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[SOUNDS FROM AN ANTI-ABORTION PROTEST]

Protester: Hail Mary, full of Grace, the Lord is with thee. Blessed art thou among women, and blessed is the fruit to thy womb, Jesus.

Protester: ... sin has brought you to a point where you're willing to pay someone to abuse and murder your baby ...

Jenn Stanley: We're outside a Planned Parenthood in Indianapolis in early November. Crowds of protesters stand on each side of the driveway, holding signs with graphic images of fetal remains. Some of them are praying. They have a PA system set up, and one man holds the microphone up to his cell phone where he's playing audio of a baby crying.

Protester: And so, I think it's important for those mothers in there—and you are mothers—to understand that, if that little one could speak, what's she saying?

Jenn Stanley: There are people of all ages crowding in front of this abortion clinic. A young couple stands together at the entrance of the parking lot greeting people as they drive in. They're holding their newborn infant, still pink and wrinkly and barely opening their eyes.

I start talking to two of its members, Cal Zastrow and his 19-year-old daughter, Eva, about their support and volunteer work for former Alabama Chief Justice Roy Moore's U.S. Senate campaign.

Cal Zastrow: I can't speak for Operation Save America. But a bunch of folks from there, and also the leadership—Rusty and them and former leader Flip Benham—whenever Chief Justice Roy Moore was needing support or encouragement or something, we did what we could to cheer him on.

Jenn Stanley: Eva, do you think that Roy Moore, that there is something that has changed in the United States that has allowed for Roy Moore to become a mainstream candidate?

Eva Zastrow: I don't know exactly. I wouldn't say I see a large change. I just— The people that know what he stands for, they're voting for him. Alabama is voting for him. He won the primary. So, we'll see if he wins. And if he does, it's not going to be because he lied to a bunch of people and told them what they wanted to hear. It's because he spoke God's truth, and people wanted that.

Jenn Stanley: This conversation was recorded less than a week before *The Washington Post* published the allegations that Moore initiated a sexual encounter with a 14-year-old girl when he was 32.

Eight more women have come forward with allegations ranging from unwanted advances to sexual assault.

Those allegations cost Roy Moore his election to the U.S. Senate. But if they hadn't been brought forward, he was a virtual lock to become one of the most powerful people in the country. And even after the allegations came out, his evangelical base stood by him.

Here's what Cal had to say when I called him to discuss the alleged abuse.

Cal Zastrow: He's had so many allegations and so many false allegations and so much stuff thrown at him for years, for decades.

Jenn Stanley: But if somebody's had that many allegations thrown at them, do you at some point think that maybe it could be true?

Cal Zastrow: No, not at all. The more allegations, the more false allegations, the more honorable the man is.

Jenn Stanley: Members of Operation Save America support Moore because they share his values. They believe that U.S. law should more closely align with the laws of a conservative, literal reading of the Bible. That it should be a country much more similar to Gilead in the dystopian novel *The Handmaid's Tale* than a modern democracy.

Roy Moore is not the only politician who aligns with Operation Save America.

My colleague Sofia Resnick is joining me for this special, two-part season finale of CHOICE/LESS. We'll look at how an organization which includes some members who were once viewed as so extreme, the FBI was investigating them for a violent conspiracy now has its message deeply embedded in the mainstream political landscape.

Jenn Stanley: For Rewire Radio, I'm Jenn Stanley.

Sofia Resnick: And I'm Sofia Resnick.

Jenn Stanley: And this is *Marching Toward Gilead*: a story about a radical group with rising influence, and the world they want all of us to live in. We'll explain the history of the group and how we got to where we are today. We'll talk to current and former members about the organization's tactics and goals. And we'll take you through their summer of actions in Kentucky as they happened and explore how those actions reveal a larger plan.

We'll speak with and about lawmakers who have become a part of their movement. And in this end, we think this will paint a pretty clear picture of how extremism can go mainstream and what our lives might look like if Operation Save America continues to gain ground.

Okay, Sofia, so Roy Moore really threw a wrench in this story we've been working on.

Sofia Resnick: Yeah, I mean even though he didn't win, the fact that he would have but for the sexual assault scandal I think it makes our story all the more relevant to people's daily lives.

I mean, basically this started out as a story about abortion access and a fringe group, right?

Jenn Stanley: Right, I was originally working on a story about the last abortion clinic in Kentucky, and efforts by the state and religious activists to shut it down.

This right-wing, anti-abortion group Operation Save America had scheduled its national conference in Louisville, Kentucky, the home of the state's only remaining abortion clinic, EMW Women's Surgical Center. The group had already been amping up protests outside the clinic, putting pressure on them to close.

But then in May, Operation Save America did something that made it seem like the group was returning to its old tactics and maybe even challenging the Department of Justice.

So, I asked Sofia what her take on this was, and if she'd be interested in doing this story with me.

Sofia is an investigative reporter for *Rewire* who has studied the Christian right movement for years now.

Sofia Resnick: Yeah, so, I'd actually written about Operation Save America in the past, and I've always understood them to be on the outer fringes of the movement.

But, so, I reached out to one of my trusted sources, the Reverend Patrick Mahoney—he goes by Pat—and back in the late Eighties he was the communications director for Operation Rescue, which would eventually split over philosophical differences, leading to what is now Operation Save America.

But a little more on that later.

Anyway, Jenn, when you and I started realizing that more than a few politicians—at the state and federal level—have been meeting with this group and embracing some of their ideas, I went to Pat for his take on this.

And I was surprised. He basically scoffed at the idea that Operation Save America wields any real influence. He said they're very much just a fringe group, even among the pro-lifers that he's friends with. He said they have no mainstream influence, and that nobody takes them seriously.

Jenn Stanley: Jenn Stanley: Yeah ... but that's not really what we found. See, Roy Moore is in many ways a would-be messiah for the fundamentalist Christian movement.

Since the beginning of his political career, Roy Moore has challenged the separation of church and state that our country was founded upon.

And not just slightly, occasionally challenged it. But systematically challenged it, and grandly.

At the height of Roy Moore's career—during his first stint as the chief justice of the Alabama Supreme Court, he ordered a two-and-a-half-ton monument depicting the Ten Commandments in the rotunda of the Alabama Judicial Building.

When he refused to remove it, he was thrown off the court.

But then less than a decade later, in 2012, Alabama re-elected him to the court only to see him ousted prematurely again in 2016—this time for defying the new supreme court ruling finding same-sex marriage protected under federal law.

In the eyes of Operation Save America, Moore has risked his career on fundamentalist Christian ideals. His political career is basically an embodiment of everything Operation Save America wants for this country.

Jenn Stanley: So, today we're looking at one of the groups who have tirelessly supported Roy Moore. In the past year, Operation Save America has found its way back to national prominence. But what other news outlets are missing is that they don't just want to close down a bunch of abortion clinics. They want to usher in an American theocracy.

But it's complicated, and before you understand any of that, you need to understand where they came from and who they are.

So, hang on, we're going on kind of a deep dive into the past. But I promise the history lesson is going to worth it, so you can understand exactly why it matters that Operation Save America is getting its hooks in mainstream politics.

[MUSIC]

duVergne Gaines: My name's duVergne Gaines. I direct the National Clinic Access Project for the Feminist Majority Foundation. And the Feminist Majority Foundation is a wide-ranging national women's rights organization devoted to achieving the social, political, and economic equality of women worldwide, no small task. And we were founded in 1987, and shortly thereafter the National Clinic Access Project began. And it really grew out of—you know, at that time a group known as Operation Rescue was organizing blockades against women's health-care providers, abortion clinics.

[MUSIC]

Jenn Stanley: They would chain themselves to clinics, physically blockading the entrance, attempting to stop people from having abortions.

Sofia Resnick: Or, as they put it, rescuing babies.

Jenn Stanley: Right, that's where the name Operation Rescue comes from. By the early '90s they were down to a group of very dedicated, professional rescuers who lived off of donations. And in 1991, they garnered national attention when thousands of protestors descended on Wichita, Kansas, staging sit-ins, and blockading clinic entrances. They called it the Summer of Mercy.

And while they were protesting abortion generally, they honed in on Dr. George Tiller's clinic. At the time, Tiller was one of the most vilified abortion providers out there—hated especially because he was one of the few to offer abortions late into pregnancy—a rare occurrence, but one that is sometimes sought because of extreme health circumstances, related to the fetus or the pregnant person.

Two years after the Summer of Mercy protests, a violent extremist shot Tiller in both of his arms, but only injured him. Then in 2009, a different activist shot him again, this time fatally.

The Summer of Mercy lasted six weeks, during which approximately 2,600 people were arrested for blockading clinics, among other activities. But they continued these kinds of protests all over the country.

Here's Kathryn Brightbill. She grew up in Florida and was raised to be part of these rescues as a child during the late Eighties and early Nineties.

Kathryn Brightbill: A family that was in our homeschool group, they were the youth leaders for Operation Rescue in the late Eighties and the Nineties. And so, they led work here in Sarasota, Bradenton area. And just through being friends with them, they kind of encouraged us to get involved.

We started out by doing protesting at the abortion clinic in Sarasota, Sarasota Women's Health Center, which is now closed, and also doing what's called sidewalk counseling, where people try to hand out information and offer options for women who are going in to have abortions.

[SOUNDS FROM AN ABORTION PROTEST]

And then from there we ended up going to Operation Rescue National events and were involved in some where I was arrested. The first time I was 12 years old, blocking an abortion clinic, arrested for violating a protest buffer zone injunction and for protesting without a permit in Birmingham, Alabama.

Jenn Stanley: Kathryn was so present in the movement that a photo of her kneeling in front of an abortion clinic and awaiting arrest is the cover of one of Rusty Thomas' books.

The Reverent Rusty Thomas is the current leader of Operation Save America. Now, it's not uncommon for children to be so active in these protests. They are definitely on the frontlines of this movement.

Kathryn Brightbill: At the time it was like a kind of really exciting experience. Because we believed that we were doing something that was important, was saving lives, and that we were going to be the people who were going to change society in a way that was framed very much as a continuation of the civil rights movement. That's how they kind of got us involved and convinced us that what we were

doing was right. They told us we were kind of the heirs of the civil rights movement, which in later years I realized that that was all just rhetoric that they gave us. But as a middle-schooler that all sounded, yeah, like I was doing something important and changing the world.

What I remember when we went to lobby against a buffer-zone law that was being proposed in Florida in the mid-Nineties, they had some of the people that were lobbying make arguments that bring up animal-rights activism and argue that the buffer-zone law would hurt militant animal-rights activists who were protesting at lab testing. And so, some people were posing themselves as animal-rights activists and making those arguments. Some people were posing themselves as just like the good Christian. I was about 13 at the time. I played kind of the role of I'm this cute kid who you're going to make a felon if you pass this bill. So, they'll frame it in whatever way works and plays with legislators who they're speaking to.

Jenn Stanley: Operation Rescue maintained that it was nonviolent. But their protests and protest by similar groups sometimes attracted extreme and violent activists who believed it was their duty to kill abortion providers in order to rescue babies.

In 1993, a man named Michael Griffin killed Dr. David Gunn. That was the first known murder of an abortion provider in the United States

Again, Kathryn Brightbill.

Kathryn Brightbill: My feelings about that are very much shaped by—that was actually the day that David Gunn was murdered in Pensacola, which we didn't know at the time that that murder had happened.

And actually, Wendy Wright, who at the time was the communications director for Operation Rescue, who then went on to head up Concerned Women for America for a number of years. I'm not sure what she's doing now, but she called a press conference where a number of us spoke to a bank of cameras arguing why this bill shouldn't be passed, and I got up in front of the cameras playing the cute teenager role, arguing that this law was going to turn me into a felon.

And I found out later that Wendy Wright actually was aware that David Gunn had been murdered in Pensacola several hours before, but she sent us out in front of the cameras to argue that the pro-life movement was non-violent knowing that that was a lie. But we didn't know that was a lie, so in retrospect I felt very betrayed by that. But at

the time as it was happening it was this kind of exciting thing because we thought we were changing the world.

Jenn Stanley: Wendy Wright disputed Kathryn's account of the events that happened on March 10, 1993, saying that she spoke on another day, and even if she did speak on March 10, by the time Kathryn would have spoken, everyone would have known about the murder already. However, Kathryn's mother and sister both corroborated her story, saying they remember it the way she does.

A man named Paul Hill then penned what he called a Defensive Action Statement in support of Michael Griffin, Gunn's murderer. It said that Griffin should be acquitted of all charges against him because the murder was justified, as it was in defense of the unborn.

Thirty-one pro-lifers signed it, including people who had ties to Operation Rescue.

While anti-abortion activists were doing that, on the other side, abortion-rights activists lobbied the federal government to do something about the violence at reproductive-health clinics. In response to the escalating violence, then-President Bill Clinton signed the Freedom of Access to Clinic Entrances or FACE Act, which among other things made it a felony to obstruct the entrance to an abortion clinic, or to intimidate or attempt to injure someone entering an abortion clinic. The FACE Act made many of Operation Rescue's activities federal crimes.

And remember Paul Hill? The anti-abortion activist who in 1993 wrote the Defensive Action Statement?

Well, clearly his statement wasn't just theoretical for him. Because the following year he murdered Dr. John Britton, the abortion provider who had taken Gunn's place, along with his bodyguard, James Barrett.

Many pro-life organizations, including Operation Rescue, maintained that the movement was non-violent, but the public was associating their brand of in-your-face activism with the increasing violence. Plus, the FACE Act was leading to more arrests and bigger fines, and it was becoming financially impossible to keep the same course.

Again, Kathryn Brightbill:

Kathryn Brightbill: Leaders from around the movement, different organizations met in Melbourne-Palm Bay, Florida, to plan out a strategy. And at that meeting that was when Keith Tucci stepped down as the head of Operation Rescue. And from what I understand from what people told me at the time, there was a kind of power struggle as

to who was going to lead the movement. There's—a lot of the figures who did argue for justifiable homicide and use of force were at that meeting. And from what I understand, Flip Benham got control of leadership and marginalized that wing of the movement.

And looking back, I would say that meeting if it had gone differently and if that wing of the entire movement had gained control of Operation Rescue at that meeting, that the '90s very likely could have turned into full blown—like the movement could have turned into a full-blown terrorist movement and the '90s could have gotten very bloody very fast.

Jenn Stanley: So, as Kathryn notes, Philip Benham—who goes by Flip—takes over leadership of the group. He decides they should distance themselves from the violence and take it easy on the rescues. So they change their name to Operation Save America, and expand their focus to other things he considers ungodly, like homosexuality and Islam.

Again, duVergne Gaines.

duVergne Gaines: This particular group is an offshoot of Operation Rescue. They adopted a different name, really to escape a legal judgment against Operation Rescue and Flip Benham, who had assumed the mantle of the national leader of Operation Rescue, but he so stalked and terrorized a provider in Texas that that provider was able to achieve a substantial judgment against Benham and Operation Rescue. So, therefore he moved ultimately to the Charlotte, North Carolina area and begins to use a different name—moniker: Operation Save America.

And really, the individuals associated with this group, to give you an example, after Dr. Tiller was murdered in Wichita, Kansas, in 19—excuse me, in 2009, it was Flip Benham, then-president or director of Operation Save America that began immediately using wanted style posters to target Charlotte-area physicians. And we know what those are. Those are essentially putting targets on a physician's back and really an invitation to potential violence, declaring an open season, I guess. They distribute these flyers in the neighborhood of the physicians.

And they came to Charlotte and they went to hospitals, the private offices, OB-GYN offices of physicians, in addition to their neighborhood and littering those neighborhoods and going up to houses and harassing neighbors, as well as the independent, individual physicians' homes and going to the clinic where they work and distributing them there.

They actually went so far as to go inside the private OB-GYN offices of abortion providers in Charlotte and tried to pass out those leaflets in the waiting room. And that—you know, this is extreme conduct. This is what we would call we believe to be stalking.

Jenn Stanley: When Kathryn finished homeschool, she attended Covenant College, which, according to its website, is the official college of the Presbyterian Church of America, or PCA, as Kathryn refers to it here. And it's in college that she starts questioning some of what she was taught through Operation Rescue and her church.

Kathryn Brightbill: I was questioning—I started questioning whether that kind of very aggressive, militant activism was a good idea and also started becoming aware of kind of the broader political context that they were operating in that I wasn't aware of at the time.

I wasn't aware at the time that the leaders of the movement were believing in kind of a hardcore theocratic view of the Christian's role in government and the idea that Christians should take over government and usher in kind of a Christian theocracy.

I didn't have the framework as a teenager to recognize that that's what they were advocating for. But then in college going to a—the PCA's university and studying about the theonomy Christian reconstructionism and recognizing that this was what was being advocated for in the circles that I was in.

I think people need to be aware of that broader goal—that the end goal isn't just ending abortion; the end goal is implementing a Christian government not terribly different from, like, Christian equivalent of the government of Iran or Saudi Arabia. That's their end goal, and they will frame their arguments in ways that will play with particular legislators at that time on that particular issue, but this end goal is always—is still in implementing kind of a Christian theocracy.

[MUSIC]

Jenn Stanley: But she also doesn't think they have a chance of accomplishing that goal. She starts questioning church teachings, particularly on the issue of homosexuality, and kind of does a 180.

She goes from supporting the Republican Party to volunteering for Barack Obama in '08. She's a big supporter of marriage equality. And she kind of loses touch with Operation Save America and their movement. She checks in from time to time. She still has family involved. But it's not her way of life

In 2014, Flip Benham steps down as director of OSA.

Again, duVergne Gaines.

duVergne Gaines: Rusty Thomas took over Operation Save America and the leadership of the organization in 2014. And he, I believe, has taken it to a new, more radical, more concerning level of openly associating and bringing into the fold of Operation Save America's leadership a man by the name of Matthew Trehwella.

Jenn Stanley: This signifies a big shift in the movement, because Matt Trehwella is part of the more extreme wing that Flip Benham tried to marginalize. He and other signatories of the statement defending the murderous actions of Michael Griffin were the subjects of a federal investigation for conspiracy to use violence to influence politics.

So, Sofia and I called her source, Reverend Pat Mahoney, to get his take on Matt Trehwella and the potential changes in the group.

Pat used to be the national media director for Operation Rescue, but he distanced himself from the group when Flip Benham took it in an anti-Muslim, anti-LGBTQ direction. Though Pat is also quick to say that he still respects and likes Flip. And he gives Flip credit for disavowing violence against abortion providers.

Pat Mahoney: Right, well, I think Matt would believe—are you familiar with the term “reconstructionalist?” A reconstructionalist in essence—well, it's kind of a complicated thing—but in essence believes that the principles of the Old Testament in law, unless they are changed in the new testament, should apply to current culture today. So, I think where Matt—and again, I never want to put words in people's mouths, but I think when he looks at the lesser magistrates, the lens that he would look through would be that of the Bible, and the Bible in his interpretation.

Jenn Stanley: So, Matt Trehwella believes in a literal interpretation of biblical law and thinks that those laws should be implemented at the national level.

In 2013, he self-published a book about it called *The Doctrine of the Lesser Magistrates*, which we'll talk more about later. But it basically encourages legislators and civil servants, or lesser magistrates, to defy the federal government in order to bring about a more Christian nation. Think Kim Davis, a hero of Operation Save America's. She's the Kentucky county clerk who in 2015 defied a federal court order to issue marriage licenses to same-sex couples and spent a few days in jail for it.

Sofia Resnick: Right, so Matt Trehwella, he was also one of the people who signed this Defensive Action Statement, which effectively argued that killing abortion providers is quote unquote “justifiable homicide.” And that’s why Flip Benham marginalized him from their group.

But when Rusty takes over Operation Save America’s leadership, he continues Flip’s focus on the anti-LGBT, anti-Muslim activism. But he also becomes even more politically focused. And he likes what Matt has to say about the Doctrine of the Lesser Magistrates. So, he brings Matt back into the fold. And he starts championing his book. He thinks that the Supreme Court is tyrannical for upholding abortion rights and marriage equality. And he also thinks that if politicians are truly Christian and pro-life, that they should ignore these laws.

Jenn Stanley: And so this is kind of where Roy Moore comes in.

Moore very much believes that a conservative, literal interpretation of biblical law should be applied to our federal government. The Ten Commandments in the courtroom is a signal of that. And when he’s removed from the court, Operation Save America under Flip Benham’s leadership are still supporting him. In 2013 Moore gets reelected to chief justice. But in 2016, after the decision in the landmark Supreme Court case *Obergefell v. Hodges* establishes marriage equality. Moore tells his judges to ignore it, and not to honor same-sex marriages. And he’s removed again.

Sofia Resnick: Right, so at this point, Rusty Thomas is the director of Operation Save America. And he sees this as a lesser magistrate interposing between God and the federal government in the name of upholding God’s law. Because to Rusty, and to Roy Moore, homosexuality is one of the greatest sins.

So, Rusty gives him an award.

Rusty Thomas: And this plaque actually is a Godly Statesman Award presented to Chief Justice Roy Moore [APPLAUSE]. Now, folks, can we gather around the chief justice really quick, ‘cause he’s got a lot this year. I want to gather around, and we want to pray for Chief Justice Roy Moore.

Father, we thank you for the example of Chief Justice Roy Moore. And Lord, we pray that you use this dear brother to set an example for lesser magistrates throughout the United States of America! That it’s time to say no to the federal beast! In Jesus name. And Lord, I thank you, Father God, for his example. And we pray your blessings upon him, his marriage, his children, his grandchildren, my God, and thank

you for the heritage, Lord, that he leaves for his family and for this city and for this state and for our nation, oh God.

Lord, bless him, we pray, and continue to use him, oh God. In Jesus' mighty name and the saint said amen and amen.

**Sofia
Resnick:**

Back in his Operation Rescue days, Reverend Pat Mahoney had been in jail with Rusty Thomas and Flip Benham. And here's what he has to say about the group now.

Pat Mahoney: I don't work with Operation Save America. I wouldn't speak at one of their events.

Jenn Stanley: Why not?

Pat Mahoney: Well, perhaps the main reason would be I do strong bridge-building with the Muslim community, with the Islamic community. And OSA in the past at their events have burned pages of the Quran, have been very direct condemning Muslims in general. And there is just no way that I could ever work with that, as much as, you know, I love Rusty and talk with him and share with him on things—not so much recently, but in the past.

Jenn Stanley: You said you were in jail with Rusty? Oh, sorry, go ahead.

Pat Mahoney: Yeah, yeah, over the years with Operation Rescue and others, sure, uh-huh.

And so, you get a chance to talk about family My wife was very much involved in praying for Rusty's first wife when she had her battle, which tragically ended up taking her life way too soon. Kendra, his current wife—it's kind of interesting; she has the same last name that I do, Kendra Mahoney, and she—Kendra actually worked for me when she was here in D.C.

So, I think—I think that what happens sometimes is that when you do these rallies and you do events, there is a tendency to maybe have that side of your personality be the dominant side.

So, I would say, for Rusty, the general public, particularly those that, you know, saw the recent events in Kentucky that they had this past summer, would view Rusty as kind of a cowboy-esque, militant kind of person. And I don't—I can see where people might have that view of him, but I see Rusty through a different light also.

Jenn Stanley: The recent events Reverend Mahoney is referring to is the week of protests this past summer that were planned to put pressure on EMW Women’s Surgical Center to close. The event that drew me to this story in the first place.

Here’s Rusty Thomas addressing his followers on their opening-night rally.

[MUSIC IN THE CHURCH]

Rusty Thomas: ...equip us. Empower us. Lord, send us forth into the harvest field, for they are certainly ripe unto harvest. Father, there’s those in this room right now who are lost. They’re walking in darkness. They don’t know you; they’re outside the faith. They have no hope in this world, nor in the world to come. Oh, God! Reveal yourself. Lord, draw people, draw...

Jenn Stanley: So, we’re just sitting with the rest of the congregation here. The church is packed, but it seems like most of the people there, or at least as far as I can tell, are members of Operation Save America. So, I’m pretty sure at this moment he’s talking about us, but there could have been people under cover, or he could have just assumed there were pro-choice protesters in the audience.

Pat Mahoney describes Rusty as cowboy-esque. And I think that’s a pretty good description. He’s almost always in a cowboy hat wearing boots and jeans and a button-down shirt. But Sofia, you had a really good description for Rusty when we first saw him. Do you remember?

Sofia Resnick: Yeah, for me, I think he’s Walter White in *Breaking Bad*—only, in cowboy form.

Rusty Thomas: ... led us to come to Louisville, Kentucky, for such a time as this. And we know even now that the eyes of the world literally are upon Louisville, Kentucky, for such a time as this.

Father, you have created an incredible scenario, Lord, that we could not—we couldn’t make this up; we couldn’t write the script. And yet, it is happening in our midst, oh, God. And Father, we don’t want to miss one iota of your precious will. So, we bow before you, our King.

Jenn Stanley: Nearly every summer since 1991’s Summer of Mercy, when Operation Rescue descended on Wichita, Kansas, Operation Save America has held a national event where they perform similar activities: protesting at abortion clinics, showing up in public squares with graphic anti-abortion posters, and picketing and outing abortion providers outside of their homes.

This year's event was called *Such a Time as This*. Because Rusty Thomas, now the leader of the group, feels that we are at a special time in history in which *Roe v. Wade* could be overturned.

Rusty Thomas: Lord, our desire is not just that Kentucky be the first abortion-free state; though as great as that will be. Father, our desire is that the name of Jesus Christ be exulted in all the Earth, and that the nation that you have made will bow in honor the [INAUDIBLE] of King Jesus.

Kentucky is one of a handful of states with only one clinic left. And Rusty wants the GOP-dominated legislature to ignore the federal government and just make abortion illegal.

On Mother's Day weekend, two months before Operation Save America's national event in July, Rusty and ten of his followers blocked the front entrance of EMW Women's Surgical Center. It was their first staged rescue at an abortion clinic in over two decades. And it brought a lot of media attention to Louisville that week.

Rusty Thomas: So we've been talking about verbal interposition. And I believe we even got some folks, some special folks by the way, who did physical interposition.

Do we have any rescuers in our midst, on the 13th, the Mother's Day Rescue, please stand up! [APPLAUSE] Stand up! Stand up!

[MUSIC]

Jenn Stanley: At the top of the show we met Eva Zastrow, a 19-year-old volunteer for Operation Save America and Roy Moore's Senate campaign. She was one of the rescuers. And it was her first rescue, but her parents named her after a very committed, veteran rescuer Eva Edl.

Eva Edl: Eva Edl. Extremely Determined Lady. In German it's noble. Well, I've been at this for 29 years, okay. My first rescue was in Atlanta in 1988. Because when I heard of the abortion clinic, I was unaware, because it was all so hush-hush. I saw it on TV, and I said these are the American death camps. And I just asked my husband if he would let me go, jumped on a bus, and I've been doing it ever since.

Jenn Stanley: Eva is 82 years old. She has dark hair and a warm, inviting smile. She's petite, a little shorter than I am—I'm about 5 foot 2.

Jenn Stanley: There had been a period when less people were doing rescues.

Eva Edl: Yes.

Jenn Stanley: When was the gap between the last rescue you did and the one in Louisville?

Eva Edl: I think it was in Philadelphia in '95. It was under FACE. And I still owe a large sum of money. Well, I guess whoever has it has to pay 137,000 but I don't own anything. I was willing to risk that no matter what.

Jenn Stanley: Eva Edl told us that she hadn't done any rescues during that time, not because of the FACE Act, but because God had commissioned her to create a sculpture depicting what she said to be the horrors of abortion. And she couldn't work on her sculpture if she continued to be jailed for violating the FACE Act or crossing legally recognized buffer zones

But she recently completed it.

She says she won't do anything with it until God tells her it's time. For now, it sits in her garage. But she's free to participate in rescues again.

Jenn Stanley: Why did, after a 22-year hiatus?—sorry—a 22-year hiatus?

Eva Edl: Yeah.

Jenn Stanley: From doing these rescues, what made you all do this rescue again? What was the discussion like?

Eva Edl: There were some of us, as far as I know. I've mentioned it often, okay. But there were not enough people that I knew of. I didn't advertise. But I knew I had to do it again. And Louisville, there came the opportunity where some people were willing.

Jenn Stanley: Who was the first person who said, "We're going to do this rescue"?

Eva Edl: Oh, I don't know, I just talked about it. Maybe I was the culprit, I don't know. You know, I'm just obedient. [SINGS] He leadeth me, he leadeth me. That's all.

Jenn Stanley: Eva Zastrow's mother and Cal's wife, Tricia Zastrow, is the person who tells us that Eva Edl is her daughter's namesake. She and her husband, Cal, have also been involved with the group since it was Operation Rescue.

Tricia Zastrow: I did in the early '90s, but then I started having children in '93, so I stayed home to raise them to love Jesus.

Jenn Stanley: Were you ever scared during a rescue?

Tricia Zastrow: Usually, I was scared before, like driving to it, because you don't know what's happening. But God's grace is sufficient for everything when you do things for him.

Jenn Stanley: Eva Zastrow also tells us that she doesn't know whose idea it was to do the rescue or why; though, it's clear that it was planned well before the day.

Sofia Resnick: Did you guys, like, plan ahead and, like, put cash in your pockets, you know, just in case you were arrested?

Eva Zastrow: I actually did. I had—I brought some money in case I could bond out if anything—but we were released on our own recognizance, so that was irrelevant.

Jenn Stanley: By early July, the Department of Justice still hadn't charged the so-called Mother's Day rescuers with FACE Act violations. And Rusty told *Slate* that in the past, they'd been charged right away. So, he saw this as a positive message from the Trump administration.

But shortly after that conversation, the rescuers were charged with FACE Act violations. Rusty told *Slate* that he blamed the turn of events on the deep state but that he believed he had friends in the Trump administration. He added that he believed that Trump and Trump's personal lawyer, Jay Sekulow, were working to expose the shadow government working behind the scenes to maintain their power. Sekulow has a long history representing Operation Rescue and later, Operation Save America, in lawsuits involving buffer zones and FACE Act violations.

Nevertheless, the charges against the group affected some of their planned activities in Louisville. Because of the blockade, a judge mandated buffer zones in front of EMW, meaning they couldn't get too close. Rusty and the other rescuers also had to make an appearance in court to discuss issues in their trial.

[SOUNDS FROM OUTSIDE THE COURTHOUSE]

Rusty Thomas: Good morning church, welcome to the day the Lord has made. We're just going to rejoice, and we're just going to...

Jenn Stanley: On that morning, July 24, Rusty shows up to the federal courthouse in Louisville, Kentucky, greeted by about 100 of his followers and media outlets from all over the country. There's a band of young musicians playing Christian music, and Rusty walks up to them and takes the mic. One of his sons fronts the band.

Rusty Thomas: My son Jo—Josiah, come out here for a minute. Can you take your guitar off just for a minute? [BABY SCREAMS] I want you to model this T-shirt. Because honestly, this T-shirt and the message carries the message of the day. [BABY SCREAMS] We're before a human court, but it's very important that this message go forth throughout all the Earth. Once you notice what it says: "In the Days of Lawlessness—watch this—Those Who Keep the Law Become the Outlaw. [SOUND GETS REALLY LOW] What happened to my sound? Because I really—All right—It's important that we hear that. In the days of lawlessness, those that keep the law become the outlaw.

See, the kingdom of God is a funny thing. [GUITAR STRUMMING] I don't need the music right now. Be quiet please.

Jenn Stanley: The crowd is filled with OSA regulars. They're holding their signs with bloody fetuses. Young children are sitting near the band coloring the sidewalk with chalk.

Rusty Thomas: See, the world thinks that you and I are on trial here today. I got news for the world. We are not the ones on trial here today. The United States of America is on trial here today [APPLAUSE]. And we as Christians are the law keeper. Jesus answers...

Jenn Stanley: Sofia goes inside the courthouse to cover the hearing, but she can't record in there. So, I caught up with her and Eva Zastrow during the recess.

Sofia Resnick: Okay, so, we're here at the Western District Court in Louisville, Kentucky, on Monday mid-morning. We're here for a hearing in *USA versus Rusty Thomas*. This is the case that deals with anti-abortion protesters in front of EMW Women's Surgical Center, and the federal government has charged them with violating the FACE Act. It's a preliminary hearing.

Jenn Stanley: What's going on in the courthouse?

Sofia Resnick: So, the hearing opened with two motions. One, the defendants wanted to have the judge recused, and essentially their argument was that because he was appointed as a U.S. attorney under the Obama administration, he might have bias in this case, since it's politically, you know, a very political case. And so, that was their argument. The judge said that he didn't think that their argument had any merit. And so, he denied the motion.

The other motion was to have two, what they call sidewalk counselors, who are not affiliated with the defendants. Two Louisville counselors who regularly are in front of the abortion clinic and try to get women not to go inside. They want them to be able to intervene into the lawsuit, and the judge hasn't ruled on that yet.

Jenn Stanley: How's it going in there?

Sofia Resnick: Eva said she doesn't—you don't want to go back in, right?

Eva Zastrow: Well, yeah, I'd just rather be outside.

Jenn Stanley: Yeah. [LAUGHS]

Eva Zastrow: Court.

Sofia Resnick: Yeah, it's just—so, from what I saw, it's just—Rusty is sitting up at the front. But none of the other—oh, maybe I saw your dad up there, too?

Eva Zastrow: No, I believe it was Rusty Thomas and our attorney, Vince Heuser and Eva Edl and then two other sidewalk counselors.

[MULTIPLE PROTESTERS PERFORMING SPOKEN WORD]
Fifty-six-million times we've been led to the slaughter/just as we...

Jenn Stanley: So, there is a lot going on outside the courthouse, too.

... Not by war, famine, or disease/but by terrorism on the inside/56 million voices lost/ the word abortion is so hush-hush/don't kill your baby/it's just too much...

At first it's just representatives from Operation Save America, but there are a lot of them. And they maintain their presence there all day.

Pro-choice groups had been meeting throughout the city as well that week. They were helping to support EMW Women's Surgical Center, the last

abortion clinic in Kentucky, during the weeklong protests that OSA had planned. So, I'm kind of surprised that there are no counter-protesters there this day.

Then three women wearing long red dresses and white bonnets show up.

Betsy Riot Protester [name withheld, upon request]: We're with a group called the Betsy Riot. It's a group of anarchist suffragettes. We're just here to be a presence in opposition to what's going on here today. They seem to have taken control of the street with little to no pushback from the public. So we're here to just be the face of someone who's not OK with what's going on.

Jenn Stanley: Their costumes are based on Margaret Atwood's 1985 dystopian novel about a patriarchal, totalitarian theocracy where women called handmaids are raped and forced to breed with powerful men. In 2017, Hulu made a serialized drama based on the book. It's a very popular show. It's won a bunch of awards. I'm sure most of our listeners know what the *Handmaid's Tale* is, so I don't need to go into it too much. But no one from the OSA crowd gets the reference Here's one of Rusty's daughter's, Torah.

Torah Thomas: What do you think of us? We do not hate you. We love you.

Jenn Stanley: She's 13. And she didn't know who the women were supposed to be dressed as, which makes sense. But what surprised me was that she and her friends thought that they were just making fun of them, dressing and acting like they do in an attempt to mock them.

Jenn Stanley: So, I asked Kathryn Brightbill about this. She's the woman we spoke to earlier in the episode who was raised in Operation Rescue but has since left the movement.

Kathryn Brightbill: I could definitely see that. Because the way, like, the very kind of conservative way that women dress in that subculture, which I—actually my parents never made us wear all dresses. But a lot of people kind of treat it as a joke that, "Oh, haha, look at these women wearing their denim jumpers and their long hair," and see mockery.

And it—which I think is harmful for the girls and young women who are in that environment to see themselves mocked because they—it kind of makes—it emphasizes that what they're taught about how society hates them and is out to get them and doesn't like Christians. It reinforces that idea. So, I can see how they would see those *Handmaid's Tale* dresses and see it as a mockery.

Interestingly, conversation that I've had with various homeschooled friends was about all the things about those dresses that would have been considered immodest in our world. That their collar bones are visible, that they're formfitting enough that you can see women's shape. There's buttons in the front, which would be considered an eye trap because they draw attention to women's bust line. So, like, so a number of my friends who have kind of grown up in that world, we've all kind of joked about how the dresses that the handmaids wear are immodest. So, to everyone in the outside world, they look like these very button-down, very modest, very strict dress. But to us, we can see where they actually aren't modest enough.

But boys could get away with whatever they wanted to wear.

Jenn Stanley: Eva Zastrow, the younger Eva—Cal's daughter and volunteer for the Roy Moore campaign, was also homeschooled. I ask her what her experience was like, and what her goals are for the future.

Jenn Stanley: You were homeschooled, right? Did you dad and mom teach you? Or, were you part of a homeschool group?

Eva Zastrow: Both! Both and. My mom was the main teacher. Dad taught, you know, fishing.

Cal Zastrow: I taught fishing class.

Eva Zastrow: Physical education.

Cal Zastrow: I taught her sign-holding class.

Eva Zastrow: [LAUGHS] One thing I've seen from homeschooling is you become best friends with your family; you become best friends with your brothers and sisters. And they're not all the same age as you. So, all of my siblings and I, we all really enjoy meeting new people. And we enjoy people of all ages, not just our age group. That's something we've noticed is not always the case with other young people our ages. You know, it's kind of almost an age-segregation, so.

Jenn Stanley: Eva, do you have any plans to go to college?

Eva Zastrow: Not right now. I don't, actually. My heart is elsewhere. God's broken my heart for the fatherless, the unborn children, but also the special needs and handicapped orphans in Nepal, China, India, all around the world.

[MUSIC]

Jenn Stanley: Homeschooling is very important for many in the evangelical pro-life movement. And everyone we spoke with who was raised in Operation Save America said they were homeschooled. Part of what these girls are taught in homeschool is to be submissive, dutiful wives who have and raise children to follow Christ.

In light of the Roy Moore sexual assault and pedophilia allegations, Kathryn Brightbill wrote a piece for the *LA Times* about courtship in the evangelical movement.

In it, she writes that it's common for homeschooled teenagers to be courted by much older men. Their parents arrange or approve these courtships. And through homeschooling they're grooming their daughters to be submissive, obedient wives. The evangelical support for homeschooling and their belief in Christian patriarchy are inextricably linked. *ThinkProgress* recently reported that in 2011, Roy Moore co-wrote a study course that says women shouldn't run for office, and that women's suffrage was a mistake.

Rusty also seems to believe that homeschooling is important for ushering in a patriarchy—explicitly, there's no misunderstanding.

His biography on the Operation Save America website contains a telling passage. It says: "Rev. Thomas has a father's mantle and spreads a patriarchal vision to reclaim the masculine identity that has been neutered by the feminization of America. He and his wife, Kendra Thomas, home-school 13 children at the Thomas Nation's University of Righteousness."

That's right, Rusty Thomas homeschools his children and calls that homeschool the Thomas Nation's University of Righteousness. He and others believe that their way of life is being threatened by feminism, homosexuality, and multiculturalism.

Here's Pastor Dale Sochia, another leader at Operation Save America talking about his rainbow umbrella.

Dale Sochia: I hope [lesbians?] bought my umbrella from Noah's Ark. When I saw that umbrella, I said, "How dare we surrender the colors of the rainbow to some feministic movement?" I don't think so. They didn't invent that. God chose that. That's God's. [INAUDIBLE] Because it's not for Satan to take away from what belongs to God. I'm done with giving the devil ground.

Multiple people at the rally: That's right! Amen!

Dale Sochia: Wherever you put the soldier feet that says it's yours. Hallelujah. [APPLAUSE]

[MUSIC]

Jenn Stanley: Operation Rescue started up in the mid-Eighties. Most of the men in leadership didn't group up in Operation Rescue or Operation Save America. They chose it. They created it. And now they want us all to live it.

Male headship is important in the evangelical movement. It's this idea that since Jesus is the head of the church, men should be the head of the household and women should be submissive, obedient wives. Many of these men's testimonies have something in common, the mistreatment, or desired mistreatment of women.

A testimony is basically someone's personal story about how they found Christianity and were born again.

Rusty's testimony begins when he's a teenager.

Rusty Thomas: Pretty much this is how my testimony, as I told you ladies. I was raised on the mean streets of Bridgeport, Connecticut. Ninety percent of my neighborhood was Black and Puerto Rican. I was white. It didn't go over well. So, fighting to survive was a way of life.

Jenn Stanley: After the opening-night rally in Kentucky, we introduce ourselves to Rusty, and we tell him we'll be around all week but that we'd also love to ask him a few questions then. He says he has a few minutes but he's very busy, and he leads us to the church basement. It was really loud in the church. It was packed from earlier that night. There were kids running around everywhere. So, we were really just looking for a quiet spot. But the only room open is the nursery.

Rusty makes a comment that it's fitting that we're in the nursery given that this is an interview on OSA's attempt to close down the last clinic in Kentucky.

But that's only a fraction of what we talk about in that nursery.

The only chair for an adult is a rocking chair, and Rusty sits there, and Sofia and I sit in these desk chairs that were made for children no older than 5 or 6. So, we look a little ridiculous. And Rusty starts by telling us his testimony, how he gets involved in the movement.

Rusty Thomas: My dad was a hardcore marine atheist. He was a drunkard, a womanizer, a gambler. My mother, bless her heart, was a hypochondriac, and because my dad abandoned his responsibilities to her, she was lonely. She did a lot of negative things to try to get attention from my dad.

And I would say I was demonized. And what I mean by that, if I wasn't beating up on flesh and blood, I was literally smashing my own face and head against brick walls, screaming in torment. Whatever it was that was eating me alive on the inside I wanted out. Give me a pill, put a gun to my head, send me to a psychiatrist, I don't know, but whatever this is, I can't handle it; it's destroying me. And honestly, as I look back now, that's probably was my prayer. It was my prayer; it was my cry. I'm dying I'm hurting.

And honestly, I had murder in my heart. I was filled with rage. And when God intervened, right before he intervened, I was literally plotting the murder of my mother. She was a hypochondriac, so she would feign sickness and disease so people would feel sorry for her so she could get some attention that she wanted from my dad and he wouldn't give it to her. And so she would just complain, bitterly complain. And we were kids and we just got lashed day in and day out.

I wanted to choke her. I needed relief, you know what I mean? I just did. Like, you're killing me woman, with this stuff. So, I'm just thinking how do I get out from underneath this, I'll take her out, you know? I mean, honestly it was survival. Honestly it was just, I needed to survive this. So, I figured the best way is to get rid of her and then maybe the torment would go away.

Jenn Stanley: So, Rusty ends up converting to Christianity after he finds out his 16-year-old cousin is pregnant. He travels from Bridgeport, Connecticut, to Portsmouth, New Hampshire, where she lives. And he's planning to beat up the boy who got her pregnant. But when he goes to punch him, he says a big brick wall of air stops him. The boy said he was protected by Jesus Christ and then took Rusty to his home, where Rusty was evangelized by this boy's family.

So, at this point, Rusty's a Christian. He goes to Los Angeles. He tries to become an actor, but then he says that God called him to leave acting and focus on his ministry fulltime. And he's been spreading the word of his God and fighting against LGBTQ rights and abortion rights ever since.

Rusty Thomas: And Jenn, please hear me what I'm saying to you. This is my warning, and I—record this—because if we fail in convincing the states to exercise the doctrine of the lesser magistrate

and say no to the federal beast when they are devouring their own citizens, okay, whether it's abortion, legalizing sodomy, or taxation to death, it doesn't make a difference. If they don't say no to that, and they go along to get along, guess where this battle then falls to? We the people.

Study history. Study history. This is really important what I'm saying to you, because once tyranny gets to that point and there's no checks and balances and it falls to we the people, that's when it gets bloody. And that we do not want to see happen. So, believe me—when you may not be agreeing with me about abortion or homosexuality, but I'm telling you I know the Bible and I know history. And I see where we're at, and I'm telling you if we are not successful in convincing governors and legislators to put the constitutional chain back on that federal government, if they fail to do this, then this tyranny falls upon we the people. And that historically, I am telling you, produces the revolution. And that's when you have blood in the streets.

I don't know about you, Jenn, I don't want to see that happen. I have children and I have grandchildren. I do not want to see that that's happening. And that's why what we're doing is so crucial and vital to our survival as a people, that we have an opportunity to correct this without shedding blood.

Jenn Stanley: Rusty believes that homosexuality and abortion are crimes in the eyes of God. Big crimes. And the fact that the government allows them is tyranny against God. He believes that we are so divided as a nation because God is punishing us for allowing homosexuality and abortion.

And here he is telling us that unless the government starts enforcing biblical law, there will be a bloody civil war.

This is why Rusty has championed Matt Trehwella. Remember, Matt Trehwella is one of the signatories of the justifiable homicide statement. Well, he self-published a book called *The Doctrine of the Lesser Magistrate*. We will talk about it much more in the next episode, but it's basically a guidebook for defying the federal government to defend God's law. Only his and Rusty's interpretation of God is one who hates Muslims, homosexuality, and autonomous women, particularly those in positions of power.

Here's Rusty again, addressing his congregation on a night that Sofia and I were present.

Rusty Thomas: What is the culmination of a nation under judgments when their sayings and doings are against the Lord? Well, you can find it in Verse 12, and it's not pretty.

Ask for my people—and this is going to go over really well with the feminists in our midst. [LAUGHTER]

Ask for my people, children are their oppressors. Anyone besides me have a little concern for the youth culture we're raising in the United States of America? [MULTIPLE PEOPLE: YES!]

Are you seeing what I'm seeing? Do you ever see, like, these interviews, where they're talking to our young people about anything, about history. Any important topic. Do you hear what's coming out of their mouth? Do you realize we're raising a generation of young people that actually need safe places in college? [FROM THE CROWD: YES!] Because they can't handle an opinion that's contrary to them? And these are going to be our future leaders, by the way. Folks, we're in trouble. We're in trouble. Since children will be your oppressors. Now watch this, and women rule over you.

Now, in America we think we're so progressive; we're so enlightened. You know, and little do we know that when we exchange patriarchy for feminism, guess what, in God's word, you're not enlightened, you're not progressive; you're falling deeper and deeper into God's curse and judgment upon you. And [RAISES VOICE TO A YELL] it's a harbinger of greater [wall?] that is to come.

[MUSIC]

Jenn Stanley: So, this man who's basically saying that feminism is an early sign of the apocalypse is championing a self-published text by a man who believes in the justifiable homicide of abortion providers.

Sofia Resnick: Yeah, and I think it's also worth mentioning here that Matt Trehwella has a similar story to Rusty's about how he got involved in this movement.

So, Matt started the website LesserMagistrate.com a few years ago to promote his book, and that's where I found a written testimony he published actually last year on the day he refers to as the 38th anniversary of his quote "born again birth date," the day he came to know Jesus Christ.

So, in this testimony, Matt writes about what sounds like a troubled youth, filled with fighting and drug use and beatings from his dad. He grew up in Detroit, and he describes hating Black people—he uses the word hate—in part because he felt like a minority as a white person in Detroit. And in part also because of bad experiences he said he had with other Black kids.

Anyway, he writes that he was charged with arson at the age of 17, and spent a few days in county jail, which is where he went to this Christian drug rehab program and finally that's what led to his ultimate conversion.

But what's so striking to me in this text is the contempt he expresses for his mother. He writes that he lost respect for his mom after his parents divorced, when Matt was only 11. He explains that she threw him out of the house when he was 15 for dealing drugs. After unsuccessfully trying to live with his father, he comes home to his mom.

And, I mean, just listen to this line: quote "I stood outside for a while. I hadn't seen her in six months. I thought—'Now I'll have to put up with her mouth again.'"

That's the end of the quote. So, later, at age 17, during an acid trip and a particularly low point for Matt, he writes about having a strong urge to take a knife and kill his mother and his sister, and then to run down the street and kill anyone in sight.

And I bring all this up, because, you know, this is the man who wrote the book that brought Operation Save America to Kentucky. And with Operation Save America's help, Matt has been bringing this book to lawmakers and government officials all over the country.

Rusty Thomas: About six months ago, I was approached about coming here—actually, even a little before that, maybe about eight months ago. We were approached about coming to Kentucky. It was a Macedonian call. I had a professor—a great brother of the Lord, David Street—I don't know if he's even here tonight. Is he downstairs? Bless you, David. But he's the one who put the bug in my ear: "Would you consider coming to Kentucky?" And I said, "Well, I'll certainly pray about it, put it in the hopper, and we'll just see, you know? But I will, I'll pray."

And, you know, the more we kind of looked at things and monitoring what's happening in the United States of America, it seemed like every indicator was Kentucky. It seemed like all the pieces of the puzzle were coming together in Kentucky. So, right after Brother David shared that with me, I went up to Wisconsin, and I met with Pastor Matt Trewhella, who's going to be with us Monday night. Hallelujah. And we were sitting down—and we were actually working on another project—and I shared with him about the possibility of us coming to Kentucky: "I'm seriously thinking about doing this, Brother, and I want your help, your partnership."

And so, I shared the vision with him. And the very next day we're together sitting in the living room, and we get a phone call. And he picks up the phone, you know, "Matt Trehella here." It's a congressman from the state of—

[CONGREGATION IN UNISON]: Kentucky!

Rusty Thomas: Kentucky. Who orders, as Joseph said, 2,000 *Doctrine of the Lesser Magistrate* books.

So, the day before, it's the first time I'm communicating that we're coming to Kentucky; we're going to do this. The very next day ding ding ding ding, second fold witness. He orders 2,000 books, and he spreads it in the church world and throughout state government in Kentucky.

Governor Bevin has read the book; he has praised the book; he has quoted from the book in his official speeches to the state of Kentucky. And I want you to know coming into Kentucky. There's a lot of things the media is showing, but there's a whole lot of stuff going on behind the scenes.

[FROM THE CROUD]: HALLELUJAH!

And nobody has no idea. When I tell you we are hitting this from every possible angle, I am telling you we are hitting this from every possible angle. Mercy ministries, prophetic ministries, working within the state government.

Jenn Stanley: Pastor Joseph Spurgeon is a local leader with Operation Save America in southern Indiana and Kentucky. He helped Rusty set up the events in Louisville.

Joseph says that him and others in Kentucky begged Rusty to come down to Louisville for the national event, because the city was being taken over by crime, which they blame on the abortion clinic and the city's reputation for being LGBTQ-friendly.

Joe Spurgeon: In 2016 Louisville had the record high of criminal homicide, not counting the murder of pre-borns. And in 2017 they are already on pace to break that record. Illicit drug use with the heroin epidemic is ravaging communities in Kentucky. These are the same communities sending their women to the abortion mill.

In addition, Louisville, Kentucky, has decided to parade its sin, parade sodomy throughout its city. In a news report, Louisville was ranked

the 11th among all the cities in the U.S. for population of those enslaved to sodomy. The same report said this about the Louisville Metro Council: “The Louisville Metro Council and tourism officials are working with groups to attract more lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender,” pedophilia, and all the rest—I always add those at the end—“to the city.

Jenn Stanley: Ultimately, it was the Doctrine of the Lesser Magistrate that made Rusty decide to come here, but they still had other goals. Rusty instructed his followers to disperse across the city, spreading their anti-abortion, anti-gay, anti-Muslim message.

Rusty Thomas: You guys listen to me. When you’re dealing with the Satanists and the witches and the pro-aborts and the homosexuals, listen, they’re gathering together. Man, they’re locked. You actually believe they’re going to be listening to us or ministering, that they’re going to receive the Gospel then and there? How many know that ain’t happening? Now, you get them away from the crowd and you get them alone, then you can have a conversation. But how many know, they got each other’s backs? They do. In fact, if they see even one of them start to listen to what you have to say, believe me, they’re going to run and grab them! They don’t want anybody defecting from their camp!

[FROM THE CROWD:] Right, they’re united.

Rusty Thomas: Now listen, you know how I want you to treat the pro-aborts? I want you to ignore them. If you can, listen, if you can, if God gives you the opportunity, show them a loving and kind act.

[MUSIC]

Jenn Stanley: They set up a tent in downtown Louisville, where people signed up to pray and sing. And one day they projected a giant video, which they said was of an abortion. But they also focus their efforts on Kentucky’s last clinic, EMW Women’s Surgical Center.

Protester: Justice, you want to sing with me today? Not yet? Well this is my little buddy, Justice. He is 5 years old, and he is a gift from God, and you guys should be ashamed of yourself, because if Mama wanted to kill him, you would help her kill him. That is despicable. I can see why you’re not very happy,

Different protester: It is shameful to murder babies.

Jenn Stanley: One of the clinic escorts who's there that day tells *Rewire* that she's alarmed by the messages of hate the children seem to be absorbing.

Clinic escort: Yesterday, on Thursday, the kids were used to—they were lined up in front of the escorts and told to pray very aggressively. And that stood out because—I took a picture of one kid who was glaring at an escort with this hatred. And he was like 8. And he doesn't even know why any of this is happening. But he's kind of brainwashed to just hate this person he doesn't even know, because of this issue. And that almost made me cry.

[RELIGIOUS MUSIC FROM THE PRAYER TENT]

Jenn Stanley: And while, as Rusty put it, the eyes of the world were on Louisville, Kentucky, and the media focused on what was happening at the clinic and around town, Operation Save America's leadership was working to get its word out to lawmakers.

And their success might surprise you.

More to come on Part Two from *Marching Toward Gilead*.

[MUSIC]

Marching Toward Gilead was produced by myself, Jenn Stanley, and Sofia Resnick for *Rewire Radio*. Mark Faletti executive-produced this episode. We had some reporting and recording help from Andrew Villegas, Rachael London, and Kelly Benjamin. Jodi Jacobson is our editor-in-chief, Brady Swenson is our director of technology. Music for this episode is by Doug Helsel. Thank you to all the staff at *Rewire*, especially Rachel Perrone, Lauren Gutierrez, and Stacey Burns, our Communications and Social Media team, for getting the word out about CHOICE/LESS. For more on this story, including photos and links, visit our website at Rewire.news/CHOICELESS. Thanks for listening.