

The Anti-Trans Hate Machine

Season Three, Episode 2 Patriot Front and the Rise of Localized Anti-LGBTQ Violence

Imara Jones, HOST: It's June 2022, and a group of 31 men are packing themselves into the back of a U-Haul moving truck. It's in a parking lot of a hotel in Coeur d'Alene, the most populous city in North Idaho.

Stuffed inside the truck, the men wear a uniform of white balaclava masks, baseball caps, and sunglasses. Several hold red, white, and blue riot shields.

They're following a detailed plan to cause violent confrontations, ready to kick off the chaos with a smoke bomb.

Now these men have traveled from *all over the country*, and they are members of the white supremacist group Patriot Front.

Their destination: A Pride in the Park event in downtown Coeur d'Alene, Idaho, where entertainment, concessions, face painting for kids and one of several drag performances were in full swing. The event was expected to attract hundreds of families.

But on the perimeter of downtown Coeur D'Alene, about half a mile away from the park, Patriot Front's truck comes to a rumbling stop.

Its members are ready to crash into the party. Patriot Front is ready for combat.

I'm Imara Jones, and this is the Anti Trans Hate Machine, a Plot Against Equality.

When I saw the news coverage of what happened in Coeur d'Alene, I knew that trans people were facing a different type of danger.

This group, that I had not heard of until then, showed that it wasn't just the "Western Chauvinist" Proud Boys targeting people like me. Now violent neo-fascists had turned their sights on the trans community.

However this wasn't the only reason that it got my attention. Coeur d'Alene was actually a full-circle moment for this entire series.

Because back in season 1, we showed how the first law to block trans women and girls from playing sports came into existence. Where this happened is important – Idaho.

Idaho is a petri-dish for Christian Nationalist laws and extremist politics, which inevitably make their way into state capitals across the country. Like the anti-trans sports ban. This has been

true for years.

But now, something new is revealing itself.

In Idaho, authoritarian, anti-trans politicians and political groups are forging powerful relationships with armed extremists in communities across the state.

This unholy alliance is accelerating the deterioration of democracy.

And that's why we're back in Idaho.

To understand what's going on there and how a violent group that most of us have never heard of, ended up targeting a Pride event in an out-of-the-way small city, I decided to call a woman who has been standing up to rising extremism in Idaho. She's right in the middle of all of it.

Anita Parisot lives in Coeur d'Alene, Idaho with her husband and three kids. Originally from Michigan, Anita has lived in Coeur D'Alene for more than 20 years.

***Anita Parisot:** I met a boy, and on our second date he said: if this works out, I'm not going back to Michigan. I'm an Idaho boy. And, I need my mountains and my lake. So, that's kind of how I got to stay out here.*

By outside standards Coeur d'Alene is a small town, but by North Idaho standards it's an urban oasis, one of the largest communities in the state.

***Imara Jones:** What has it been like to be the parent of two LGBTQ kids in Idaho, in Coeur d'Alene?*

***Anita Parisot:** Presley, my youngest one, she calls me an aggressive ally, which she says is a compliment.*

I've cut ties with anybody who is not safe for my girls. That isn't safe for me. And by safe, I don't just mean physically safe. I mean how they talk, who they associate with, how they vote. They're not in our lives anymore. And that's what I've spent probably the last two years doing is being very conscious and very deliberate at who I surround myself with.

But Anita wasn't always this progressive.

She was raised in a conservative household and held on to those views until she had first-hand experience for what they could mean.

Imara Jones: *How would you describe your politics?*

Anita Parisot: *You know, it's been a journey. I actually grew up in a very red household. I like to tell people they, you know, my family, they were Rush Limbaugh listening and Bill O'Reilly watching Sean Hannity fans. And I was raised if somebody had an R next to their name, I voted for them. And then I moved to Idaho. I had an incident in my career where I lost my job, and I was unemployed for 19 months. And I saw things from a little different perspective.*

I started to lean the other way. I also, I really have to credit my husband, Mark, he is, he got me to think and to question, and he gave me a safe place to ask stupid questions, to be vulnerable, and to just and to be okay going: this doesn't make any sense to me. Why does this, you know, why does the Republican Party do this? And I don't understand if this is what we're supposed to be about. Why is it like this?.

And Anita is not quiet about her support for her kids. She wants her community to know that she stands by them, putting up signs in her yard, one which declared: Love Lives Here. But when Anita put up that sign, her husband had one request:

Anita Parisot: *The only thing he said was please move the signs out from under Presley's bedroom window. These people have guns. So I moved them out, they're now in the front of the house, away from any place that somebody could shoot through a window.*

They had both learned to be matter of fact about the potential to be targets. But these threats have been impacting Anita and people she knows in some frightening ways.

Anita Parisot: *I had a gentleman drive past my house a few times a couple summers ago, and he said to me, I really like your sign. I was like, oh, well, thank you. And he said, yeah, make sure you keep it up so I know who to shoot when the revolution comes.*

Yes you heard that right. Anita lives in a community where the extremists next door are preparing to target their neighbors as part of a conflict that they see as inevitable.

Anita Parisot: *You know, we have a lot of violent people up here, I've had friends who have been doxed. I've had friends who have been swatted. They've had death threats. I've been threatened in front of my home. So it's a scary thing to stand up and feel like you're the lone voice in the wilderness.*

Now Coeur d'Alene is no stranger to extremist violence and danger. In the 1970s, 80s, and 90s, white nationalists flocked to Northern Idaho. In fact a white supremacist group, the Aryan Nations, bought land there and became a local powerhouse. But when the organization's leaders went bankrupt in 2000, tensions calmed. And many thought that the worst had passed.

Anita Parisot: We've gone through the mess back in the early 80s with the Aryan Nations, and our community was not viewed as a great place. And it really hurt us economically, hurt us as a culture. And we fought really hard to come back from that.

However over the past decade violent extremism has come back to Coeur d'Alene. And Anita knows that this new wave of white supremacist intimidation puts her community at risk.

So when Anita's daughter said she wanted to go to Pride, Anita and her husband were supportive but really concerned about safety. They needed to talk through what to do.

They decided to go to the most private place in their house, their bathroom, to talk it over in a whisper.

Anita Parisot: His concern was they just have to shoot something in the air to cause panic. He said, go, but be smart. And I knew where the exits were, and I knew where to go. And he said, just don't ever - don't let Presley out of your sight for a minute.

With that, their family was on the same page. It was important to show their daughter not to be afraid.

Anita and her daughter Presley made their way towards Coeur d'Alene City Park the morning of June 11, 2022. It's where the pride celebration would be taking place.

And it looked like any typical Pride gathering.

Queer youth skateboarded with rainbow flag capes billowing behind them. Others showed off their skills with hula hoops decked out in facepaint. Hundreds of pride-goers were ready to celebrate that day. It was all festive.

Anita Parisot: You could see the pride signs in the park from a distance. The balloons, you could hear the music, you could hear the laughter

But Anita was on guard

Anita Parisot: We talked about safety and let Presley know, you need to stick with me. They're going to have their guns out. And so, you know, I don't know what's going to happen, but you need to be within sight of me at all times.

Anita and her daughter got out of their car dressed in their Pride apparel, ready to join in on all the fun. At first it seemed that their worst fears might not be realized.

Anita Parisot: And then as you walked closer, that's when you saw the ring of gun toting hatred surrounding this joyous celebration that was happening in the middle.

And it just got worse.

Anita Parisot: As we walked into the park, we were surrounded by people with automatic weapons. There were several gentlemen in ghillie suits that I had never seen up close before. That was terrifying. He walked right up to my face and stared at me, didn't say a word, and just raised his gun and then put it back down and turned around and walked away. We had people along the lakefront with signs saying groomers go to hell. They had skull masks on. They were carrying AR fifteens. Everybody was packing, and they were in a ring around Pride. So they were surrounding us. And so you had to walk through them to get into the event.

Once you got past them, it was like a completely different world. Joy, love, music. Colorful. People were laughing, hugging. We saw two marriage proposals. Once you got through the crazy ring, it was beautiful. It was just you had to get through the craziness to get into where the love and the hope and the peace was.

Imara Jones: Yeah, that was one of the questions I had, you guys are used to seeing guns and people carrying guns, and so it was like, oh, no big deal. They're going to have guns. Everybody's got guns. It's Idaho. But it wasn't that. It was that you all had a sense that it could be potentially dangerous.

Anita Parisot: Yes. And the reason I told Presley that we needed to keep her in sight is because if the bullets start flying, I'm covering her up, and I'm taking the bullet for her and she'll survive. So she has to be with me. And I lost her for, like, 15 minutes, and it was like, oh, my God, where did she go? And as I talk about it now, it sounds completely insane, but that's what we talked about. It sounds insane as I talk about it.

Anita and her daughter enjoyed the rest of their day and fortunately made it out of the pride celebration without incident. But it wasn't actually supposed to be that way.

Because members of Patriot Front were on their way to the park with riot shields and other violent paraphernalia, ready to cause the mayhem that Anita was worried about.

Thankfully they never made it. But that was by sheer luck.

ARCHIVAL newsclip: *"31 members of the white supremacist group Patriot Front were arrested on suspicion of plotting to violently disrupt a local LGBTQ pride event."*

These arrests only happened because a concerned citizen thought that it was strange that dozens of men were piled into the back of a U-haul at a hotel parking lot. So they called 911.

ARCHIVAL newsclip: *"Tonight, federal authorities are on alert after police in Idaho say they prevented a possible domestic terror attack over the weekend."*

One single bystander. One single phone call. That's the only thing that prevented what could have been one of the worst days in modern American history.

Anita and her daughter remember seeing the nearly three dozen Patriot Front members being detained as they drove away. They were stopped just a block away from the Pride celebration.

Anita Parisot: *We could see the guys kneeling on this grass with their hands behind their backs. and we were like, what the hell was that?*

That was Patriot Front.

To understand Patriot Front, and how they ended up in Coeur d'Alene, we actually have to go back to the event that gave them their start.

The Unite the Right Rally in Charlottesville, Virginia. That's where a number of white nationalists descended upon the University of Virginia's campus in 2017 to protest the removal of a statue of Confederate General Robert E. Lee. The slaveholding commander of Southern forces during the Civil War.

Amongst these groups was a little known organization called Vanguard America. Here's Emily Gorcenski, an independent data scientist who tracked Vanguard America and other groups at the Unite the Right Rally.

Emily Gorcenski: *One of the chants that the neo-Nazis were chanting in Charlottesville on August 12th that summer during the Unite the Right was, fuck you fagots like, they were like standing in a group chanting that, right. When I was there in*

the torch march that night, they were throwing all sorts of anti-LGBTQ slurs at me. They were using every sort of anti-trans trope that was in the book.

And among all of those groups, Vanguard America would prove especially violent.

Emily Gorcenski: Throughout 2017, Vanguard America was one of the more aggressive neo-Nazi white supremacist groups.

They considered themselves the tip of the spear, at the “vanguard” of white supremacy. And their blood was up in Charlottesville.

Emily Gorcenski: They were trying to be militant. They had made up shields, they had brought banners, they brought flagpoles to attack people with,

This penchant for violence culminated during Unite the Right.

Hundreds of people brawled in the street in Charlottesville. People wielded Confederate flags, using them as weapons. Swarms of people were throwing punches, shoving, and kicking. The violence was so raw and so real that Virginia’s Governor would declare a state of emergency.

Vanguard America was in the middle of it all.

And then, it got worse.

Wearing a Vanguard America uniform, a neo nazi named James Alex Fields drove his car into a crowd of counter protesters. The attack injured dozens and killed Heather Heyer, an antiracist activist and paralegal.

Heather’s death changed everything. Suddenly the hate groups gathered in Charlottesville realized that the murder of a white woman, in their name, would turn public opinion against them. And they were right. Prominent leaders from the Democratic and Republican parties came out to condemn the Unite the Right Rally. And though he would stumble into saying that there were “good people on both sides,” even Donald Trump was forced to respond.

Unite the Right leaders realized that their show of force had backfired.

Emily Gorcenski: I think within 48 hours of the attack, the photos came out of James Alex Fields marching with Vanguard America. They kind of said, oh, shit.

Members of Vanguard America decided to distance themselves from the attack with a rebrand. Led by Thomas Rosseau they formed a new group called Patriot Front. These former members changed their uniforms and adopted a new flag. But more importantly they embraced a tactic of

concealing the identities of their members. Balaclava face masks and baseball caps became essential parts of their new identity.

But concealment was not only about hiding individuals. The organization decided to put forth a more presentable face overall, emphasizing patriotism and Americana. This was an effective approach that appealed to mainstream conservatism. Especially their new assertions that they weren't white supremacists at all – they were simply misunderstood patriots.

Here's Emily again.

Emily Gorcenski: But, at the end of the day, It's still largely the same people running it. And they still have the same blood on their hands.

And Patriot Front, through local coordinators, with direction from the group's leader, Rousseau, focused on community demonstrations of force, especially anti-abortion, anti-LGBTQ and anti-semitic activations.

Now what do abortion, queer people and Jews have in common for Patriot Front to make them a target? Well it's something called the Great Replacement Theory.

Great Replacement is the idea that America will eventually be a minority-white nation because not enough white Christians are having babies. This means that they would be gradually "replaced" by people of color, LGBTQ+ groups, and non-Christians.

In their worldview, white dominance can only be protected by ending bodily autonomy, enforcing the gender binary and centering heterosexuality and Christianity. To them, this is an existential threat to white people, and violence is an acceptable remedy.

Here's Rousseau, the group's leader, on a white supremacist podcast.

ARCHIVAL, Rousseau: *"The organization is consistently pro-life. Not just pro-life, but also pro-family, and pro-society that helps families. We believe that a rightful and virtuous state should protect the structure of the family".*

And this explains why Patriot Front showed up in Coeur d'Alene Idaho that day, and at a number of anti-LGBTQ events over the years.

Emily Gorcenski: *And so they've always had that sort of anti-transgender anti-LGBTQ mindset. The only question is whether it's the thing that they want to lead with.*

For them, gender identity tops their list of issues. And they are willing to do battle over it.

To be clear, Great Replacement Theory is right out of Nazi ideology. Substitute the word "Germany" for "America" and Great Replacement Theory is straight out of the mouth of Adolf

Hitler.

Patriot Front wants to be a household name. Being visible is part of their strategy.

It's why they are obsessed with optics and aesthetics.

Patriot Front tightly choreographs their marches and demonstrations for maximum public display.

And being seen is how they plan to recruit new members—especially online. Across social media, they want as many people as possible to see them projecting unity and force.

So despite its retro-fascist inspiration, this movement is all too modern.

And leaked recorded conversations of Patriot Front captured Rousseau talking about how the movement needs to revamp to realize their vision.

***ARCHIVAL interview:** "I am not interested in using certain, you know, phrases or messaging tactics that have been prevalent in organizations of the past, because we are describing them as organizations of the past, they are not with us anymore."*

According to the leaked chats, the group planned to create fake social media accounts to spread those videos of marches over as much of the internet as possible. These fake accounts would pretend to be regular people in order to drum up buzz and publicity.

But social media isn't only about marketing for them. It actually sustains and fuels the white supremacist movement, and helps it to pick its targets. This is essential to understanding how things came so close to going so badly in Coeur d'Alene.

Dave Reilly is an online alt right provocateur. He moved to North Idaho in the years following Unite the Right. In a photo from that infamous event, you can see him standing in front of a group of Vanguard America members.

Reilly has been linked to a hate blog called the Idaho Tribune, a website focused on Coeur d'Alene and North Idaho. In it, he constantly attacks LGBTQ+ people. And in early 2022, he began targeting the Coeur d'Alene Pride in the Park event.

Here's Christopher Mathias, a Huffington Post reporter who covered Idaho extremism.

Christopher Mathias: Dave Riley starts to churn out a bunch of propaganda about how this pride event in Coeur d'Alene is going to be a haven for groomers and pedophiles. He basically warns

the queer community in North Idaho that like, we're going to be there to confront you, right? And we'll be armed.

But Riley wanted to reach beyond the local audience for his blog. He wanted this event to be a national flashpoint for paramilitary hate groups like Patriot Front.

And he knew that the best way to accomplish this was by getting the attention of the social media account *Libs of Tik Tok*.

Ari Drennan is with Media Matters, a watchdog group. She's been tracking the impact of Libs of Tiktok, an account with more than 3 million followers founded by New York City realtor Chaya Raichik. Drennan says that it's hard to underestimate Raichik's ability to proliferate hate.

Ari Drennan: She seems to be the person whose posts about it make it jump from just being a Twitter thing to being something that's covered by Fox News, by Joe Rogan, and by the broader right wing media ecosystem.

And it has also become a platform that right-wing and paramilitary groups use to signal to each other about what they should be focused on.

Ari Drennan: They're watching her posts. They're looking at what she's posting and they're taking action based on that.

According to Media Matters, more than 20 bomb threats have been called on the events, groups and individuals that Libs of Tik Tok targets.

Knowing their power and influence, Riley flagged the Coeur d'Alene Pride event for Libs of Tik Tok on Twitter.

Not surprisingly, news about the Coeur d' Alene event spread like wildfire.

And thanks to Libs of TikTok's signaling, Coeur d'Alene's Pride in the Park became a place for extremists to make a show of force.

But it's not just national actors like Libs of Tik Tok or Patriot Front that help us understand what's happening in Idaho. There's actually a unique force in the state that's enabling all of this.

It's called the Idaho Freedom Foundation and it backs politicians, policies and laws which make the environment in the state conducive to extremism.

In my conversations about what happened in Coeur d'Alene, IFF kept coming up over and over. This indicated to me that there's more than meets the eye about the Idaho Freedom Foundation, despite their innocuous sounding name.

So I decided to call my friend Eric Ward, who I thought might be able to explain IFF.

Eric is executive vice president of the think-tank Race Forward and an expert on white nationalism, especially in the Pacific Northwest.

And he really illuminated for me the role that IFF plays within Idaho politics. According to Eric, the organization has created a civil war inside the state's Republican Party.

Eric Ward: *What it does is it sets the environment and the narrative— that is the power—So much so right, that even conservative Republicans, who disagree with the Idaho Freedom Foundation understand that they are at political risk if they seek to build coalition with their more moderate Republican kin.*

But we should be clear when it comes to influence in policy in Idaho, that comes from a far right perspective, there is none more influential than this organization.

Imara Jones: *It's interesting because what you're saying is that regardless of whether or not you're under the Capitol dome or you're in a paramilitary organization, with regards to the political agenda that people have in the state, that conversation, that tone, that background, that environment is very much set by this organization.*

Eric Ward: *That's right, by the Idaho Freedom Foundation.*

Now Idaho is a state which was already conservative, think of center-right politics with a libertarian streak. So for IFF to push its more ideologically extreme agenda, it has to overturn the established order.

Eric Ward: The Idaho Freedom Foundation has come into Idaho communities and ripped those communities apart. To be clear, these are primarily self-identified conservative communities that they are ripping apart.

IFF purposefully latches onto issues that are divisive, and that play on white people's fears.

Eric Ward: It is a group that has long attempted to manipulate state politics in Idaho, by othering the LGBT community, immigrants, anyone it can feed into the body politic as a potential other - something that needs to be eliminated or or controlled.

To establish itself as a far-right standard bearer in Idaho, IFF has built a wide-ranging infrastructure.

For communications, they hired Dave Reilly, the online provocateur who galvanized Libs of Tik Tok to call paramilitary groups to Coeur d'Alene.

IFF developed a system for rating legislative bills, signaling to politicians what they should get behind and what they should vote against.

And they created a Freedom Index Scorecard to reward legislators who toe their extremist line, and to punish those who do not; putting a target on their back.

Idaho State Representative Heather Scott was the only politician in the state to receive a perfect score from the organization in 2022.

And she's not afraid to throw her weight around for extremist causes. Here she is at a church convening one month before the Coeur d'Alene pride standoff.

ARCHIVAL, Heather Scott: *"I wanted to start with thinking back to 9/11 and when that tragedy struck people woke up our country everyone became a nationalist ... communities came together and the pews of our churches were full. That 9-11 attack was so easy to identify because it was so visual and it happened all at once and the people rallied. There's another tragedy that I want to talk about tonight and I think that it's maybe not been as obvious it's not been as sudden and it's a war of perversion against our children it's an orchestrated attack on their minds and their souls and because it didn't happen overnight or in one instance I think many people do not even realize it is happening*

Do we know when, do you remember when drag Queen hour even started? The one where drag queens were reading to the little children? When did that start? When did school counselors start to counsel children to change their sex and then hide it from the parents? And when did high school boys -I went to Taco Bell the other day, and the boy had the longest fingernails I'd ever seen. Painted lipstick. When did this happen?"

Yep you heard that right. Scott declared that the existence of trans people poses a national security threat to the United States. And declared that the country should unite to destroy the LGBTQ+ menace.

To be clear this just wasn't rhetoric. It was a call to arms for Coeur d'Alene. Because Scott invited two men to the stage after her talk. They were members of the Panhandle Patriots, a local armed motorcycle club.

ARCHIVAL: *"We are having an event the very same day that very same day we actually intend to go head to head with these people. A line must be drawn in the sand. Good people need to stand up. we say damn the repercussions. Stand up. Take it to the head. Go to the fight. We are fighting in multiple counties. We are asking for all of you to come stand with us. They are trying to take your children"*

One of IFF's leading politicians did nothing to discourage going "head to head with *these* people." In fact she was behind it 100%.

The coordination between Representative Scott and an armed right-wing group in targeting a Libs of Tik Tok flagged event, shows that there is an ecosystem of extremism in the state which connects them all. And that connective tissue is provided by IFF itself.

Given their impact. I decided to give IFF President, Ron Nate, a call.

Ron Nate: My response is actually no response. We have a policy of not responding to media requests. But thank you for your request.

Imara Jones: Okay. Is there a reason y'all don't talk to media? I'm just curious.

Ron Nate: Our policy is we don't respond to media requests n

But I kept calling. And eventually I reached their Vice President Alli Megal.

Although she spoke to us for an hour, at her request, we cannot use her voice for this podcast. Therefore we are using a voice actor to relay what she said, word for word. She emphasized that she was speaking for herself and not on behalf of IFF.

Imara Jones: Yes, hi. May I speak to Alli Megal, please?

Alli Megal: Who's calling?

Imara Jones: My name is Imara Jones, and, I'm calling from TransLash-

Alli Megal: Your name is what?

Imara Jones: Imara Jones. I'm.

Alli Megal: Hello?

Imara Jones: Can you hear me?

Alli Megal: Yes.

Alli tells me she's a mother of two, and a grandmother of three. And, according to the IFF website, enjoys cooking, drawing and kayaking, and she has a cute little dog that's a mix between a shih tzu and a yorkie named Max. Alli sounds like any kind-faced woman from Middle America that you could strike up a conversation with on a plane. Until she doesn't.

Alli Megal: My ten year old granddaughter, she watches YouTube. She watches Tik Tok. No matter how much we try to protect her, she sees what she sees. And she's very curious about it. And she's years beyond her age. She's like 15 going on 20 and she's ten. So her mom and I are always like, yeah, no you can't wear that out. Yeah, you look like a little stripper.

Now the Foundation that Alli works for portrays itself on the surface as a standard conservative think tank focused exclusively on conservative policies like efficient use of taxpayer dollars. And Alli pushes back hard against the notion that there may be something more nefarious going on

Alli Megal: We have been attacked by the media several times, and these people hate us.

Imara Jones: What do you mean by attacks?

Alli Megal: *We hate children and we hate education, and we hate -we hate everybody, apparently, the IFF, I'm speaking on behalf of the IFF - we hate everybody because we just call it like we see it. And we're racist and we're this and we're that. No we're not. We're regular human beings just like you.*

Because we are a policy think tank, we do a lot of research on government spending, and it's not the proper role of government to be paying for this kind of stuff. Right? It would be, it would be no more right for the government to pay for me to get cosmetic surgery. That's a personal thing. That's something that should come out of my pocket. Our community is very divided right now over this trans stuff, especially here in Idaho. So, and part of the reason I think the division exists is because some of these groups feel like it's okay for the government to fund, which means everybody funds it, like it's taxpayer money. So I work, I pay taxes, I don't get to decide

where my taxes go. But as a mother and as a grandmother, do I want it to go to indoctrinate my young grandson, to make him think that he wants to have a sex change by the time he's 7 or 8? I absolutely do not.

But even though she is talking tax and education policy, the issue of trans people is personal for Alli. It's very close to home.

Alli Megal: I have two nephews who are transitioning right now. Have been boys their whole life and have been all into boy stuff, and then they get into college or high school and all of a sudden they decide they want to change their sex. Where does that come from? Where do you think it came from, Imara. I don't know. You tell me, you're on that side of the fence. I don't, I don't know.

You said you have a lot of little ones in your life that you love and care about. They might really look up to you, right? And they might want to be like you. They might want to emulate your life and choose that path. I don't care if it's the drug community. I don't care what it is. I just think that kids are very vulnerable and they're very impressionable, and that they can get caught up in stuff that they're not going to be able to go back and change.

As Alli became more and more animated, I gained some insight into the depth of her feelings around this issue. You see, for so many it is not just political, it comes down to their fundamental identity. And their insistence that every sphere of public life reflects their personal values without challenge.

This reminds me that the path to authoritarianism is taken one individual choice at a time.

And it made me wonder: how far are Alli and others with her beliefs willing to go? Were there any guardrails for the families and kids of all backgrounds who had gathered at Coeur d'Alene Pride that June? I mean could we at least agree that guns and violence were out of bounds?

Alli Megal: There's an open carry law. [Imara Jones: Right]. You have your gun rights. Why can't you show up with a gun? Lots of people, I go to the grocery store and people have guns strapped to their hips or wherever they put them.

Imara Jones: You know, you're increasingly seeing, like armed people who are showing up in protesting pride marches and

they're saying that like, yeah, they're doing it to protect kids. And I'm wondering like, how do you feel about that?

Alli Megal: How do I feel about it?

Imara Jones: Yeah -

Alli Megal: I feel like I don't understand why any adult. Would want to harm a child.

But I think that there are a lot of folks in Idaho who are more right-leaning, who are very Christian-based, and they feel like if the sex, the sex exploitation is going to affect their children or their grandchildren, they're probably going to take that pretty seriously.

Imara Jones: Including showing up armed?

Alli Megal: Whatever makes - I can't speak for those folks. I don't know why they showed up. Maybe they don't understand. Maybe that's what it is. They don't understand why anybody would feel okay with exposing children to sex. Because to me, that spells pedophilia. And to me, that's absolutely wrong. I've said over and over again, if anybody ever touched my daughters, I probably would have killed them.

But I kept pressing because I couldn't believe my ears. In her mind the people with AR-15s are the ones protecting kids. For her, the people taking kids to a family-friendly event are the threat worthy of an armed response.

Imara Jones: Is there a difference in your mind between, like, individuals who show up versus like these armed groups of people, these like, you know, militia groups or whatever who show up armed for the same reason? Like, are they more dangerous, or do you think it's the same thing as, like individuals who show up armed?

Alli Megal: *Think it's dangerous to take adult activities and put them out on the street for family friendly places. Most of the pride stuff that I know is happening right here in the parks where you take your children, and do I think I'm going to take my kids to a shooting range? Probably not. But we live in kind of a weird world right now, don't we?*

I think that there's certain activities that adults, responsible adults can engage in, and there should be places

for those things. But when they're out for the whole general public, yeah, it does get a little scary for both sides. I don't go to the pride stuff because it's not my scene. Right? But if I show up there and there's little kids on the stage dancing half naked and in a very sexual way, I'm going to be pretty pissed because I'm going to be looking around at all the adults around me going, why is this okay? And why is everybody just going along with this? If it was a little kid on a stage wielding a gun, same thing. I'm going to be like, where are the goddamn adults in this room? And why isn't anybody standing up to say no to this craziness? This is madness.

Imara Jones: So you understand, it seems like. It seems like you understand why, a group of people would who- an organized group of people with guns would show up at a pride event because of their desire to protect children.

Alli Megal: Well, I mean, if there's children there, there shouldn't be. Wouldn't you agree?

Alli lives in an upside down world where queer kids don't even exist, aren't real. So the presence of children at a Pride event must mean, to her at least, that they are being harmed, that must be protected.

To her, Patriot Front, and their allies who were armed, are totally justified.

And that's why Alli doesn't disavow the militia activity in her state.

And this idea, that armed citizens have to take the law into their own hands to bring about the world that they want, is why the Idaho Freedom Foundation is working behind the scenes to make organized, armed intimidation a permanent fixture in their state.

Protecting kids just provides political cover.

In fact IFF is currently backing a bill that would allow paramilitary groups to have a free reign in the state. The chief sponsor of this bill is ranked by IFF as one of its top legislators. Although it has yet to pass, this bill has been introduced for three years in a row since 2022. And as we know from this series, the more right wing laws are introduced, the greater the likelihood they will eventually pass.

The bottom line is that if the Idaho Freedom Foundation gets their way, Patriot Front targeting celebrations like Pride would be legal.

So what actually happened to the Patriot Front members who were arrested in Coeur D'alene because of a random citizen tip off?

Of the 31 members brought into custody, only 5 were sentenced on the charge of conspiracy to riot. They received a few days in jail and were banned from Coeur d'Alene parks for a year. That ban has now expired.

And Patriot Front has not slowed down.

It has continued to march throughout cities across America, looking for places which have the right ingredients to garner support for its openly white supremacist vision.

Ingredients like: a critical mass of extremist politicians, support for white supremacist and Christian Nationalist policies, loose gun laws, tolerant law enforcement agencies, and think-tanks which signal what's important to all far-right actors.

These conditions exist in more states than should give any us comfort. And the conditions are spreading to states like Tennessee.

Tennessee has passed the most anti-trans bills of any state in the Union. Extreme politicians have a super majority in the state legislature and in 2023 expelled Democratic members who dared to defy Republican will on the floor. It is a permitless, open carry state. Libs of Tik Tok even helped close trans healthcare clinics with coordinated threats.

Not surprisingly, Patriot Front, and members of other neo-nazi groups, have made several demonstrations of force; marching through Tennessee's state capital waving Nazi flags.

What all of this signals is that the ingredients for paramilitary violence are far more pervasive than anyone wants to acknowledge. Stirred up by anti-trans agitation, it's planted itself in communities across the country in ways which underscore that this will be an enduring problem for years to come.

Coming up on the Anti-Trans Hate Machine, we'll show how there are bright possibilities for ending extremism in America. But halting the surge in paramilitary violence will require bold actions from the federal government, states, localities and individuals like you and me.

Pasha Ripley: *We just want to be that grown up that we don't just wish we'd had, but that we should have had when we were kids.*

Daryl Johnson: *Terrorism is about politics. It's about social issues. That's the whole point.*

Eric Ward: *The white nationalist movement is able to recruit them and take advantage of them and exploit their anxieties, exploit their fears.*

Cynthia: *It turns out that people don't like to find out they're being manipulated*