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# THE AXE FILES

## The Axe Files - Ep. 123: Corey Lewandowski

*Released February 20, 2017*

[00:00:05] DAVID AXELROD, "THE AXE FILES" HOST: Are you rolling? I'll do an introduction after, so we'll just roll right into it. Corey Lewandowski, good to see you again. Welcome. We spent a lot of time across desks together at CNN.

Obviously, there's a lot to talk about going on right now. But, before we do, I want to just get a sense of your own journey and how you -- you sure were shot through a rocket of -- by a rocket. Blah, what's that? You were sort of shot through a cannon in the last few years and more and particularly well known before that. Where this all start for you?

COREY LEWANDOWSKI, POLITICAL COMMENTATOR: You know I -- a lot of people don't know much about me. That's OK and I'm OK with that. You know, I have had a very remarkable life. Blue-collar guy, I grew up in a blue-collar town of Lowell, Massachusetts.

AXELROD: Lowell, Massachusetts, yeah.

LEWANDOWSKI: You know.

AXELROD: Shoes, is that -- what do they make there?

LEWANDOWSKI: Textile.

AXELROD: Textile, yeah

LEWANDOWSKI: Yeah.

AXELROD: Paul Tsongas, right? He was from Lowell, Massachusetts.

LEWANDOWSKI: Paul Tsongas, yeah. Very close, lived -- he live in the nice neighborhood. I live in the poor neighborhood, which was OK. And Marty Meehan and number of other -- Ed McMahon. Lowell is a pretty famous place for some place -- for some things and --

AXELROD: Ed McMahon from --

LEWANDOWSKI: Ed McMahon from "The Tonight Show."

AXELROD: "Tonight Show?"

LEWANDOWSKI: Yeah.

AXELROD: No kidding?

LEWANDOWSKI: From Lowell, Massachusetts.

AXELROD: I didn't know that.

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LEWANDOWSKI: And a group of the working-class environment. And my grandfather was a union printer for 40 years. And I --

AXELROD: When did your family pride came over from Europe at some point?

LEWANDOWSKI: From Canada, came down from Canada. So, I'm very fortunate about our six generation American from the Canadian side, French-Canadians and my mother still speaks French. And my grandparents all spoke French, of course, in the house.

AXELROD: Do you speak French?

LEWANDOWSKI: I don't. I took it for a long time in college and high school, but, you know, I didn't make it.

AXELROD: There are certain parts of your party where you could be expelled, you know, for speaking French. So, if you -- I'd keep on the down low if you do --

LEWANDOWSKI: I won't tell anybody.

AXELROD: OK.

LEWANDOWSKI: Since I arrived, no language skills, whatsoever. So, you know, then like many other people I was fortunate enough to go to undergraduate school and went to study politics, went to graduate school, studied the American government and long story short, worked on Capitol Hill.

AXELROD: Don't just back-up. What was Lowell like? What -- how did Lowell kind of imprint itself on you and shaped your sense of the world?

LEWANDOWSKI: Yeah. Lowell is a tough town, you know. It was a tough town. It was, you know, we went to public schools, like anybody else did. And there's a place where growing up I don't think people realized they weren't rich, right? But nobody was rich. It didn't matter.

It was a town. Still is a town where people value hard work. And, you know, my grandparents lived about 15 houses up the street from us. And so, every weekend all of us, my cousins, everybody would go to their house. And, you know, we never spent any money, because nobody had any money.

AXELROD: What you folks do?

LEWANDOWSKI: My mom, you know, a single mom. My dad left when I was a kid and died when I was in high school. And so, you know, everybody kind of --

AXELROD: How many brothers --

LEWANDOWSKI: I got a brother who's active duty Marine. So he's a colonel in the Marine Corps. And from six, seven years old, we're delivering newspapers everyday to make some money. And in the winters we'd shovel out cars and driveways, like everybody else did and it

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was -- it's just what everybody did and pitched in to help the neighbors.

And I had no money go to college. I was very fortunate to get a small scholarship to go to the University Massachusetts at Lowell. And made it through college after a tough first semester like so many others and maybe I --

AXELROD: And join the club brother.

LEWANDOWSKI: I didn't really study as much I should have. But, you know what happen after the first semester of college was, I went up and I worked on a dairy farm in Upstate New York, hard-working people. I mean --

AXELROD: How did you end up doing that?

LEWANDOWSKI: I was dating a girl whose family had a place up there and (inaudible) went out in college, I'm too good for this. And I walked away and I went up to this dairy farm in twice a day, every day, seven days a week you milked the cow and it was tough work. And these guys were workers. I mean, they -- it didn't matter it rain, sleet, snow, sick, healthy, Christmas and I did that for about two months. And I said, I better get back to college and learn something. And I did.

I went back and try to -- I had a really good professor who took some interest in me and get me back engage and I ended up graduating fairly well. And I went down with the graduate school down in D.C. and --

AXELROD: American?

LEWANDOWSKI: And I went to American University. I got a masters degree down there.

AXELROD: You did an internship, I read in the Massachusetts State House.

LEWANDOWSKI: Yeah.

AXELROD: Which is -- if you want to learn about politics that's an interesting place to go. And you -- you're -- the rep you intern for was a Democrat, right from your area?

LEWANDOWSKI: So he was a Democrat state rep from Lowell. There were no Republicans.

AXELROD: Right.

LEWANDOWSKI: There are no Republicans from Lowell.

AXELROD: Right, right.

LEWANDOWSKI: But, you know, the thing about him? He had this thing --

AXELROD: There are very few Democrats. There are very few Republicans in Massachusetts.

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LEWANDOWSKI: In Massachusetts. But -- his name was Steve Benjie Tachos (ph) and he went on to become --

AXELROD: I knew that -- I read his name, but I was hoping you would say it. So, thank you.

LEWANDOWSKI: Yeah. So, Steve, you know, he became a state senator and served as the chairman of the Ways and Means Committee. But, you know what, he believes in fiscal responsibility. And that's what, you know, that's what the Democratic Party was for a long time in Massachusetts, socially more liberal, but fiscally very responsible.

[00:05:06] And I interned for Steve and it was a great, great relationship I had. And he really gets me excited about being involved in politics. And when I out and campaigned for -- at the time there was a state rep by named of John Cox, a Democrat from Massachusetts who I went out and camping for. I was 7, 10, 12 years old campaigning with my friends going door-to-door and I was invigorated by it. And you know this.

So, when you find something you actually love doing, it's not really work. And so, I always say I have no tangible skills, so I got into politics. And I tried to do a whole bunch of other things and that's why came back and that's why I keep going back to.

AXELROD: So you went down to Washington. When did you sort of make the move to the Republican Party?

LEWANDOWSKI: You know, I went to -- I interned for what was the last Republican from Massachusetts. His name was Peter Torkildsen in Congress in 1996. And I interned for him. And Peter lost his reelection campaign in '96m by about 361 votes. And what I remember the most is the camp -- the congressional staff took a leave of absence starting on Halloween night before the election, about four or five days before the election.

We drove up to Massachusetts to help campaign. When we get up there and the campaign manager who I never meant said, "Look, race is over. We're going to win, feel free to go home. Go enjoy yourself. Go spend time with your family or friends. Go out with your buddies." I say, "What do I know, right? Sure, I'll go do that." And we probably hit the bars and do whatever we did and we woke up, four or five days later and we lost by 360 votes.

AXELROD: What happened to that guy?

AXELROD: Well, he disappeared basically. I mean, that's what happens, right? I mean, Peter Torkildsen lost his reelection campaign.

AXELROD: I'm talking about the campaign manager.

LEWANDOWSKI: Well, yeah. I mean, she was ultimately fired and probably had another job in politics again. But, it instilled in me something that good politicians always know. You run like your 10 points behind, no matter what. And you work right up until Election Day and all the way through Election Day.

AXELROD: And that remind me. But Torkildsen was not like kind of deep red conservative

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Republican. He is more of a moderate Republican.

LEWANDOWSKI: Very moderate. He took the seat from Nick Mavroules, who happen to get indicted going into that election the first time Peter won in '92.

AXELROD: Which is always helpful?

LEWANDOWSKI: It always helps when you and your opponent gets indicted. But, look, even Massachusetts Republicans, you go back and look at the days of Bill Weld, and Paul Cellucci and Jane Swift, the Republican governors at the time.

AXELROD: Well, and Mitt Romney.

LEWANDOWSKI: And Mitt. These aren't the ultraconservative right-wing of the party and that's where I grew up. I grew up with fiscal responsibility. And a lot of that was held at the State House by Democrats and Republicans. That's why I think for a period of time Bill Weld had a pretty good run as a governor of Massachusetts because he could work across party lines to agree on fiscal responsible things. And to me, that's the most important thing, you know. The other stuff is important, but not as important.

AXELROD: And so, you went down to D.C. You got a degree -- you got masters degree.

LEWANDOWSKI: I did.

AXELROD: And did you have to write a thesis and so on?

LEWANDOWSKI: I did. So, they have this thing at the end of, you know, when you're finishing your masters' degree they actually time you and you had to sit there and answer a series of questions. You had to memorize all these authors. And I was just lucky it was a disaster. Somehow they pass me. I think they just wanted me to get, get me out of school, the School of Public Affairs down Washington at American University. And, look, I'm so lucky. I was the first person in my entire extended family ever to go to graduate school.

And so, it was a big deal. It was really a big deal. But, you know, I passed, probably by the grace of God. And I worked on Capitol Hill for a little while and then decided to go out and really want to campaign.

AXELROD: You worked for Bob Ney from Ohio.

LEWANDOWSKI: Yeah. I went out to work on Congressman Ney's campaign in '98 and ran his reelection in '98 -- in 2000. Bob Ney from Ohio where I had a different look at politics there. Politics in Ohio are very different than there in Massachusetts. Bob won, and he went on to become the chairman -- the mayor -- they call him the mayor of Capitol Hill, the chairman of the House Administration Committee and I left. That wasn't for me.

AXELROD: He ran into some problems himself in the Abramoff scandal.

LEWANDOWSKI: Yeah. Bob end up going to jail. And, you know, I think --

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AXELROD: Were you surprised by that?

LEWANDOWSKI: You know, Bob is a very good man. He was very good to me and took very good care of me and I mean that in the best sense when I was a young guy moving to Ohio and didn't have a family out there. But what happened I think and this is not just on Bob as people come to Washington and they get stuffs, and they get cars, and they get offices. And everyone tells them how great they are. And they forget the rule sometimes.

And, you know, Bob grew up in a tough area of Ohio, Southeastern Ohio. It was a coal country and the steel industry that had been decimated. And I think sometimes people forget like, hey, you know what, people back home, when you make \$150,000 a year as a congressman and the guy back home was making \$30,000 year and you're taken the free meals and the free trips. You know, those are things that I think the member of Congress in trouble. And he's not the only one.

AXELROD: You got into a little bit of trouble then, too, when you see, I guess inadvertently walked into the Capitol with a gun in your laundry bag or whatever it was.

LEWANDOWSKI: I did, yeah.

AXELROD: What the hell was that?

[00:09:58] LEWANDOWSKI: So, you know what happened was, I had a license to carry concealed weapons on the state Ohio. And my -- I had it in a bag, a laundry bag that I would travel back and forth with. And the night before, usually what would happen was I would drive the member's car. You know, that member of Congress place, because I would drive him to and from Ohio every week. And I never really thought about it for whatever reason. I did really bring the car into the Capitol very often than, may be on the outside to pick him up very quickly.

And what happened that particular day was I had my bag at my home in Virginia and went into the Capitol the same way I would normally do, but I brought the bag with me. And I walked through the Longworth building and I put my bag in the magnetometer through the X-ray machine like everybody else and I walk through and the officer said to me, "Can you step through, sir? And I said, "Of course." And so I step through and he says, "Is this your bag?" "Of course it is. What's in it?"

And he was literally -- if you ever saw the pictures, it's just overloaded with dirty laundry I was going to bring back to Ohio. And he says, "I think you've got something in the bag by all means." I had no understanding intentional or whatever and it was a pretty humbling experience.

AXELROD: Awkward.

LEWANDOWSKI: Humbling. Humbling, because you go from freedom to not freedom in a matter of seconds.

AXELROD: So, you got locked up?

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LEWANDOWSKI: Oh, yeah, no right there. They said, you know, they said, "Look, you know, we've got to process you." And I that's what they do. That's what the Capitol there to do.

AXELROD: So the obvious question is, why did you have a gun? Was this an accouterment of campaigning in Ohio, or --

LEWANDOWSKI: No, it wasn't that. It was, you know, I'm a big supporter of the Second Amendment and when I was in Ohio, you know, something that we go and shoot a lot. And this wasn't anything more than that. It wasn't nefarious in any way. But I tell you, it's very humbling when you go from --

AXELROD: Yeah.

LEWANDOWSKI: -- having freedom to not having freedom in a matter of seconds. And I went down and I was process in the D.C. facility. And, look, I'm -- as much I grow up in a tough town, it's a whole different ball game when you walk in to a situation like that. And you really have no freedom. And I, you know, waited hours to have the judge call me and then release me on my own recognizance. And then I, you know, had to hire an attorney and do all the things that people do.

And ultimately, I was found that there was no intent, obviously. And even the police officers because they are professional said look, clearly, I did not know what was in the bag by my expression, by my demeanor and they came and testified to that. And the congressman said, "Look, obviously there was no intention here of any harm," which of course there wasn't. But it was --

AXELROD: If you were like me, your laundry itself could have been designated a deadly weapon.

LEWANDOWSKI: Well, believe me if -- the number of days I had in that bag it might have been.

AXELROD: But, do what -- did that change you in any way that experienced?

LEWANDOWSKI: Oh, sure. Look, you know, you get into a situation like that. It reminds you just how important freedom is, right? How you go from doing what you think you can do from one day to the next and all of a sudden your life is not your own.

AXELROD: How about what you do with your weapons? You're not packing now --

(CROSSTALK)

LEWANDOWSKI: No. It's tough in Chicago.

AXELROD: I want to calibrate that before I ask you any further question.

LEWANDOWSKI: But -- no, no, you're fine. But, you know what is, is sure, you have to be cognizant all the time. But more importantly, I think the real issue is in an instance someone's



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life can change and sometimes you don't plan on it. And that was a big change for me going and having to go through that.

And, look, I was very fortunate I had a boss that understood that it was clearly mistake and he didn't fire me, which I thought was very kind of him. I offered to resign, of course, but he said, "No, I'm going to stand by you."

AXELROD: And resources to get representation, my guess as you -- there were people in that D.C. locked up who didn't have that. And, I mean, this issue of the criminal justice system is one that is a hotly debated now because you got a lot people sitting there who don't have the resources to defend themselves. Some of them --

LEWANDOWSKI: For crimes that honestly, you know, I understand. Look, a crime is a crime, but there are different levels. You know, committing a felony is very different than --

(CROSSTALK)

AXELROD: First things in that -- than that in any way to be provocative, but probably things less meaningful than walking into the U.S. Capitol with a gun.

LEWANDOWSKI: You know that's exactly right. And, you know, what I didn't know at the time, but I've learned since this, a number people do this on a fairly regular basis. This is something because they come from other areas they think that they need a weapon in D.C. for whatever reason. And, you know, it's a fairly common occurrence that people walk into the Capitol --

AXELROD: It's a scary thing, though. You know, I -- given the times in which we live, you know, I honor those guys who have to scream. Every body walks in there because, you know, there's a potential for some really horrible things to happen. So then you left Washington and you became an organizer.

LEWANDOWSKI: Yeah. I went up and, first, I do the job with the Republican National Committee to be the Northeast, you know, Legislative Political Director and help some races there. Work in the New Jersey governor's race, which is an off year election up there way back a million years ago with Jim McGreevey and those guys. Those are the races we are doing at the time.

[00:15:04] But then I went to a 501(c) (4) --

AXELROD: Against McGreevey.

LEWANDOWSKI: Against McGreevey, yeah, yeah. Schundler, Bret Schundler was a candidate in the Republican side.

AXLEROD: The mayor of Jersey City, right?

LEWANDOWSKI: That's right, yup. So I spent a number of months working in Trenton, which is very, very exciting spending time in Trenton.



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AXELROD: Yeah.

LEWANDOWSKI: At that the time, there were no hotels in Trenton so I get to drive back and forth to Princeton, which is fine. But then I left there and joined an organization called Americans for Prosperity, Americans for Prosperity Foundation.

AXELROD: Which is the Koch brothers --

LEWANDOWSKI: That's right.

AXELROD: -- sponsored group, probably in -- pretty much in its early years then.

LEWANDOWSKI: It was amazing. You know, I had the privilege of taking my wife and I think maybe my daughter at the time on -- one of our vacation. And we were down in Aruba and I had this phone call from this person I never heard of. He says "Hey, this is Tim Phillips, you know, with Americans for Prosperity and we like to hire you to run New Hampshire."

I said, "I have no idea who you are, or what the organization is, but I'm on vacation with my family and if you want to talk to me, I'll be back in two weeks." And lone behold, he actually called. And, you know, I kind of came on board to give some advice and counsel because I had done a U.S. Senate race in New Hampshire and they said, "Look, you know, New Hampshire seems to be the type of place where smaller government in general would be a good message there."

And so, I spends time building new chapter, launching new chapter, building it, trying to pass the bills at the state legislative level that would reduce the burden of taxes on people, give people more economic freedom. And I built that to some level of success. I'm not sure how much, but then after three or four years of doing that, they promoted me and I oversaw a fairly large region of the country in their behalf.

And then, ultimately, I went on to run their voter registration and then get out the vote activities on a nationwide basis. And it was based on the book, "The Victory Lab," Sasha Issenberg's book.

AXELROD: Tim Phillips, he's been a guest here at the IOP on this show and whether you -- whatever, you know, I have this kind of different orientation on a lot of issues. But, their model is a pretty impressive model and they started off not doing races so much as doing issues. I don't think that's well understood. I mean, they built a foundation based on a list that they accumulated, a people who are motivated not by candidates but by issue.

LEWANDOWSKI: The model was very different. And I can tell you, when I launch the chapter on the State House steps in Concord, New Hampshire, literally, seven people showed up. My wife was one of them. Our infant daughter was the other and then five friends, and that's all it was.

And so the fanfare of exactly nobody, nobody cared, nobody wanted it. It was just going to be another group they thought. The difference with the model is if you don't raise money from within your state and you can't get buy-in from the people who are actually impacted by the

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legislation that you're trying to change, the model fails, and that's a good thing.

So, it was important to get the people from the state of New Hampshire to say, "Look, this is something we want and you're creating value." So, we didn't engage in races. We didn't engage with candidates who already -- they're running for U.S. Senate or congressional or down ballot races. We didn't do any of that. We just focus on State House Legislative activities. We looked at issues like right to work. Can New Hampshire become at right to work? So it's still a fight that's going on to this day. We looked at a number of these things

So, for us, it was something where we saw some early success, but didn't get a lot of buying (ph). And then when we start to really grow was when the Republicans took over the State House and we knew that we could help move an agenda, which was going to be pro-economic freedom and that's where AFP really grew --

AXELROD: John Lynch was a Democratic governor.

LEWANDOWSKI: John Lynch was a Democratic governor.

AXELROD: You famously debated a cardboard cutout of him on the state --

LEWANDOWSKI: I did.

AXELROD: -- State House.

LEWANDOWSKI: At Tea Party day, yeah, yeah.

AXELROD: I would be remiss if I didn't ask you at this moment because you are an expert on New Hampshire politics. Do you think your old colleague Steve Miller was on T.V. suggesting that there was a cavalcade of buses coming across the border from Massachusetts to New Hampshire with voters who -- from Massachusetts who are voting illegally New Hampshire? You're an expert on New Hampshire politics. Almost every Republican in New Hampshire said that's -- that didn't happen.

LEWANDOWSKI: Look, that's not what happens. But the law in New Hampshire is very unique and needs to be changed, because the law stipulates in the state of New Hampshire, if it is your frame of mind on Election Day that you are a Hampshire resident then you're entitled to vote there. That needs you to be there for one day, one week, one month, one year.

And I think the problem with that, the way that the Attorney General of the state of New Hampshire has read this law is that it's so broad that it has the potential for voter fraud, because people could come in that day if they so chose, and say, "Hey look, you know what, I've got business here." Or, "I feel like I'm a New Hampshire resident, because I've always been here, guess what, I'm going to vote in the elections."

AXELROD: Well, I'm not asking about what the potentials.

LEWANDOWSKI: No, no.

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AXELROD: I understand the point you're making. But, the notion that there's --

LEWANDOWSKI: The law has to be change, but --

[00:19:59] AXELROD: But do you think that the election turned to New Hampshire on people coming across the border and posing as New Hampshire residence?

LEWANDOWSKI: I live on the border. I didn't see buses coming across the line to say that, "Hey, we've moved up from Massachusetts and candidly, most of the people actually moving from Massachusetts moving to the southern tier of the state of New Hampshire and that happens to be the most conservative area of the state in the Rockingham and Hillsborough County are right along that border."

So, I don't think you have that. But what I do think you have is you have the potential in the future for voter fraud. And the important part here, David, is you have to remember, with 400 state representatives in the state of New Hampshire, literally, one or two vote in these districts where they only represent 3,300 people --

AXELROD: Yeah.

LEWANDOWSKI: -- could make a difference. So, I think the state needs to address that they've tried to do some of that with voter I.D. in saying, "Look, if you want to cast the provisional ballot if you don't live in the state and don't have a recognized driver's license from the state, you can cast a provisional ballot. But we're going to go back and verify by mailing you a piece of mail at that address before we count your vote." I think it's a fair thing for the state to do.

AXELROD: We're going to take a short break and we'll be right back with Corey Lewandowski.

(COMMERCIAL BREAK)

AXELROD: So tell me how you came to know Donald Trump. I mean, you must have -- you obviously knew Donald Trump like everybody else.

LEWANDOWSKI: Yes.

AXELROD: You probably saw him on T.V. You knew him as a personality. When did you actually meet him?

LEWANDOWSKI: I was still working for Americans for Prosperity and it was April of 2014. And what happened was, Dave Bossie, who was the president of Citizens United and I decided that we were going to jointly have an event and invite potential presidential candidates up to New Hampshire.

AXELROD: Between the two organizations.

LEWANDOWSKI: The two organizations. Citizens United and Americans for Prosperity want to jointly host an event and invite as many potential presidential candidates as to New Hampshire

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to address the crowd, right? Good earned media opportunity for anybody.

And Marco Rubio came, Ted Cruz came, Mike Lee came, Kelly Ayotte was there and number of -- Mike Huckabee, Rand Paul. And Dave said to me, "Let's invite Donald Trump." And I said, "Dave, he's not going to run, like, I don't want, you know, just -- let's not do this." He said, "No, let's invite him, it's OK. So Mr. Trump flew up on his helicopter from New York.

AXELROD: Because you guys knew that if he came --

LEWANDOWSKI: It's a draw.

AXELROD: -- there will be a show.

LEWANDOWSKI: And -- but, you know, look, when you've got eight or nine potential presidential candidates in the room, you're going to have a drawer anyway. C-SPAN is going to cover it live. It's a first to the nation where spoiled in New Hampshire, so were used to this.

AXELROD: Yeah.

LEWANDOWSKI: And we had the biggest room we could get. And, look, I run a very tight ship. We knew of us are exactly on time and end on time. It's going to start at 8:00 a.m. It's going to end 4:00 p.m. It was going longer and had it mapped out minute by minute. And I think each candidate was given like nine minutes to speak with a big clock.

And Mr. Trump came up and we had a number of people, Marsha Blackburn and bunch of others. And we were going to have at lunch break schedule, so people get up and walk around. And we scheduled him, right, before the lunch break and he supposed have nine minutes. Well, he spoke through the entire lunch period for 45 minutes for the, you know, the flashing stop talking sign. And he just, you know, just went on. He gave a speech and which ever is my first interaction with him now.

And the thing that was most striking to me was I had my young daughter with me whose -- she's 10 now, so she's about seven at the time. And she's in the back room in the green room and --

AXELROD: You got four kids, right?

LEWANDOWSKI: I do. And she was the oldest, which want to come. And she said, "Hey, daddy." I said, "Yeah." She said, "The man over there offered me a ride in his helicopter. What you think?" And I said, "What do you want to do?" And she just shook her head and she said, "No". And I said, "You know, that's OK. You don't have to go." But I thought it was so kind to go out with this kid. He didn't have to do that.

AXELROD: But, you -- none of the other candidates offered.

LEWANDOWSKI: Nobody else offer a ride in the helicopter, nobody. I mean, Rubio, to Cruz, nobody. I mean -- and so I just saw he was very kind of him. And following that interaction with him, I send him a thank you note, of course, as -- just a matter of courtesy.

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And then I fast forward to November of 2014 after the elections. Dave Bossie called me up again. And Dave and I have a good relationship, strong relationship. And he said, "Hey, I've got to go to New York in January to go see Mr. Trump, would you come with me?" "Sure. What do you want to -- what are we going, because I got to go see him. Come with me. We'll meet in New York." I said, "Of course, who wouldn't want to go see Donald Trump in New York."

And I ended up the day before I supposed to go to New York, Dave called me and say, "Hey, Corey, something came up, I can't be there tomorrow, but can you go any ways?" I said, "Sure." I'm going because I just go see Mr. Trump, that will be fine. So I drove to New York and waited, long story short, I ended up in his office. And he stood up. He shook my hand. We started talking. He started telling me about, you know, his air force, meaning his helicopters and airplanes and all the things that he had. And then he told his --

AXELROD: And you intern (ph) it the same.

LEWANDOWSKI: I said, "You know, I borrowed -- I rented a car to get here, which is pretty nice one." Zipcar, I think it's called. It was 1999 of days so, you know, it was fine. And we start talking way about 30 minutes of the conversation. He said to me, "Do you want run my campaign for president?" And he said, "What do you think the odds (ph) of me running and winning are? And I said, "You know, sir, with all due respect, 5 percent." And he said, "I think there are 10 percent." And I said, "Well, let's compromise, 7.5." And he said, "Done."

[00:25:01] And with that --

AXELROD: See, that's why he's such a good negotiator.

LEWANDOWSKI: He started high, right? And, look, I walked away and think I had, you know, the benefit. And he walked away thinking he had the benefit. And he shook my hand and he said, "OK, you're hired."

AXELROD: Did you go into that meeting with any expectation that he was going to --

LEWANDOWSKI: No.

AXELROD: -- tell you that he was going to run for president?

LEWANDOWSKI: No.

AXELROD: And this was November of 2014.

LEWANDOWSKI: It is January 15.

AXELROD: January 15. So he didn't announce until June.

LEWANDOWSKI: We start --we announced it June. So he hired me on the spot. I stood up. I remember very clearly, walked out of his office. I called my wife and I said, "I think I just took a new job." And she said, "Doing what?" I said, "I'm not sure." And I drove back to New Hampshire.

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(CROSSTALK)

LEWANDOWSKI: Yeah, exactly. And, you know, look, I have been working for --

AXELROD: She's use to this.

LEWANDOWSKI: -- the coax. And then I run out of money anytime soon. OK, they were doing just fine and Americans for Prosperity was doing well. And he's doing well. And I said, "You know what, let's try something different, just take a chance." And, look, it became a bone of contention later after I was, you know, actually the campaign, but I sign the contract. And so, "Look, if I'm going to work for you, I want to have a contract because if you fire me tomorrow --

AXELROD: Became a bone of contention because it had a nondisclosure clause in it.

LEWANDOWSKI: Because it said that if you want to terminate my relationship, you have to pay me for the length of my contract, right, which is how normal people do business.

AXELROD: But did have a nondisclosure.

LEWANDOWSKI: It did. It did. And so, you know, I signed up and he's, "OK, you start with me tomorrow." And that's when I've got a job and ended up -- the first met we do was in South Carolina and I wasn't sure if people were coming out to see him, because he was a celebrity or because we're going to run for president. And we methodically over the next four or five months built what we thought were the bones of a presidential campaign.

AXELROD: No one really believed that he was going run.

LEWANDOWSKI: Nobody.

AXELROD: I mean, it was kind of --

LEWANDOWSKI: Very small group.

AXELROD: When he came down that escalator in June of 2015, everybody -- there was a lot of shock and surprise and a little bit of mocking, I think on the part of the -- I think I may have been involved in some of the mocking. When -- did you know what he was going to say when it came down that escalator?

LEWANDOWSKI: So on -- we originally want to announce on June 14th, which happen to be Flag Day. It's also obviously the president's birthday, but it fell on a Sunday. And I knew I didn't want to do in Sunday. I knew I want to do it on Tuesday or Wednesday or Thursday. And so we spent about six weeks planning this announcement meticulously, you know, from the color of the credentials that we would issue to each person to the media.

AXELROD: And was he involve in that in determining --

LEWANDOWSKI: Not so much that part. I mean, look, I was involved in that. But myself and

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Georgia G. Kohns who is the director of the (inaudible) for the White House, we huddle ourselves in the Sheraton in Midtown New York and I wrote what was supposed to be his announcement speech, like any good staffer would. And I went through, you know, like dozen iterations of it and had every word down.

And I said, "You know, Mr. Trump this is going to be about seven minutes and 45 seconds. It's about how long, you know, this is supposed to go for." And we deliver it to Mr. Trump on that Sunday. He read it and I said, "Do you have any questions?" "No, all set, great." So, Tuesday I had that -- look, I had a very high privilege of -- just before he announced he was going to run for president of the United States everybody was gathered downstairs. And as a campaign manager, I went up to his office --

AXELROD: In the lobby at Trump Tower.

LEWANDOWSKI: In the lobby. And I had the privilege of going up to the 26th floor of Trump Tower, in his office. And everybody else was already downstairs, his entire family. And it was just me, him and his wife, Melania Trump, there. And he said, "Are you ready for this?" And I said, "Yes, sir, I am." And he just took his deep breath and exhaled and said, "Let's go." And that was it. And we --

AXELROD: But your seven minute and 45 seconds --

LEWANDOWSKI: Through right up the window.

AXELROD: -- speech was just something that he could turn over and chat some notes on.

LEWANDOWSKI: Well, we, you know, we distributed to the media like most good campaigns would and say hear their prepared remarks and one outlet ran it, of course, before they did any due diligence. But -- and then he threw out the window and he went off on his own.

AXELROD: That -- so that was your introduction, the life with Trump as a candidate.

LEWANDOWSKI: That's right.

AXELROD: Obviously, what he said that day was provocative and offensive to some people, exhilarating, I'm sure to others as we sit here. We're at the University of Chicago. You're appearing at the Institute of Politics that created some (inaudible). And part of it is still goes back to the words that he spoke that day. When you heard him deliver those famous lines about rapists and -- I forget the other, you remember the phrase in characterizing immigrants from Mexico, what did you think?

LEWANDOWSKI: Here's the unique thing about that particular day. There were probably 300 potential media there that day in the lobby listening to it. Not one media outlet following that speech was up in arms. And what we did immediately following that speech is we go in the airplane, we flew to Iowa where Donald Trump gave almost the exact same speech that night at Hoyt Sherman in Des Moines.

[00:29:56] And then the next day, we went up to New Hampshire, give the almost exact same



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speech. So that would have been Tuesday night and Wednesday, no media uproar at all. What happened, unfortunately, then there was a terrible tragedy in South Carolina. A crazy person walked into an African American church --

AXELROD: Yes.

LEWANDOWSKI: -- and killed a bunch of people.

AXELROD: Of course.

LEWANDOWSKI: And we were supposed to be in South Carolina on that Thursday, because we were going to go Iowa, New Hampshire, South Carolina in order of the primary process and we had to cancel. We had to cancel that out of respect. And what I remember then was at Thursday after that was Hillary Clinton went on television and said it was the type of language that Donald Trump was using that cause this type of incident to happen. She didn't blame him indirectly, but use that.

And then the media went back and look at what Donald Trump said in that announcement speech. And then on that Friday is when the uproar happened. So, he announced on Tuesday, made the same remarks basically in New York, in Iowa, in New Hampshire. But it was until that terrible tragedy in South Carolina where this became more into focus.

AXELROD: You know, your recollection, my recollection are slightly different, partly because I was on T.V. the day of his announcement and there was a lot of focus on that particular line and just the sort of the very edgy and, you know, kind of divisive nature of that line.

What do you say to people who were really offended by that, because as you know, I mean, you appreciate the hard work. There are millions and millions and millions of immigrants in this country, some undocumented who are among the hardest workers in this country and came here because they wanted to be part of this country and support their families who are guilty of nothing, but wanting to do that and felt like they were being caricatured in that speech.

LEWANDOWSKI: I think what Donald Trump tried to relay in that speech was that we need to do a better job with our borders. And people come to this country because they want what's best for their family, because we are an amazing place in the land of opportunity and a nation of immigrants that all of us came here at some way and work hard. And if you remember, look, when my family came and others, there were areas of the city that were designated for those particular types of a background, so little Canada, we used to call it. I don't think you said it anymore. You know, the Polish area, which, you know, people would go and have their communities. They would learn English and they would work hard and --

AXELROD: Well, this city is an example of city with a lot of ethnic enclaves.

LEWANDOWSKI: Chicago, right. Polish, my family is from Poland. And so, it used to have a lot of that. And I think what Donald Trump talked about was, look, if we can't control our borders, what we can't have is people coming over and doing things to Americans.

And what happened following that speech was Kate Steinle was killed in California on the peer

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by a person who'd been deported five or six or seven times, locked up and deported. And, he heard stories about this many, many times. And what I think he tried to say and what he tried to impress upon people was, we're going to put Americans first. And that -- I know it sounds like isolationism. I know it sounds like --

AXELROD: Well, yeah.

LEWANDOWSKI: It sounds like we're going to close the borders. If we have a system where our people can't work, they can't get good jobs. This is not derogatory towards illegal immigrants. We have to take care the U.S. citizens first. I know it sounds terrible, but I'm an American first. And I think you have to make sure that those people in our country who are Americans that are here legally who want to work have that opportunity to do so. And the best way to potentially do that is to control the borders.

AXELROD: The -- but his presentation was a little bit -- was a little less reason than what you just gave. But when you say -- so, they are rapists, they are murderers and I assume some are good people. The implication is that a large number of these people are not good people and are rapists and are murderers that probably -- there was probably a constituency out there for that. Is that -- I mean, would you say that that's true that there are people who responded to that, that it was a provocative thing that helped him politically with some voters?

LEWANDOWSKI: Sure. There's no question that there is a portion of the electorate that wants to hear that. There's no question about it. There's a portion of the electorate who believes that we should close our borders indefinitely to everybody. There's no question.

Look, there are some elected officials who talked about this, both Republican and Democrats, on both sides of the House that we need to close the borders and get a better handle. But, there's no question.

[00:34:59] There is -- particularly in the Republican primary space. There are people who look at that and say, "OK, I understand this." And know what, maybe he's right.

AXELROD: There -- so it may have been good politics, but was -- do you think it was a fair characterization?

LEWANDOWSKI: I don't think that's for me to judge. I think, you know, the president is the one who wants to lay out. You know, candidate Trump and now President Trump is the one who's going to lay out his agenda and he'll be judged based on the merits of that agenda and the success or failure of that agenda, so it's not for me to say. I think for each individual --

AXELROD: How do you think he'll be judge? You're very close to his constituency. He once famously said, "I could go out and kill someone on Fifth Avenue and they'd stick with me." But -- and hopefully we don't test that proposition. But --

LEWANDOWSKI: (Inaudible) won't allow that.

AXELROD: But the -- but there must be some things that he has to accomplish in order to keep those base voters with him. What are those things?

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LEWANDOWSKI: OK. I think some of the things that he has to accomplish is, yes, put people back to work. His plan and he's talked about this publicly, he's to put 25 million people back to work in four years. Very, very, very difficult to accomplish. I mean, that would be doubled.

AXELROD: I think Bill Clinton had the best record probably in the modern era and that was 22 million over eight years.

LEWANDOWSKI: That right. It would be double what any president ever done in four years. So that's part of what he has said he will accomplish. Part of what he said he's going to accomplish, if you look in the upper Midwest states, if you look in the Indians, the Michigan, the city Wisconsin's of the world, right? Bringing jobs back there. And part of the jobs that have been lost their have gone through modernization. So, not just because a bad trade deals, but basically looking at a robot now to do something that --

AXELROD: And that's a question I wanted to ask you, because the trade issue I think was at least as powerful for him with the voters who ultimately elected him than the immigration issue was. In fact, in the exit polls there was less support for his immigration position than for his trade position. But, the reality of the economy today and you come from a manufacturing community is that the biggest threat it seems to middle-class jobs is less China and Mexico and more robots and computers.

LEWANDOWSKI: It is. But, you know, the difference is you know what you need to do now, the people who used to be building the cars with their hands that we now need them to be coding the cars. I was told that the average car, the average General Motors car has 100,000 lines of code written into it. That's more code in it than the F-35 fighter jet.

And the reason is, because people now use their cars as their offices as, you know, everything they want to have, you know, they want to be able to see where they're going if they get the map inside. They've got hands-free. They can voice command, all those things. It needs to retool the system for the people who used to be building the cars with the hands, they will be writing code for those cars. And there's a huge opportunity to grow in that particular field as oppose to just a car building field.

I think what you have is you have people in the upper Midwest who've look at the bad trade deals that Donald Trump has talked about for a long time. And if you go back and look in 1989 the president sat down with Oprah Winfrey, at that time, candidate Trump and now Mr. Trump and now the president sat down with Oprah Winfrey and said, "Look, our country is getting killed in his bad trade deals. China is killing us. Vietnam is killing us. We need to do something to be more competitive."

You know what we found in the campaign? It is so difficult to use American-made products here that are truly made in America. The baseball caps are a great example. You know, what you could buy in China is at \$0.02 or \$0.03 or \$0.10, cost here \$0.25 or \$0.30.

AXELROD: Well, he learned that because his ties and his apparel that he --

LEWANDOWSKI: Should (ph) certainly easier to do it at overseas. That's exactly right. But

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even -- look, the make America great again hats, which we sold tens of thousands or maybe hundreds of thousands of, you know, we used a firm in a California to do it. We did a nationwide search. It was about to companies in the U.S. that can actually make these hats in Maine U.S. And our cost point was significantly higher, I think.

AXELROD: But maybe those aren't the jobs of the future. Maybe, as you said, the jobs of the future are coding these computers. It's interesting you pick the car example, because we're going to be in a situation by the end of this decade where there are driverless cars on the market. And you're a highfalutin public affairs not lobbyist, but public affairs consultant.

LEWANDOWSKI: Strategist.

AXELROD: I don't know if any of the auto manufacturers are among your clients. But, there are millions and millions of people in this country who make a living driving. And where are they going in the time? It seems like these are weightier issues in certain ways.

There is no doubt that in the '80s and '90s that some of his labor agreements disadvantaged some communities and advantaged the other communities in the upper Midwest where we're sitting today. A lot of manufacturing towns were adversely affected. But it seems like almost yesterday's battle now and the battle of the future is what we do with all these folks who are being idled by computers and robots?

[00:40:01] LEWANDOWSKI: You have to remember, we don't even know what's coming. Nobody heard the word Uber 10 years ago, right? Uber has fundamentally transformed the way that people travel in this country now. If I were to said to you 10 years ago, "David, I'm going to put an app on your phone and every time you press it, the cars is going to show up. It's going to take you where you want to go." Yeah, I have this, called the taxi, right? No, no, we're going to fundamental transformed the way we do this.

And people now use Uber or Lyft or -- and, look, I don't work for any of these guys so it doesn't matter. But, they fundamentally change the way it's going and if, you know, innovation is what's going to bring our country forward. That's what -- it has always been. And so where are going tomorrow and the next -- in the next day? It has to be a place where the government is giving you incentives. And I don't mean financial incentives, but they can't be regulatory burdens on companies from growing.

And what we've heard time and time and time again on the campaign trail is if you talk to people who've been very successful over the period of three or four or five decades, they would tell you if they had to go start and that company today, they couldn't because of the regulatory burden that the government has placed on them. You have to lift those burdens. And what the president has done, he signed an executive order that says for every new regulation, we're going to remove two regulations. That's good smart business sense. Let's see what --

AXELROD: That depends on the regulation.

LEWANDOWSKI: Well, no, let see what it is. But, what we know, every time there's more regulation, more regulation. You have to make sure that it's a true story. I tried to start a small business, right, my Avenue --

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AXELROD: Will you let me know when your stories aren't true?

LEWANDOWSKI: Yes, I will.

AXELROD: OK, all right.

LEWANDOWSKI: This is true. So I tried to start a small business called Avenue Strategies. And in order for me to take a check from a client, I have to open up a bank account. In order to get a bank account, you have to get something called an Employer Identification Number, EIN number issued by the government. Between December 23rd and January 3rd, the federal government was closed for issuing EIN numbers.

First, it was a maintenance system on there so you can do it electronically. Then I called all the way to 47 minutes. I talk to an operator and she said -- I think it was Mrs. Robinson (ph), she said, "Did you fill out the form?" And I said, "No, I like to do it over the phone so get this number." She said, "No, no, you need to fax it to me." I said, "Fax it? What year are you? And I don't have a fax machine." I can go to Kinkos maybe and fax this. I can e-mail it to you. She said, "No, we don't have e-mail."

I said, "Once I fax it, how long until I get my number?" She said, "Seven to 10 business days." I said, "Excuse me?" So, yeah, seven to 10 business days, which means between December 23rd and January 3rd, not one new business was started in this country.

AXELROD: But this doesn't sound -- we got to take a break here. But, this doesn't sound like a problem with regulation so much as a problem with the need to innovate and upgrade government system.

LEWANDOWSKI: You have to have the government that's working for the people again. That's what you need. You can't let the bureaucrat --

AXELROD: But you wouldn't argue that employer should Employer Identification Number.

LEWANDOWSKI: But you need to have one, right? I couldn't start a business without one.

AXELROD: I want to take a break on a point of agreement.

LEWANDOWSKI: Perfect.

AXELROD: So we'll be right back with Corey Lewandowski.

(COMMERCIAL BREAK)

AXELROD: Let's go back to the campaign, because you had a pretty successful run with Donald Trump. He was considered kind of a joke when he announced by a lot of people in politics. And the joke was on them, because he ended up taking -- certainly obeys the Republican Party and writing it to the nomination.

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In the spring of 2016 you had a little tumultuous run there. You had a run in with the reporter, a female reporter charge, but not actually indicted for that. And so there was some volatility around you. I'm not going to probe that. Interestingly, she was from Breitbart, but let set that aside for a second.

What happened with you and Donald Trump? We hear about the fact that he is deeply loyal, but you were cast aside having written from the very beginning of this thing to the nomination.

LEWANDOWSKI: I was very fortunate to spend 18 months having a front-row seat at history. And I know how fortunate I was for that. But, you know, in a campaign when you put 18 hours a day into something, seven days a week, other things suffer. It can be my family, my health, others. Nobody can maintain that. And we had such a small team. There was five of us and --

AXELROD: You're not going to handle this differently by the way. You -- you're thin. I gained 30 pounds --

LEWANDOWSKI: I lost about 30 pounds, I think. And, you know, I became a fraction of what it was and it's not healthy. It -- mentally, physically to work that hard and, look, I'm a hard worker and I'm willing to do it. But, you know what happens?

AXELROD: But you don't live on your own -- of your own (inaudible).

LEWANDOWSKI: No, I didn't. You what happens, like anything? We were startup. We were small startup and we're a tiny group and we never had a leak, never. 18 -- 16 months, then we start to bring new people in who had a different agenda. And I think it's fair to say that the people who started with the Trump team, their agenda was truly Donald Trump.

[00:45:01] I don't think I get into this to claim fame and fortune of, you know, getting -- helping and get the next president of the United States elected. I don't think that was -- what the goal was. I think it was to truly help him. And that was the mindset and we were all very, very close.

As the team expanded, people have their own agendas and start to leak stories and want to move their own narratives and that's OK. And we went from what was a small startup to a midsize company and didn't grow quickly enough in my opinion. I didn't do enough hiring and I got a lot of --

AXELROD: One of Christie's (inaudible) that you traveled with him a lot and weren't really there to manage day-to-day.

LEWANDOWSKI: That's right, because when you're with Donald Trump, the decision matrix are him to you, right? And if you're not there to provide input, he wasn't going to wait until he landed the plane at 30,000 feet in two hours from now to make a decision. So, look, we built the team in such a way where it was so small that there was no one back running the day-to-day operations, because they had to be part of it. Don't forget, you had a first-time candidate, the one who'd never been involved before.

AXELROD: Well, and not just the first-time candidate, like how many times did he go out to the



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microphones and surprise you with the news that he made.

LEWANDOWSKI: Sure. I mean, it happened a lot in a lot of different places. You know, the John McCain example is one of those. And so --

AXELROD: When he said that he didn't --

LEWANDOWSKI: When he said John McCain wasn't--

(CROSSTALK)

AXELROD: -- war hero. Yeah.

LEWANDOWSKI: You know.

AXELROD: What did you think when you heard that?

LEWANDOWSKI: As a political operative, my instincts were, the campaign is over as probably most people believe at the time. And I remember it well. And he walked off the stage and I've told the story and I said, "Mr. Trump, can I speak to you for a second, sir?" And he said, "Sure." And we walked into a room. We close the door and he said, "That was pretty good." I said, "No, sir. You just said that John McCain wasn't a war hero when he spent six years in a prison camp for his country."

And he said, "No, he hasn't taking care of our veterans enough." And I said, "Sir, I think we need to rethink this and make an apology." And he said, "I think you're wrong. Let's go down and set a new press conference." Then we had a 28 minute extremely contentious press conference. We left Iowa. We cancel our next event. And I remembered, well, I got the airplane. I called my wife and I said, "Look, I'm coming home. Race is over." That was on a Saturday and the next day Sunday, et cetera. You know, that was the news.

AXELROD: Well, one of you made the same --

(CROSSTALK)

LEWANDOWSKI: Well, that's right.

AXELROD: Class made the same -- apparently wrong conclusion.

LEWANDOWSKI: Well, that's right. And, look, as a -- what I hope would be some type of professional that I am. That was my advice. We need to apologize. He said, "No, I'm going to double down."

AXELROD: Can he apologize? I mean, have you ever seen him do it? I mean, publicly.

LEWANDOWSKI: Absolutely. You know, what people don't understand about him is how magnanimous he is in private, how gracious he is, how thoughtful he is.



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AXELROD: These are not adjectives that are normally associated with him.

LEWANDOWSKI: But, you know, Dave, if you spend 18 hours a day with somebody, seven days a week for 18 months you get to know a person. Now, you can like the person. You can hate the person, but you're going to get to know him in that period of time, right? You're going to know what this person's about. You're going to know what they're like. You're going to understand what their value proposition is and what they hold dear. And I saw it at firsthand.

You know, on more than a dozen occasions he would say to me, "Corey, how's your family? Do you need to go home and see your family? Do you need to bring your family down here so you can be with them?" And I said, "Sir, I just want to work because I just want to work." And, look, that's on me. But, he was always very concerned about making sure that my family was taken care of knowing that -- and he would say, "Would you like me to call your wife and tell her that you're doing a good job? "Sir, I appreciate that, but, no, thank you." Because he was always very concerned --

AXELROD: So what happened at the end? I mean, at one point he said, "OK, it's over."

LEWANDOWSKI: You know what happen? Look, I think what happened was enough people --

AXELROD: Well, how did they tell you that?

LEWANDOWSKI: Enough people had told him that I didn't have the core confidence or capability to get him any further than I had gotten him, which was at that point the Republican nomination. And they believe that they needed a more seasoned professional who was going to come in and run the campaign. And at that juncture, they believe that Paul Manafort who candidly had never run a campaign in his life has been a delegate counter was that person.

AXELROD: Well, he run a campaign for victory on a (inaudible) in Ukraine.

LEWANDOWSKI: He's never run a U.S. campaign (inaudible). But the point is, you know, that was a decision that was made outside of my purview. That was -- those are discussions that were taking place without me being part of that. And unfortunately, what you can't do is you campaign two places at once. I couldn't simultaneously be in Trump Tower, you know, explaining what the campaign strategy was to the kids and the other key members of the team if I'm also traveling with Donald Trump because we're in the road six days a week.

AXELROD: But, did it hurt when you -- I mean, I can't -- I mean, I've been in these situations.

(CROSSTALK)

LEWANDOWSKI: Completely surprised. David, I was completely surprised. I walked in on a Monday morning on June 20th of 2016. I was in the office at 6:00 a.m., like I normally was. I done -- conducted three phone calls, three conference calls. And by 9:30 in the morning, I was asked to go have a conversation with a couple people. And during that conversation they said to me, "We appreciate what you've done, but you can't work here anymore."

AXELROD: Who are the couple of people?

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LEWANDOWSKI: You know, some of the family members and some of the attorneys. And --

[00:50:03] AXELROD: Did you hear from Trump himself?

LEWANDOWSKI: Not at that particular moment. Not at that particular moment. And so they said, you know, "Thank you." And I said, "Look, what do I being fired for? We won. We won 38 times, 38 primaries and caucuses. We received more votes than any candidate in the history of the Republican Party. You are the Republican nominee for President of the United States. Look, if I was -- with all due respect, running Jim Gilmore's campaign, I should have been fired. Or pick any of the other 16 candidates that we vanquished, but we won."

And, you know, there wasn't really a good answer and that's OK. Look, that's a little hurtful as you can imagine, because you put so much of your life and energy and time into something. But, it looks -- I want him to be successful. I've always want him to be successful. What I have preferred, to have been able to be a part of it until the end, sure.

AXELROD: Let's talk about Manafort for a second, because he's in the news right now. And there is some intimation that he was in touch with the Russians during the course of the campaign. Do you have any reason or believe -- to believe that? Did you see any evidence of that? I know he came after you.

LEWANDOWSKI: Well, Paul was there. Paul lasted eight weeks and one day from the time I was asked to leave until the time he was ask to leave.

AXELROD: But who's counting, right?

LEWANDOWSKI: Well, I'm not counting. It was that one extra day. You know what it was? I don't know. Paul took most of his meetings and phone calls in his apartment, so he didn't work out the campaign office very much. He didn't travel with us ever, so I didn't have much of a relationship with him because he was back in the building, you know, doing his work.

AXELROD: Are you surprised by the stories?

LEWANDOWSKI: Look, I had no idea if, you know, the stories that have been very public about dossiers and Paul's name appearing and, you know, other foreign countries about receiving money. I don't know if they're true or if they're not true. I have no idea. I have no reason to believe them, whatsoever.

But let me say this, if anybody cross a line and give information to a foreign agent or foreign government or for intelligence official, weather that's Paul Manafort or it's Rick Gates or anybody else, I hope they're held accountable.

AXELROD: And what if they were cooperating in ways that were -- to benefit the president, because that's the allegation in the intelligence community that not the allegation, I mean, I think it's been accepted as their conclusion that the Russians were trying to help.

LEWANDOWSKI: But I don't think -- look, I spent a lot of time with Donald Trump. Never ever,

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ever, ever in my entire tenure did he ever intimate anything about wanting any help from the Russians, never. Never brought up. Never discussed.

Paul Manafort did something that he was trying to encourage that Russians should be involved in this election cycle and he did so on his own accord without any direction from -- then candidate Trump, the campaign or President Trump. I am certain of that.

AXELROD: What about Mike Flynn? You must know him very well. He was around the campaign. He's obviously now been dispatched in record time as national security director. There is a suggestion that he has -- had contacts with the Russians during that.

LEWANDOWSKI: I think there's two very important parts to the Mike Flynn component. Look, in order to ascertain domestic wiretap information, you need a court order to do that. And what I have heard so far that's been publicly reported is that he has placed six calls or some number of calls to the ambassador to Russia to talk potentially about something whether is legal or not is not for me to say. What we know is that somebody has a copy of that transcript. Now, how you obtain that transcript by spying on someone domestically? I'm not sure, because I don't think --

AXELROD: Well, clearly, they were listening in on the Russian ambassador.

LEWANDOWSKI: I understand, but you're a U.S. citizen on domestic soil. I don't know if you can legally do that without a court order.

AXELROD: Should he have known that if he was a cop coming out at the intelligence community?

LEWANDOWSKI: Of course he should know that. But the question is, was a government agency listening to domestic U.S. citizen telephone calls on domestic soil? If so, that's a clear violation of law.

AXELROD: Can I ask you a question? Knowing Donald Trump as you do, is it possible that Flynn made this five or six calls without the knowledge of the president or the president-elect? I mean, given the nature of their relationship and --

LEWANDOWSKI: The relationship with General Flynn was, one, where he was a steadfast supporter of the president. I can see no scenario with the president or president-elect at the time where have directed Mike Flynn to make a phone call to a Russian official to discuss sanctions. Number one, it's just way out of the round of possibility.

Number two, I think Mike would understand as the former head of the defense intelligence agency that those calls are probably being monitored through U.S. intercept. And, again, I don't know what -- if -- what Mike did was legal or illegal. The question is, how that information gets there?

AXELROD: I get your point on that. What about the fact that he apparently didn't owned up to this --

[00:54:56] LEWANDOWSKI: That's the larger issue. Look, the larger issue is that if you cannot

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be honest with the president or in this case, also the vice president of the United States and you did not properly inform him of your conversations and then the vice president of the United States goes on television and reiterates a narrative which you told him, which is factually inaccurate, look, I think it's very difficult to serve in any capacity in the administration.

You have an obligation to make sure that you're honest and trustworthy with the president and the vice president, because the way I understand it, those are the only two people in the government who will guarantee your job for the next four years.

AXELROD: Then why did it take so long to get rid of him after they knew that he -- after they were told the president, Steve Bannon, Reince Priebus, and the counsel, White House Counsel, why it take so long to tell the vice president what had transpire?

LEWANDOWSKI: You know, I don't know, you know, workings of how the conversation took place, but from what I understand and what's been publicly reported, Sally Yates from the Department of Justice notified the White House Counsel who turn around and notified a number of other people within the building who then had some type of -- I suppose conversation with the president to notify him of what the Department of Justice has indicated.

I don't know when the vice president has brought him to loop. I don't know if he was brought in to loop. Those are internal discussion. I'm not privy to. But what I do think is, what we so when "The Washington Post" reported was as soon as the vice president was made aware of it, if that's how he was made aware of it, he acted very swiftly and was steadfast and has resolved that he no longer had confidence as the national security adviser. And I know, you know, was probably a person who helped encourage Mike Flynn --

AXELROD: What if the Post hadn't reported it?

LEWANDOWSKI: Again, look, I think its part of the open question of who knew when and, you know, that's a very real question. And, you know, did the Department of Justice say that Mike Flynn was open to blackmail base on this conversation? I don't know. I'm not privy to the classified information. That seems to be what is being reported. I just don't know the answer.

AXELROD: Let me finish up because I and a lot of other people who report to be knowledgeable in politics missed a lot in 2016. Right now it feels like the president got enough to a pretty rocky start. You don't want headlines about thermal oil chaos, internal leaking and so on. But, how do you judge the way he started and what does he need to do now to change the narrative?

LEWANDOWSKI: I think the president in the first 20 days has begun to fulfill the campaign promises, which he outlined. We saw that through a series of executive orders. I do think, and I agree with Governor Christie on this, the staff has probably not prepared him as well as they could have or should have as it related to some of those executive orders and the implementation in what that would mean, particularly as it related to immigration issues.

I think you have a president who wants to move very quickly, who has a grand vision of what he wants to accomplish and he's leaving the details to the staff to implement and have to hope that the staff understands what that means. It was -- as I look at the totality of the senior staff and if

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that's Kellyanne Conway, Steven Bannon, Reince Priebus, Jared Kushner, you know, the senior staff inside the building, none of them have ever work inside the government. And I think it's both the plus and the minus.

You know, you don't know what you don't know. But what I think you see is people like General Mattis and General Kelly who understand the government coming in and taking a larger role now, understanding how to get things done and making sure they rolled out properly. And what I think you'll see moving forward hopefully is a measured approach, not to scale back on fulfilling the promises of the campaign, but making sure that you have vetted it properly with not only the right legal entities, but also given the heads up to those people in Congress so that you don't have backlash from your own party that they were unaware of issues that are coming forward, because you want to build the consensus to move your agenda forward.

AXELROD: Yeah. You're a -- you obviously been in this work for a long time. If you're doing things that appealed to your base, then you want those to be the center, the focus of the story. It seems like a lot of this controversies have diverted attention from the story that the president wants to tell.

LEWANDOWSKI: He has to tell the story of. He's going to provide middle-class tax cuts. It's something that he's campaigned on. He has to tell the story that we're going to put America first. He has to tell the story that we're going to control our borders and that we're going to have fair trade deals. That's the story that he has to tell and everything else is a diversion.

You know, he has to tell the story that he has campaigned on repealing Obamacare. Now, you have to find a way to get those things done. You know, as you know, the hard part actually is governing. They always say the campaign is the tough part. The campaign is the easy part. They have to go and implement and you've got a massive bureaucracy, staff with career bureaucrats who have a very different agenda and they, you know, they stick around from administration to administration.

AXELROD: One of the issues is that he himself has been slowing filling some of these positions. Why?

[01:00:03] LEWANDOWSKI: I think some of that is the concern at the U.S. and it hasn't move fast enough. And I think if you look at the Jeff Sessions nomination, you know, Jeff Sessions's first hearing for Attorney General was on January 4th, even before the president was sworn in. He didn't get sworn in and voted on by the full Senate until last week. You know, seven weeks.

AXELROD: But, Corey, you know, Mattis has been there from the beginning. Kelly has been there from almost the beginning. They still don't have deputies. There are thousands of positions, literally, that need to be filled. Was it a deficiency of the transition or --

LEWANDOWSKI: I think --

AXELROD: Do you think that -- do you think there was a send -- were they surprised? Were people surprised when he won? Did it -- did that put them back?

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LEWANDOWSKI: I think what happen was, you know, the president appoints approximately 4,152 appointments of those -- not all of them require Senate confirmation, some must schedule sees (ph), et cetera.

But looking at the government in the totality, there were so few people in the campaign that they didn't have enough people to fill all, all of these roles is what it came down to. So now you have to go out and look outside the box of the people that you knew internally. And a number of those people candidly were not supportive of the Trump presidency and we saw that recently where someone wanted the position and the president was made aware of some --

AXELROD: Deputy Secretary of State.

LEWANDOWSKI: That's exactly right.

AXELROD: Elliott Abrams.

LEWANDOWSKI: And he said, well, you know, I didn't say anything that nobody else didn't say. Well, the difference is, you know, if you're so fundamentally oppose to the president's agenda, why would you want to join the administration? And part of that reason is, and this is not directed at anyone person is, people get use to the power. They want to get back into the government.

AXELROD: Tillerson, one of the guy, though.

LEWANDOWSKI: No, I understand. But, look, it's very difficult, Dave, if you have a person who has said some really tough things about you. And written some really nasty letters about you to then come and say, "Hey, guess what, I'll serve if you want me to." Well, you know, you didn't have to publically disagree with me all the way through the campaign to only now take a job because it's good for your professional career if maybe they would have been more helpful, maybe that was the case.

This was the problem. There were so few people in the campaign that need a jobs, because there's only a couple hundred people when the whole campaign was done. It wasn't like the Clinton apparatus that had 30 years of building around them to go and filled these positions. And I think what they're trying to do right now is to make sure that they're getting good qualified candidates that they're going to go through the Senate confirmation process.

AXELROD: We will see how it goes. Corey Lewandowski thanks for being here and I'm looking forward to your appearance at the Institute of Politics.

LEWANDOWSKI: My pleasure, thank you.

AXELROD: Before we -- before you skip (ph) recording, I want to -- there's one other thing that I need to ask relative to the Russia thing. On the issue of Russia, you say if Manafort was acting or any of the others who've been named were in concert with the Russians on some of the things that they were doing, you say Manafort did it. He did it without the knowledge of the president.



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But he -- the reason it comes up is because the president has been sort of -- who's not shy in voicing his opinions has been strangely open to Vladimir Putin unchallenging to him. Did you ever have any conversations with him during the campaign about why that was?

LEWANDOWSKI: No, and let me be clear. Any staffer who contacted or potentially contacted a Russian agent or Russian official has done so on their own according, not of the direction of the campaign, the president or anybody else in the administration.

But let me say this, if the United States can develop a relationship with Russia where they can agree to do one thing, just one thing only, which is to go to Syria and destroy ISIS. That is what I believe the president's agenda is, which is to go to the area where ISIS has promulgating and stop them in their tracks. If that means, we can work with Russia to make that happen, then that's a good thing.

Does that mean we're going to work with Russia on everything? Of course not. But if we can find one way for the betterment of our own country and our own citizen so that ISIS isn't coming here to kill us and we can do that with the help of a major force in the world, then that's the place where I think --

AXELROD: Do you think he made a mistake when he said -- what he said to Bill O'Reilly on Super Bowl Sunday when he said that -- when -- he seemed to be equating America and the tactics to the American employees to those with Vladimir Putin who after all does kill and jail political opponents, kill and jail journalist. And he is an authoritarian dictator in many ways.

LEWANDOWSKI: Well, look, there's no question Vladimir Putin has done, you know, at least (inaudible) to do those things. And what --

AXELROD: Pretty well proven.

LEWANDOWSKI: Well, you know, for his country, he's been, you know, he's approving it in his country, very good. There's no question about it. Now, does that mean we're going to agree on everything? Of course not. Does that mean we should close the door and never have a relationship? Absolutely not there. One of the world's largest powers is in -- if we can have a working relationship, it would be better than the adversarial one.

AXELROD: He just had the courts throw his principle opponent off the ballot, so he can't be that confident about his poll.

LEWANDOWSKI: I think he's going to win.

AXELROD: All right, that's good.