidents did you experience as a child?</b>
12:09	Crystal Cavalier-Keck	<p>As a child, I experienced a lot of snow. My birthday is in February, so every February I would always get snow around my birthday, and I mean to me, I guess being a kid, anytime things that would stop traffic or stopped people from moving was a huge problem. I also remember we wouldn't eat the first snow, but we would always make snow cream, and that was a big thing, too, to make snow cream, and I remember having it a lot. I also remember waking up and going to school, cool mornings, hot afternoons, but I also remember it just being hot only in the month of August, and I remember that all the way through college, 'cause I moved into my dorm in one of the hottest days.</p> <p>But as a child, I never really remembered crazy weather events. We would have hurricanes maybe two or three hurricanes a year, and that was—not a year, maybe every other year or every few years—but compared to now, we don't hardly have any winters anymore. I don't think it's snowed since, gosh since 2016 or even 2017, and I was really looking forward to snow this year. I didn't get any snow and it doesn't look like it's gonna snow here on my birthday, it's gonna snow out West, where we're going so...</p>
13:39	Amanda Ostuni	<b>And who comprises your family today?</b>
13:42	Crystal Cavalier-Keck	<p>Today my family is comprised of my current husband Jason, our five kids; so we have Aiden, then we have Katherine, we have Geronimo, Samantha, and Brandon; and then my mom. That's my immediate family. I also have an aunt, and then Kim and Mark are her children. So that's who I consider my immediate family. Jason's dad was also a part, but he passed away from Covid. And then Jason's stepdad Ernie, so those--and then Jason has his brothers and sisters; So, he has Jordan, Justin, and Kaya, but they're a little bit extended.</p>
14:24	Amanda Ostuni	<b>So back to your—with your ex-husband in the military, and how did you get from that to environmental justice? What was that path?</b>

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14:39

**Crystal  
Cavalier-  
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So, I started out just supporting him as a military spouse and learning about the Army and helping new spouses come in. And I did that for about 17 years. I was the Army Spouse of the Year in 2011, a lotta activism with like Blue Star Families, I'm tryina think of the other national military family association. But then when I moved to D.C. and I worked for the federal government, my daughter had—she got diagnosed with two autoimmune diseases. One was Juvenile Arthritis and the other one was Type 1 Diabetes. And we found out that because of her one autoimmune disease, she would be susceptible to other autoimmune diseases. And so, we found out from some tests that it came from the environment that we lived in. And so, living at Fort Bragg, we saw them create a housing development basically out of a swamp. And when you fill in a swamp or people live in a swamp, or not really meant to live on top of standing water, I'm pretty sure that had a lot to do with it. And that kinda got me thinking about well, 'what's in our water, what are we exposed to, what toxins are we exposed to that we're not supposed to be exposed to?' And then when she started to have problems with her Type 1 Diabetes to where she was having constant highs or constant lows, I knew it was time to move back home and kind of focus on her, one, to get her hormones straightened out to where she could have a healthy, long life with her insulin pump, but two, it started me thinking, 'what is actually in the environment that is affecting me and my children?' And that's when I kinda started our activism, just tryina' figure out what was happening. We tested our water—we live on a private well, so we tested our water and it's been fine. I've been kinda nervous, I purchased a PFAS test last week and a well test, and so I'm gonna do that before I leave for my birthday weekend comin' up, but I'm kinda nervous to figure out what's in our water. So, it's kinda been a progress of how I've gotten to where I am.

Also the Mountain Valley Pipeline (MVP) was a huge—it was like a huge part of my life, because nobody new this pipeline was comin' through my community, and I asked other—I asked the Sierra Club, 'what are you guys gonna do about it?', this is *your* thing,' and they were like, 'well, we don't know,' and then they were like, 'well, we know.' But they were only focusin' on the landowners, and I was like 'we need to focus on the whole community,' because that's how we're gonna be able to save people; because even though you may not be directly affected, you can still suffer indirect effects from a pipeline. And so that's how we kinda got our activism feet, and really trying to unite the communities going up the pipeline.

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17:53	Amanda Ostuni	<b>So what point was the pipeline becoming an issue—at the same time you moved back?</b>
17:59	Crystal Cavalier-Keck	It was—so about—we moved back home in 2016 in the summer and the pipeline started to come through—we started to get information about it in 2018. And I just started out simply with a Letter to the Editor talkin’ about how colonialism erased our—how it erased these animals in the community. Like we used to be abundant wit’ buffalo, like an Eastern Woodland Buffalo, we used to be abundant with more bears, wolves, a lot of animals. And a lot of animals have gone extinct because of modernization, or people encroaching on their habitats, or things that destroy their wild—the area where they live. So, yeah, that was 2018.
18:51	Amanda Ostuni	<b>What does the loss of those animals mean to your community?</b>
18:56	Crystal Cavalier-Keck	The loss of those animals means a destruction of the ecosystem and biodiversity of the region. And I know things aren’t supposed to live forever, but when you make an entire species go extinct, that is detrimental not only to the environment because they played an important part in the ecosystem, but also to the livelihood of the people who depended on that source for food. So, it means a lot to our community even though at that time, in the 1800s, when it was still—I think it went extinct in 1899—we had acculturated to the mainstream dominant society, so we were no longer hunting it in the way that we did back before colonization, of using the entire animal but people hunted it to extinction. It’s just—I just can’t believe they do that. I can’t even believe they were polluting the river back during the industrial revolution, of dumping stuff in the river.
20:02	Amanda Ostuni	<b>What efforts were you aware of, or did you become—since you started your own activism, did you become aware of the community members that came before you dealing with these sorts of environmental issues?</b>
20:18	Crystal Cavalier-Keck	The activism that community members dealt with, it wasn’t really environmental issues. It was more about voting, civil rights. They really—they kind of took the environment for granted because it was a livelihood right. They never used anything in abundance, especially in my community, but because the industrial revolution and people worked in the mills, they really didn’t want to rock the boat, because if you rocked the boat too much, you would lose your livelihood, and that means your family would go poor or you couldn’t afford food. And it was really hard, so people were put in fear of their life or losing it. And also, you have to remember, this was still during the Jim Crow era. Our community was pretty segregated, they really didn’ allow a lot of outsiders in until about

		the 1960s, where a lot of other people were moving into our community. And since that, our community has been moving away, because it's no economic things to keep them there, or jobs—they have to go where the jobs are, so I guess it's kind of a modern-day expansion or leaving the area.
21:46	Amanda Ostuni	<b>So, the first thing that you said that kind of made you tap into environmental issues was knowing that Fort Bragg had contributed—was there any direct activism with that that you engaged in?</b>
22:08	Crystal Cavalier-Keck	The direct activism with that, at Fort Bragg, I did reach out to a couple families. So, at the same time my daughter was being diagnosed with these illnesses—she had asthma, she came up with random illnesses like the Fifth Disease—she would break out with rashes—there was also a string of infants who died suddenly. And these were on base, in the expanded base housing, so what I did there was I actually reached out to a couple of the attorneys that were representing the families to see if I could correlate our findings together, but somehow I got a job working for the federal government, and so we were always told that you can't sue the Army like—I didn't want to put my ex-husband's career in jeopardy, so I really stopped lookin' at the things that could correlate to it. But I mean I did do some environmental testing to see what gases or what molds, because we would have fungus growing outside our door, like little mushrooms and they smelled terrible. Like I've never known a mushroom to smell, but you could really smell whatever type of mushroom this was, and just a lot of stagnant water.  Also there was a coupla houses—there was a couple of homes that kinda were built and they found out that the contractors who had built them had used a lot of other things instead of dirt to fill it, so after the houses started to settle, people started to get a lot of ant problems, the foundations were cracking, and so when they dug those things up or when they tested the soil, they found out there was other things other than soil there and so they had to move people from those homes because of that—it's a health issue. So yeah, and it was basically just small activism and just talking to other families to try to understand what was happening to us. So really, I didn't kick up any type of dirt and dust, because again, I was afraid that my ex-husband woulda been made an example of and lose his career.
24:25	Amanda Ostuni	<b>What sort of education did you have to give yourself to understand what was happening, and know about testing?</b>

24:33	Crystal Cavalier	The education that I learned, first I had to learn a lot about Juvenile Arthritis and we did a lot of testing on us to see if we had genetic markers for that. But also, I bought a lot of science books, I started taking an environmental science class, and I remember buyin' a microscope `cause I was testing bacteria—different types of bacteria that was around the area, putting it on the glass. And I was really remembering my microbiology class that I had at UNCG when I was going to be a nurse, and I was like, oh this is—I mean it was pretty cool because I don't know, I find germs cool, but it was neat to do that. But also I was really tryina' help my daughter, because I really wanted to find a cure, because I think an 8-year-old should not have to go through things like that.
25:27	Amanda Ostuni	<b>So that project—what was the end point of that sort of issue?</b>
25:36	Crystal Cavalier- Keck	We moved to D.C. So, I got a job working for General Services Administration. And so, we actually left—we packed up and did a PCS, which is a 'permanent change of station,' to the Fort Belvoir area and so we lived in Woodbridge [Virginia] for a long time and that was kind of the end of that, because we were no longer in that environment, and we were trying to get her the best treatment and so we were able to get her seen at Bethesda Hospital in Maryland, and so they started treating her Juvenile Arthritis there.
26:11	Amanda Ostuni	<b>And so, the next thing that you took on was the pipeline would you say?</b>
26:14	Crystal Cavalier- Keck	Right, so I did a break. `Cause when you work for the federal government, you can't actively protest, you kinda sign an oath that you would not do those things, and so the pipeline was the next thing that I took on when I moved back home. And it—again I just really was worried because my daughter was going to Eastern at the time and the pipeline was gonna end at Alamance Community College, and they were in the blast zone—and I knew my other children would eventually go to the Middle College at Alamance Community College, and I just didn't want that pressure of being worried for their safety. Even within like two years in Durham County, there was—it wasn't a pipeline, it was just a natural gas pipeline that exploded in a restaurant and the damage from that blast was, it was horrendous and scary.
27:09	Amanda Ostuni	<b>Where does that pipeline situation stand?</b>

27:17	Crystal Cavalier- Keck	The pipeline is the MVP Southgate, and currently we have kinda taken it out. They haven't cancelled it but they haven't done anything—they haven't taken the land or started any work on it. We were able to get the two water permits denied in North Carolina, and then we were also able to get the air compressor permit denied in Virginia, which was the beginning of the MVP Southgate. And they also had condemned the land, which meant they had sent people letters saying that they were gonna take their property if they didn't sign the easement, and so we were able to get the MVP to kind of drop that, and they actually went to court and said they were gonna release the claims, but they had the right to come back at any time to get those claims again. So, we took that as a win and currently we're fighting the MVP mainline, to try to do the same thing, because without the mainline, the Southgate portion can't be built.
28:18	Amanda Ostuni	<b>Who are you engaged in that work with?</b>
28:23	Crystal Cavalier- Keck	My nonprofit Seven Directions, but also, we work with POWHR, which is the Protect Our Water [and] Heritage Rights. We also work with Appalachian Voices, and then we also work with the Sierra Club, the Haw River Assembly, and a couple of other organizations up the route of the pipeline. We're in coalition partnerships with <i>people</i> from West Virginia, Virginia, and then North Carolina.
28:49	Amanda Ostuni	<b>What has been the biggest challenge in that fight so far?</b>
28:56	Crystal Cavalier- Keck	The biggest challenge in that fight is that the pipeline is very persistent. Even though they were s'posed to have been completed years ago, they're still very persistent; and trying to get the investors and the funders to understand what does it cost here, that peoples' lives are at stake, tryin' to make these corporations be human when they're just really not, they're just corporations, and trying to explain that to people right, like, we're actively fighting corporations.
29:30	Amanda Ostuni	<b>At what point did you become aware of what this fight fits under, which is the environmental justice movement as a whole?</b>
29:43	Crystal Cavalier- Keck	I was—actually to tell you the truth, I was kinda aware at the beginning. Because of the Indigenous education that I learned in the last five years, of how colonialism happened, how our tribes here on the East Coast were first-contact tribe; most of the tribes here on the East Coast are not federally recognized—the United States did not recognize the treaties of our people who were made

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		with the colonies or the king and queen of England. Since they didn't recognize those treaties, they failed to recognize our people, so they continuously genocided us or paper-genocided us. Also, the Racial Integrity Act of 1924, was Walter Plecker, he basically changed the race of Indigenous people to either Black, or colored, or mulatto, which ultimately transitioned into Black and so that's why you have a lotta communities now that are still dealing with the effects of that, and also a lot of anti-Blackness in the community. I'm tryina' think what else... what was the question?
<b>31:18</b>	<b>Amanda Ostuni</b>	<b>Hmm...how does that context interact with the work that you're doing now?</b>
<b>31:30</b>	<b>Crystal Cavalier-Keck</b>	We had to do a lot of teaching of people what Indigenous heritage is, what that looks like, because also the pipeline was going through a lot of burial grounds on top of the mountains, and so the Federal Energy Regulation Commission or committee, commission, maybe, they would not consult with our tribes because they were not federally recognized—my tribe was not federally recognized. And so, even though the pipeline companies sent out emails, they really didn't have to interact with us, and so one, that's huge—that's a huge problem, because they're going through communities. They don't actively share information to the communities, because they're rural, so it's very hard to get information out. A lot of these communities don't have broadband access or good reliable internet, so there's no way they could participate in the Zoom calls, and so basically, we were callin' them out because they were just pushing this pipeline through Black and Brown communities, especially Black and Indigenous communities. And the communities were still—are still re—today, they're still reeling from intimidation tactics and fear. When we did the pipeline walk in 2021, we had people in Pittsylvania County, Virginia actively trying to intimidate us by driving their huge dually trucks, throwin'—kickin' up rocks at us, tryina' change our course, while all we were doin' was just community organizing and knockin' on doors. But they knew we were there fighting against the pipeline, and so, it's been a lot of tactics like that, but we have to tell people that we're here for the long haul, we're in this community, and we need your help to fight this pipeline. So yeah, it has encompassed a lot of things.
<b>33:37</b>	<b>Amanda Ostuni</b>	<b>What was your moment of feeling successful, either with this pipeline fight, or in general, your justice efforts?</b>

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33:49	<b>Crystal Cavalier- Keck</b>	My first success feeling a win would probably be right after the ACP [Atlantic Coast Pipeline] was canceled [in 2020] and we immediately mobilized everybody who was part of the ACP to the MVP Southgate rally. It was virtual because I believe it was going on during the pandemic and we put an ask out to have people call their North Carolina Department of Environmental Quality to say no to the pipeline, to the water permit, and we produced like 12,000 calls and maybe 6,000 emails and letters. I found that as a win. I felt like the community came together and they actively won this denial of the permit, and then from there we just kept building relationships, and telling people about our values, how we're gonna progress moving together as a community, because we felt that the government, or even these corporations were trying to bring up individualism, or make people feel alone, and that's the one thing that we don't—we want people to feel like they have a community. And so that was probably the first time that we felt a win with that, and that was in 2020.
35:08	<b>Amanda Ostuni</b>	<b>What's next for that?</b>
35:12	<b>Crystal Cavalier- Keck</b>	The next thing would be when we did the MVP Southgate pipeline walk in May of 2021, and we actively got over 100 participants to walk increments of the pipeline. So, the pipeline, Southgate, was about 75 to 100 miles long, and so we had people sign up every four to five miles to do a walk and we had teams of people. We all started the same time, at like 10 o'clock in the morning, and we had three rallies at three different parts of the event. So we had one at the Banister, we had one at the Dan River, and then we had one at the Hall River, and we had different crowds come to different events. And that was probably the second win, because we actively felt like we were doing something, and I'm pretty sure the investors saw that. Like it did take us about two months to mobilize that. And then the next big win would probably be September 8 <sup>th</sup> of this past year, 2022, when we were able to mobilize 700 people all across the United States to come together in Washington, D.C., I mean that was huge. <sup>1</sup>
36:23	<b>Amanda Ostuni</b>	<b>What is the future of that fight?</b>
36:25	<b>Crystal Cavalier- Keck</b>	Right now, we're currently fighting permitting reform. And fighting against people who want to kinda tear apart NEPA, which is the National Environmental Policy Act. We're trying to fight those two things because in the permitting reform, they wanna fast-

<sup>1</sup> Protests in Washington D.C. were in response to the [side deal](#) made between President Biden and Senator Joe Manchin of West Virginia regarding the expansion of oil and gas infrastructure through the Inflation Reduction Act.

		track the MVP, but they also wanna fast-track other projects that are extractive, or oil and gas pipelines. So, we're fighting that. We're currently educating people, and we are seeing a lot more peoples fights. So even though, the St. James Parish [in Louisiana], which is fighting against Formosa [Plastics] and forever plastics, we're seeing that, and just seeing a lot more people standing up and saying 'no' to these greedy corporations, and so, I mean, that's huge.
<b>37:26</b>	<b>Amanda Ostuni</b>	<b>And what about some of your other work. You're a land steward? Is that an official role—what does that mean?</b>
<b>37:32</b>	<b>Crystal Cavalier-Keck</b>	Yeah so the land that I currently live on and our family—has been in our family for 300 years. And so, we have our own garden that we grow Indigenous foods, like the Three Sisters, which means corn, squash, and beans, and sunflowers—that's the fourth sister. But also, we grow traditional medicines, like mullein, sage, things like that. But we also do a lot of medicinal seeds, so cattail, river reed, river cane. And then, we also have tower gardens, which we're able to grow food that is pesticide-free, organically grown, and we're teaching people how to grow that in <i>their</i> communities. So, again, our community went from a farming community down to just people livin' in community, and so we're trying to teach people again how to grow their own food, and how to grow together again in a community. So, maybe one person can grow lettuce, the next person can grow celery, and you can just share those types of things.
<b>38:49</b>	<b>Amanda Ostuni</b>	<b>And you've also done emergency management work—[regarding] cyber, natural, man-made [disasters]?</b>
<b>38:57</b>	<b>Crystal Cavalier-Keck</b>	So my degree, my Master's degree is in Emergency Management—well, Public Administration with a concentration in Emergency Management. And I did work for the state of North Carolina in their emergency response team. But then also I consulted a lot of communities about mitigation and disaster response and how to mitigate man-made disasters, and what that looked like for the community. And I did that consulting work on the side when I came home. And then also I was an Information Security Officer for—I was a contractor for Corning Glassware in Hickory [, NC].
<b>39:42</b>	<b>Amanda Ostuni</b>	<b>All of this [was] happening at the same time?</b>

39:44	Crystal Cavalier- Keck	Yep. All of it happening at the same time, before I worked for the Department of Defense and Homeland Security as an Intelligence Analyst.
39:54	Amanda Ostuni	<b>Wow. When was this?</b>
39:56	Crystal Cavalier- Keck	<p>That was—so I went to D.C. in 2012 and I started out at General Services Administration, and I started to understand about federal acquisition and I wanted to learn about this thing called cradle to grave, where our products come from that we worked in the federal government and so that kind of led me onto a path of national security. And so then I started to take a lot of classes with General Services Administration about how does the United States get their products, and who do they buy their products from, and so that kinda led me on to workin’ in Homeland Security for Intelligence and Analysis. And then I took a real interest in the Committee on Foreign Investments so they call them CFIs? And I was able to take different classes at different agencies to help build up my intelligence skills, to where I could one day be an intelligence analyst. And then I got a job working for the Department of Defense, in Defense Security Services as a counterintelligence analyst, which was so cool. I was like ‘wow, this is pretty amazing,’ like, I was living my goal, right? Like I told you when I first went to college, my goal was to work for the State Department, and be a professor. So, I was like ‘wow, it’s not the State Department, but it is Homeland Security,’ and then I worked for the Department of Defense, I was like ‘close enough.’</p> <p>And now, I just graduated with my doctorate in Educational Leadership from the University of Dayton, so I got an MED? And I’ve interviewed at a coupla colleges so hopefully, fingers crossed in the fall I’ll be teaching a coupla fall classes. So full-circle, coming close.</p>
41:39	Amanda Ostuni	<b>How does that all fit with your activism? Is activism what you consider is your number 1 thing now?</b>
41:48	Crystal Cavalier- Keck	<p>Well, it is. So, I’m trying to switch around—so currently, right now, I’m the policy director for Toxic Free North Carolina, which helps me understand how policies work but in my side job, I co-founded Seven Directions of Service, we do a lot of work around water. And again, I find all of this very colonized, that we have all these policies and red tape, when we’re just tryina’ protect the environment, we’re tryina’ protect people, we’re tryina’ protect the natural world. And like I don’t understand how people don’t get it,</p>

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right, like I just don't understand—you would think that they would try to further mankind along, but it seems like a lot of people are in their ego, or they just are so far removed from society. But then that's just kind of a fallacy I have that I think that other people act like me, which really, they don't, because there's no way I would be doing things like that, like creating a plastic that kills the environment, or one-time use plastic. Like I don't understand why we couldn't go back to glass bottles, right, because we can recycle those. Just so many choices, like can we just go back to somewhere where it's a simpler time to where you would have one bottle, and you could have different choices of soda, but one bottle that you can recycle, right? Like you would think people would wanna cut these things down and try to help us survive, because at the rate we're going, I don't think we're gonna survive.

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**43:18**      **Amanda  
Ostuni**

**Is that what—what does Toxic Free [North Carolina] do?**

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**43:20**      **Crystal  
Cavalier-  
Keck**

Toxic Free, we talk about pesticides, and then what toxins are in the environment—soil, air, and water—and so, we have a coupla campaigns that we are running, like 'what's in our water.' So, we focus on the PFAs that's been down in Wilmington, and in Cape Fear.

But then also, we talk about how we can keep families and communities healthy by people understanding what are the chemicals or pesticides that are being put on our food, or everyday things that we're eating. And I mean that encompasses so much because you have a whole genre of things. Like you have the KFOS though for the life of me I can't remember what that acronym stands for, but it's like these animal pens that are really close together, and they produce a lot of this waste that just runs off into clean rivers, or just rivers and streams, and pollutes a lot of peoples' private waters, and people get sick from that.

And it's all because of this consumerism that we have, like this dependency that we—we're dependent on these big corporations. We have gone from working in the 1900s, to where you could have your chickens or your farm or something small that could sustain your family, to where now we have to spend all of our money buying these products. And for the life, I'm just tryina' figure out how did we get to this situation? Literally, I saw a poster that had the government saying, 'you could have chickens, raise these chickens,' and now fast-forward, I don't know, 120 years, and now they're like, 'you can't have those chickens—you've gotta get them at the store, get their eggs, right?' I mean I just don't understand, we literally shifted as a culture, and I kinda wanna

		understand, ‘when did that happen? What year did that happen, when we went from this to that?’ I kinda wanna see, is it something like that in the world? Are other countries grappling with this? Or are they pretty much abiding by the rule—be a good neighbor, not be a wasteful neighbor?
45:43	Amanda Ostuni	<b>So, if you were to be able to answer that, how would that—what would be the next step. How do you see the answer being the key?</b>
45:53	Crystal Cavalier-Keck	I think we need more education in the community. People are working themselves to death to try to make ends meet, because the cost of living has risen so much—has raised so much. And so, the jobs, or the pay of jobs are not rising, and people are basically working from sun up to <i>way</i> past sun down to make a living for their family, and that means they don’t get to enjoy the life of their kids, so they miss out on their children growing up. They’re working crazy hours in hazardous conditions, only to die young or develop a cancer, because these things that are supposed to be conveniences are killing us.  I really think we really need to bring back education and telling people what it means—and that means whether it’s going back into the churches, because a lot of people seem to gravitate around church, whether it’s Earth church, or an organized religion church, but where we come together as a community and share information and say ‘hey do you know so and so had developed this cancer’ and try to figure out if this is in our community, or what do we do in our lifestyle to try to—to develop this cancer, and how can we mitigate that, or how can we protect our children from getting the same disease that we got. So, I really do think we need to kinda shift back, kinda slow down and not be in such a rush to get to the next thing, because I really do think we’re advancing at a higher rate than what science can keep up with.
47:37	Amanda Ostuni	<b>[Shifting gears] Tell me about your recent political run.</b>
47:40	Crystal Cavalier-Keck	So, in 2022, I ran for the U.S. Congress in the Fourth District, and when I put my hat into the ring, we were in the Second District, and so no competition, I think there was a guy, his name was Kyle, and he was running, and that was it. It was just a real easy race, but then when they redrew the lines, because of they wanted to get better political access, they put me in a district with seven other Democratic candidates, and it’s very difficult to run against a person who has been endorsed by the governor. And I truly was running on the goodness of my heart. I didn’t take any corporate funds, I didn’t take any PAC money, because I wanted to be the voice of the people. And I looked at the politicians who were

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		running and they were running on these political campaigns that they were like, ‘oh I’m the best at this’ but if you looked at these politicians who were running, they really haven’t done anything in the community to help advance the environment. And I’m just like ‘how could you say you’re doing this and you have been in office and you haven’t done anything that was environmentally focused, or you helping the people.’ I really think a lot of people were skewed but I certainly saw how politics works behind closed doors. And I want to run again, so, I’m excited.
<b>49:06</b>	<b>Amanda Ostuni</b>	<b>Why did you decide to start with Congress, instead of a smaller—</b>
<b>49:10</b>	<b>Crystal Cavalier-Keck</b>	Smaller—well somebody asked me to run for Soil and Water, and to tell you the truth, I don’t see any change, I don’t see how they could effectively make change at that level. They asked why I didn’t run for North Carolina General Assembly, and to be honest, I didn’t want to run against Ricky Hurtado, he was already elected. He was the first Hispanic man to be elected to the state.  And then finally, the North Carolina constitution is so difficult, it would take <i>years</i> to make a change, to undo some of those racial laws that they have had on the books since the 1800s, and it would take more than me, so I really felt that I couldn’t make a change at the state level, and I decided to run for just U.S. Congress ‘cause I really felt that I could make a difference in my district. So yeah, my husband wants me to run for president, but I’m like, ‘no’.
<b>50:04</b>	<b>Amanda Ostuni</b>	<b>That’s really interesting. I keep getting the message that you have to start small, and I don’t want to. I want to skip ahead.</b>
<b>50:09</b>	<b>Crystal Cavalier-Keck</b>	Mmm. I say you could run—as long as you meet that age requirement and you can pay that fee, run!
<b>50:16</b>	<b>Amanda Ostuni</b>	<b>What would you say was the central message of your campaign?</b>
<b>50:23</b>	<b>Crystal Cavalier-Keck</b>	Just being an honest person; the central message of my campaign is I am someone you can count on, to make the right decision, and ‘unbought and unbossed’—that was Shirley Chisholm’s thing, and I really truly meant that, I am unbought and unbossed, because I wasn’t gonna take these corporate PACs or money from these organizations that think they can come in there and sway my vote, ‘cause I’m just like ‘absolutely not, are you lookin’ at the people when you make these decisions?’ cause if you see how career politicians are—Democrat, Republican, Independent—they’re

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		making choices best on to keep them in political office, and I knew if I made choices based off of what the community needs and the district, I knew I probably wouldn't be re-elected, but that's ok, because I was able to drive change and make influence there, in my district, like protecting the waters, protecting the people who needed to be protected the most, making changes for them.
51:24	Amanda Ostuni	<b>I saw a lot of neighbor/community/regular people themes, what was the importance of that to you?</b>
51:32	Crystal Cavalier-Keck	The theme? I think being able to be relatable to the people. I did do a lot of door-knocking. I did—so, I was working on my dissertation, and so during those times that I couldn't go, my husband went in my place; I didn't have a lot of surrogates other than my husband. My campaign manager was my surrogate. But I didn't want a lot of people speaking on my behalf, especially not people who I didn't know or who didn't align with my values, and so, yeah, the theme was about people. `Cause it's people powered, it's people over profits, it's people-powered campaign, and that's the way it should be. I really think we have shifted from when those colonize folks made the constitution, it didn't include me, but from the gist of what I get from reading in the history books, they had this one idea in mind of how the government should look and they put all of these things in place, and I don't know if they had forethought but they certainly had something, and I think we have gotten so off course from that, because it's very poli—I mean it's very career-driven. I don't even know if these politicians actively go home and work in their communities, like they say they go home, but are they actively a part of their community? Like are they pharmacists and saying 'oh I'm going home and I'm gonna be a pharmacist today'? No, they're still politicians, they still—that's their job. I think it was—how much was my fee, \$1,780, so I think that was how much, it was one percent of the salary. So, I had to pay that to run. And so I'm just like these people are career politicians. They're not really down to Earth. I feel like I couldn't contact `em—and I certainly can't contact my Senators, [they're] very not approachable.
53:30	Amanda Ostuni	<b>I wish we were at the point where it's not significant, but I thought it was interesting that your [candidate] field was mostly women of color. How did that impact your views on running?</b>
53:49	Crystal Cavalier-Keck	Well, by the time I got switched to District 4, I was so invested in my campaign that it was really difficult that we had a lot of women of color running. But also that district—it was very blue, and it was an easy district to win so why wouldn't a lot of people of color enter that race? And I had a lot of people reach out to me who were political candidates to ask to concede and support them, and I'm

		like ‘Absolutely not! You can concede and support me.’ And now I’ve actually called them out, because there was a lot of people that were tryina’ talk the talk, but they’re not walkin’ the walk now, and I’ve actually called on them for help—to help fight the MVP or the PFAs in the water, and I don’t see them actively doing anything in the community, and it really saddens me because they’re not putting their mouth where their values were.
54:45	Amanda Ostuni	<b>And how does your Indigenous identity inform what you would have done in Congress and your environmental work in terms of what makes your perspective unique and the dynamic with other groups?</b>
55:10	Crystal Cavalier-Keck	So growing up, again, like I was saying, we never talked who we were, but I still—my grandparents still gave me those values in life of be good, do good things, be in relationship with nature, don’t take things for granted, and so those are Indigenous values, but we never knew that until I started to study that. And that has shaped who I am today. Also the negative experiences have shaped who I am today, to lead me to have this world view of how I wanna lead my life and how I wanna leave my mark on this world, so I really think that kinda set me apart because again, maybe it’s just my [naivete] about how I look at people like why would you be sinister and making these things when you should be at your word, because again, your word is what people have of you, right? So if you are constantly breaking your word or your promise, then that’s what—that’s who you’re gonna be considered, or that’s who you’re gonna be labeled. And so, whenever I made my word or promise, I tried to keep it or make it good, because I want people to trust me, but I also wanted my community to trust me, and we continue to build back this sense of community that we had—that I felt, growin’ up as a kid.  So that’s kinda what really shaped me, and I really—I still kinda have that sense of community or sense of thing that I feel that we’re gonna get there, like I feel I’m gonna be a Congresswoman one day. It might take me a little while to get there but I really do feel that I will be able to do that, because I’m still relationship-building with people in the community, and they really see the change that I’m making, and again, I just want people to be—just be good relatives, be a good human.
57:23	Amanda Ostuni	<b>What are your biggest person—what are some specific goals that you have to achieve in terms of justice issues in the future?</b>
57:32	Crystal Cavalier-Keck	Big goals in justice issues. So some of the big goals in justice issues I have would be talking about, well one, gender justice. Making sure women are still regarded, or two-spirits are still regarded, because at the end of the day, we need all of these people

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who are different to be able to unite together, because that's how they're gonna divide us, right? So when they start picking on transgender people or they start pickin' on Asian people, and they start picking' us off, that is how we become divided. And we can't let that happen, because that's how things work, "divide and conquer"—I think it was a game I played, and these games are built, are mimicked off of real-life experiences. And so when you build a community centered around justice, and it's not one specific justice, but you have gender justice, language justice, women justice, people justice, economic justice, environmental justice, you start building these allyships that you can call when something is happening in your community, you can call the other communities and say, 'hey, I really need your help to stand up and fight for this.' So I really think that's my goal is to keep building this unity and moving people forward.

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58:57

Amanda  
Ostuni

**And then with environmental causes, specifically?**

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59:00

Crystal  
Cavalier-  
Keck

The environmental causes? We really should be active—or not active, but knowing other environmental issues that are happening across the country. 'Cause whatever's happening here in Texas could be very much happening in your community like ten years down the line, or what's happening up North with tar sands could very well get ported out to you, and it ultimately could affect you right? Because again, the rivers in the community all tied relate to each other. And so we're just a river apart from each other, or we're just a river apart from a disaster that can really kill and hurt us, and so when communities start to die, you really have to look at that. And so with environmental justice, we have to make sure that we are still united, people still have to understand the stories and the histories that are not told. And so by doing these storytelling projects, people will eventually learn other peoples' stories, and build allyships and relationships and relational values. Like right now, currently, I'm working with an organization that's international and they're asking me 'how did I build these allyships here in the United States' and I'm like 'by building relationships.'

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1:00:19

Amanda  
Ostuni

**How—well that answered a lot of those. How do you feel about progress that has or has not happened in the overall environmental justice movement?**

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1:00:34

Crystal  
Cavalier-  
Keck

How I feel about progress that has happened or has not happened is it doesn't move at a fast pace. We have to give ourselves time, and we're all figuring this out. This is a new thing. And I really do feel that some of these causes have—has brought to the light, right? So like the Black Lives Matter cause has brought a fight—or bright to the light the fights that we're fighting in these BIPOC communities, and I really do feel that people are more empowered

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		than they were 20 years ago, or 30 years ago, or even 50 years ago when the environmental justice movement first started. People are more empowered now to speak out and speak up, and we really have to educate, mold, and help our young people develop those skills to continue the fight, so, I really do feel that being a goal or progress being made.
1:01:41	Amanda Ostuni	<b>And on an individual level, what advice would you give someone who wants to get involved in environmental activism, but doesn't know where to start?</b>
1:01:49	Crystal Cavalier-Keck	So my advice for someone to get involved is to look at the issues that are in your community. So if you live in the city, look and see what fight is happening in the city, right? Because nine times out of ten, you're gonna have an east, west, north, or south side that is—something is being affected in their community. Like maybe they don't have clean water, or maybe there's an environmental radioactive superfund site sitting there in their community that's been there for 30 years, or maybe there's a stream that's been affected by pollution—PFAs, maybe there's a hot asphalt plant; there's any number of things that's happening. You just kinda have to be in tune to it, so you kinda have to slow down, maybe read your local newspaper or online and see what environmental fights are happening. And then once you get that, reach out to the organizers. There's always community organizers in a community that are embedded in this work, and then reach out to `em and see how you can help assist them.
1:02:59	Amanda Ostuni	Are there certain personality traits that you think someone has to have to do what you're doing, and that you think you have?
1:03:06	Crystal Cavalier-Keck	I don't believe you have to have a certain personality trait, other than just caring. Like I will honestly tell you, 25 years ago I was an extrovert. I don't know if my life experiences have made me now an introvert extrovert that calls for being extroverted at times, but really knowing I really like to be by myself. I do also think you kinda have to have charisma, but you also have to be a transformational leader, and I always think that people can always learn these skills, right? You can take a class, or you can mentor with somebody. You can always do something to build yourself up. And no matter what, you have a skill, you just may not know it yet. Everybody has a skill—whether it's art, activism, music, poems, you have something that you can offer, and you can just give that to the community, right? But also have self-care around that, so—because you can get burned out real quick.
1:04:20	Amanda Ostuni	<b>Last three...I thought it was interesting you had this Fort Bragg experience. What does it mean to you that this sort of issue can happen with the military—which is a government</b>

**institution—and also with marginalized communities? How do you see that [dynamic]?**

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<b>1:04:46</b>	<b>Crystal Cavalier-Keck</b>	I really see it—now, looking back at it, there’s a lot of things that you can and can’t do in the military, and if you cause problems for the government, they can really make your spouse’s career—it can just really affect your spouse’s career. So you kinda have to know which fights to pick, and you should also have this conversation with your spouse, to know those issues. So when—also I was an advocate for PTSD, `cause my ex-husband suffered tremendously from things that happened to him in Iraq, so I was an advocate for that because it was a lot of stigma around that. But if you are doing something that you know is going against the grain or that can rock the boat, you kinda have to have that career—I mean that talk with your spouse or significant other, to say, ‘hey this is how I feel’ and you really have to get the buy-in. So, we had that conversation and I told him how I felt and he was supportive of that. But I do think going against the government, I mean it’s huge. Obviously, you’ve gotta have a good PR person `cause they will cover it up, if it’s something that they do, or if it’s their fault, I think they’re gonna wanna come out to be the best on top.
<b>1:06:11</b>	<b>Amanda Ostuni</b>	<b>What makes you most excited for the future of the environmental justice movement?</b>
<b>1:06:19</b>	<b>Crystal Cavalier-Keck</b>	What makes me most excited for the future... would probably be just new people coming in, bringing different ways of how we can attack the issue. I’m always ears open for that.
<b>1:06:35</b>	<b>Amanda Ostuni</b>	<b>Last thing, is there any work that you have done or that you’re doing that you haven’t talked about today or any issues that you didn’t address?</b>
<b>1:06:44</b>	<b>Crystal Cavalier-Keck</b>	[laughs] It’s a lot of work that I do. So missing murdered indigenous women—that’s what I did my dissertation about; I have a nonprofit for that. But I’m focusing on tryina’ help the state get a task force established. I would really love it if the tribes could come together, but again we’re dealing with such a fear factor, or the fact that they’re not first, or—I don’t understand why people are so afraid of change. So how quickly or how slowly things happen, you have to meet people where they are, right? So you just keep trying and be like, ‘ok, you’re not ready, then we’ll come back to you in a couple of years.’ Another thing—I think that’s basically it. We covered water, land, and women, which are all still tied together.
<b>1:07:31</b>	<b>Amanda Ostuni</b>	<b>And come together for Indigenous rights in general?</b>

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**1:07:34**      **Crystal Cavalier-Keck**      Everybody. Everybody. The whole goal of this is to unite people, right? Unite and educate, `cause again, the victors—history is written by the colonizer, or the person, right, the government who won. So whatever U.S. government classes are being taught, or history classes are being taught, it’s always in the colonizer lens, and so you kinda have to go and be a detective or a researcher and uncover what really happened, put the pieces together. And for us here on the—for here on the East coast, Indigenous people have to do a lot more because they were first contact, back in the 14/1500s, versus what we see now, in the 1800s, like the westward expansion, the Trail of Tears, Jim Crow, slavery, that was more, I guess modern, 1800s and forward. And so a lot of people don’t understand the generational trauma that our people have experienced.

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**1:08:37**      **Amanda Ostuni**      **Thank you so much [for your time].**