

OLIVIA MAILLET: Welcome back to Vox Voice. I'm your host Olivia Maillet, the multimedia editor at Vox Magazine, and in this episode Megan Casady, a documentary filmmaker, talks about her ongoing project Going Dark. Going Dark is about Missouri's ongoing history of the legislative battle over reproductive rights and Casady has been working on it since 2018. Casady's subjects that she interviews range from pro-life organizations that operate mobile ultrasounds and pregnancy tests to organizations that set up an abortion clinic right outside Missouri in Illinois when Missouri enacted its abortion ban in 2022. Speaking of Missouri's abortion ban, which happened four years after the filming began, Casady experienced many pivots in her quest to accurately portray Missouri's reproductive rights conflict including the pandemic and the right to Reproductive Freedom Initiative, Amendment 3, which passed in this year's election. Casady will elaborate in the episode, so let's dive in.

MEGAN CASADY: I don't know. It's a kind of a long story how I got into it, I guess. I started out in marketing after college and hated it. And I, along with a bunch of other folks in the industry, helped start Midwest, a music video festival.

We did it one year and we were like, that was amazing, but also maybe let's not ever do that again. It's too much work. But we turned that into a nonprofit. And some of those folks were filmmakers. And so I just kind of dialed into what they were doing.

And I did, like, wedding videography for a long time and photography and, somehow found myself in, more of a filmmaking position. So, yeah, that's super cool.

MAILLET: What makes a good documentarian?

CASADY: That's a good question. I don't know.

I think somebody who wants to be a documentarian just has to be eternally curious, constantly asking questions of themselves as much as they are others.

MAILLET: How does the medium of documentaries impact viewers versus, like, articles and photos?

CASADY: I mean, I think all of these forms are definitely valuable and necessary to have as forms of discourse. For me personally, I'm not a writer, and I just don't create, like express my creativity, in that medium. And I think a lot of people probably feel the same when it comes to reading versus watching.

And so it's just I think another way to, I don't know. I mean it also is such a visual thing and like human beings are such visual creatures and so there's something when documentaries can get in-depth and personal with other people, I don't know if there's something emotional about that that it invokes. Yeah.

MAILLET: For sure. I completely agree with that, especially because I feel like, you get more of an emotional impact, like, seeing that source, like, talking and, like, with their tone of voice. Like, you can really get that through documentaries, which I think is really interesting. So, Megan, you're currently working on a documentary project titled Going Dark. Could you tell me what it is about?

CASADY: It's, it's hard to explain really, but I think I've boiled it down to, the film is about abortion legislation in Missouri, but it focuses not just on the legislative sector. It's also about the people who are doing the work on the ground, the organizers and organizations that are ultimately impacting one way or another the direction of an individual bill or, really the movement itself.

And so I'm trying to focus on, both sides of the spectrum of abortion rights.

MAILLET: Okay. Interesting. So you're getting both sides. Could you tell me some of the names of the organizations that you're interviewing?

CASADY: Yeah. Sure. So on the pro-abortion side, those are a lot of this is in Saint Louis, at least what I've been covering. And so those are folks like abortion action Missouri, ACLU of Missouri, Planned Parenthood of course. And then on the other side of the spectrum, you know, you've got folks like Coalition Life, Missouri Right to Life.

There are also like other segments on on both sides, but particularly on the pro-life side, there are also like abortion abolitionists, which are their own subsect and kind of an interesting group. So, yeah. It's, I don't know. There's like so many directions that you could go with a story like this. And I'm I think I'm always like putting out feelers to see what feels right in terms of what to cover and what to include because it is so expansive.

But those are kind of the key focus, and, of course, legislators.

MAILLET: How do you choose these interview subjects from each of these organizations, and have you had, like, any trouble interviewing people?

CASADY: Yeah. Absolutely. I have.

I think it's such a complicated issue, and I think a lot of the people who are organizing on either side have run into, I don't know, I think a lot of people have been burned by media folks, you know, saying we want coverage. We want access to what you're doing so that we can share this. And then they give them that access and, that, you know, the people don't like the way that they're being covered or it gets flipped on them. And both sides have experienced this is what I understand.

And so there's definitely a reluctance, an understandable reluctance to wanting to let somebody into the more intimate parts of what's going on, but that's really where the story is. And so that's

kind of, I think, the most difficult part of what I'm doing. But, it's taken six years really to build those relationships and to meet people. And, you know, a lot of people in these situations are nonprofit organizations, and so people will, you know, work at a place for a long time, and it's exhausting work, and some people have, you know, left to move on to other places.

And so I've definitely had, some folks that I followed for a long time, and I thought like, oh, this is gonna be, you know, the main character or the main story. And then they're no longer a part of the industry. And so I, you know, I have to pivot and, maybe that's just a part of the film too is the how hard it is to constantly spend your life focused on this one issue because it really can consume a person.

MAILLET: In six years, like, gaining access, like, gaining the trust of, like, a source is commitment. Like that is crazy.

CASADY: Yeah.

MAILLET: That's wild. And then going along with how this documentary has been in progress since 2018. Correct?

CASADY: Mhmm.

MAILLET: What have been some roadblocks in editing and producing this? I know COVID has happened.

CASADY: Yeah.

MAILLET: The abortion ban and then getting reproductive rights back, like, must have been crazy.

CASADY: Yeah. Yeah. COVID was big.

I mean, so I've been working on this for six years, but, you know, I don't know, two and a half of those years, I really didn't film a whole lot because not that nothing was happening, but it was hard. Everything I've done has been, like, so instinctual because I didn't go to school for this, and it's just been, like, following my gut and thinking, like, oh, this might lead to something, and sometimes it does, and sometimes it doesn't. Other than COVID, it's just been, like, that access key.

And there were times when I got really discouraged and stopped working on the film for a while and worked on other things. And I don't know. There's just always been something that brings me back to it, whether it's, you know, seeing something in the news that's, like, personally distressing for me or, I started this film because I wanted a way to do something more other than just, like, showing up to protests, and using my voice and my skills in filmmaking to make a

difference. And so that through line has really always stuck around, and I think that's what keeps me coming back.

MAILLET: What do you look for — going back to interview subjects, what do you look for in a subject for this documentary?

CASADY: It's kind of ineffable. That person who, like, just has that thing, that "it" factor, I guess. It's really a feeling space thing. Like, do I feel drawn to this person? Do I want to listen to this person?

Even if I don't agree with them, like, are they interesting? And what makes them interesting, and how do I hone in on that? Do I feel, like, emotionally drawn to this person? Then that's the thing.

MAILLET: Did you foresee the abortion ban happening in Missouri in 2022? And then, how did this affect the documentary?

CASADY: Yeah. I think anybody who is, like, tied into the organization of, you know, the organizers around this issue, I think anybody would have told you it's coming. When, we didn't know exactly, but we all knew it was coming.

You know, and the leak happened, and that was kind of a shock, too, but then definitely it was like, oh, okay. Well, this is on, and there's, you know, everybody on the pro-abortion side had to start shifting more quickly.

MAILLET: Shifting in what way?

CASADY: Well, so there's a clinic, like, just over the Missouri-Illinois border that opened up. Basically, is a a measure to say, like, it's not in Missouri, but it's right there.

So it's really just as close as the Central Westin location for most folks. And there weren't any TRAP laws that created waiting periods so they could offer abortions more effectively and more efficiently. There were a lot of things like that. Just like, how do we make this accessible for people?

Like, the pro-life side started doing the truck, and they offer, like, ultrasounds and things. And there's debate, of course, whether those things are, legitimate or not, and I can't say one way or the other. But, yeah.

Both sides started figuring out, like, we have to think differently, and we have to start shifting from these old models of how we offered care one way or the other. And so, yeah, just a lot of, like, innovative thinking and changing the way that really, reproductive care has been offered in Missouri. That must have been so interesting to see, like, firsthand.

MAILLET: Yeah. Recently, this past November, Missouri reversed the abortion ban with the passing of Amendment 3. What does this mean for your documentary? I know there's been, like, a lot of legal limbo recently with Missouri lawmakers trying to put more restrictions on legal abortions, and abortion's not, like, technically offered yet in Missouri. So I was just wondering, like, how that has, like been going.

CASADY: So I find all this law so interesting.

So, yes, Amendment 3 passed. I think it was December 5th was the, like, official deadline of when, technically, we would be legally allowed to, offer abortions again in Missouri. However, there's this court hearing that's still we're still waiting to hear any decision about what might happen. And it's all so dependent on like what one judge says and then, you know, if it's not the desired outcome, we'll appeal it and we'll do another round of the same thing. But right now we're waiting to see whether or not certain TRAP laws are going to be removed, which ones might or might not be removed, and how that would impact being able to offer abortions in Missouri.

It's all up in the air at this point. But we'll see. I think a decision is supposed to be happening any day now. And of course, at this point, we are in, like, the pre-filing phase of legislative session for 2025. And the last time I looked there were 11 bills that had something to do with abortion legislation, and, I'm sure there'll be more by the time the session actually starts.

MAILLET: Oh, for sure. Definitely. When do you see this documentary being finished? Because I feel like the battle for reproductive freedom in Missouri is just such an ongoing issue, and it's still gonna be going on, like, years and years from now. When do you think that, like, final point for your documentary is gonna be, or is it gonna be an ongoing thing?

CASADY: Yeah. That's the question everybody asks. I don't have an answer at this point. I think, again, it's just gonna be one of those gut-feeling situations. It just kind of knowing when I know that it's over, but it's definitely nowhere close to being over at this point.

Amendment 3 is such a big deal, and seeing how that will impact the 2025 legislative session is gonna be really interesting. But I have no way of anticipating. And that's kind of the problem in trying to answer, like, when is this film gonna be done is, there's no way to anticipate anything that's gonna happen. So it's really just a matter of feeling it out, being in the right place at the right time, I guess. Yeah.

MAILLET: Definitely. And you said you had a trailer coming out, right, in the next few months?

CASADY: Hopefully, in the next few weeks. I mean, I don't know when the public release date will be exactly yet, but, soon for sure.

MAILLET: Awesome.

I'll be sure to look out for that and everyone else in Colombia should look out for it too. And thank you for being here today, that's all I have.

CASADY: Great. Thank you.

MAILLET: That was Megan Casady on this episode of Vox Voice. Going Dark will have a sizzle, documentary-speak for a short video summarizing the film's main point, coming out within the next few weeks. If you want to keep up to date on the ongoing battle for reproductive rights in Missouri, read and listen to as many credited platforms as you can to get the most objective information possible on the hearings. Also, be sure to keep tuning in to Vox Voice for more perspectives from your Columbia community.

I'm Olivia Maillet.