



Podcast: *Swing Left - How We Win*

Title: "How We Step Up! with Congressmember Katie Hill"

Interviewer: Steve Pierson (SP) and Mariah Craven (MC)

Interviewee: Katie Hill (KH)

Broadcast date: August 28, 2019

[Begin Transcript 0:00:465]

Mariah Craven: I feel hopeful, even though you said we need record voter turnout. I think we can do it.

Katie Hill: Oh, we're gonna do it. Yeah, yeah. I think it's gonna exceed all expectations.

MC: Yeah, I'm excited.

Steve Pierson: This is glass table. Here's wood. I'm not superstitious. I think we can do it. I know we can. It just depends on everyone's showing up.

KH: Exactly. Yeah.

[Start Intro Music]

SP: Welcome to our first episode of *How We Win*.

MC: The run-up to the 2020 election is going to be riveting. And every week we'll share these stories from the field.

SP: All over the country, ordinary people are doing extraordinary things. We'll give you the tools that you need to jump in and make a difference right now.

MC: The clock is ticking and we want you to join the party.

SP: For our debut episode we'll be chatting with the amazing freshman representative from California's 25th district, Katie Hill. She's going to share her story about stepping up, running, and winning her first campaign for Congress; her surprising connection to Swing Left; and what we need to do to win in 2020.

MC: Then we're going to talk about some of the highest impact ways you can make a difference, like how you can help register new democratic voters in Super States. What are Super States? We'll tell you all about that, too.

SP: I'm Steve Pearson.

MC: And I'm Mariah Craven,

SP/MC: and this is *How We Win*.

[End Intro Music]

SP: Hey, Mariah.

MC: Hey, Steve.

SP: Usually, we're going to use this spot in our show to talk a bit about current happenings in the news, really to highlight areas where we've been successful, also –

MC: I love that.

SP: – and give people an opportunity to do something about it, not just to dissect news, but to actually like, here's what you can do.

MC: Right.

SP: And we want to give people reasons for hope, and let them know that they can make an impact. But since this is our first episode, we thought we would introduce ourselves a little bit and talk about what people can expect from our show from *How We Win*. So, Mariah, introduce yourself.

MC: Hi, I'm Mariah. I did not start off with campaigns and working on campaigns and that sort of thing. But once I got in, I was hooked. And it started with a mayoral campaign in New York City. The candidate I was working for was a progressive long shot up against a billionaire candidate, I think we all know who that is, who allegedly –

SP: Who is it?

MC: – allegedly. So, Mr. Bloomberg allegedly had these phone bank parties that we heard about where there were DJ like spinning for the volunteers and unlimited pizza and candy. I don't think any of that was true, but that's what we were hearing and, and in spite of this sort of amazing

thing that greeted volunteers there, we had volunteers come to our campaign office, which was in a self storage facility in Brooklyn, and didn't have AC. And it was dirty and dingy. And people came to make phone calls and put up signs in bodegas and march and parades with us to hand out lit. And when I saw that, I said, I need to stick with this because anybody who's going to give up their evening, their Saturday, they must really believe in something and those are the type of people I want to surround myself with.

SP: Right.

MC: And I also wanted to help elect and keep people in office who are underrepresented. So, I started working for folks like Kamala Harris when she was running for senator in California, and Congresswoman Karen Bass, who's now the head of the Congressional Black Caucus and Wendy Davis who was running for governor of Texas now running for Congress. And then I started working on efforts to help flip the house. That's how I meet Steve and so many other great books. So I want this podcast to be about recruiting people to join these incredible teams no matter what their capacity is, because that is how we win.

SP: Nice.

MC: What's your story, Steve?

SP: Very well said. Boy, mine's much more recent. I consider myself class of November 2016. I'd done some phone banking, a little light volunteering, but I had never gotten really involved with the campaign. And we had a party for my daughter and her friends to watch the first female president get elected. And it was the worst party ever. Our family kind of went into a tailspin like many other families around the country, around the world.

MC: Right.

SP: And I had to do something. But I'd always been like one of those: what can I do? But, there wasn't really an option. I needed to do something because action is the best antidote for anxiety. So, I jumped in and started volunteering. I found Swing Left. My wife and I hosted a house party that turned out to have 200 people, we moved it to a church down the street. And I said yes to too many things. And I was coordinating groups all over Southern California and got really involved in training events. It just really took off and what I found early on, and one of the things I'm really excited about this podcast, I didn't realize the space there was to really make an impact. And if you're a person that shows up and does stuff, you will get recruited to do more stuff.

MC: You have to show up though.

SP: You have to show up, you have to show up. So I wanted to share those stories with people and let them know that there is a space for everyone to make an impact and spoiler alert, that is

how we win. That's it. If we show up and get our friends and neighbors and everyone to be part of this, not just vote but volunteer.

MC: Right.

SP: That's how we will win. So, I can't wait to share these stories. And Katie Hill is the perfect person to start with, because that's how we first met was working in 25.

MC: Right. And she won, because people showed up before election day.

SP: That's how we did it. We organized early. That's what we have to do right now. I don't want anyone listening to this thinking that they can wait to get involved. They need to get involved right now. So let's get started.

[Music]

SP: In 2018, as a result of a lot of early organizing and historic volunteer engagement, we flipped 40 congressional districts –

MC: Woohoo!

SP: That's right. – Across the country–

MC: It's still exciting.

SP: – I know. And elected an amazing new class of diverse and energetic leaders to the House of Representatives. One of these great new leaders is Representative Katie Hill from California. Her story parallels many of our own as we jumped into the fray to fight back against Trump and the Republican agenda. Her campaign was a true grassroots effort, as this first time candidate became one of our youngest representatives, and has already found herself in well deserved leadership positions. Representative Hill, thank you for taking the time to talk to us.

Katie Hill: Thank you so much. I'm so excited to be here.

SP: First, I want to just talk about the campaign –

KH: Sure.

SP: – a little bit and you have a particularly unique Swing Left story.

KH: I do, yeah. Yeah.

SP: How did you come to run for Congress?

KH: Sure. So, it really started, I think, as so many people who ran this past election cycle. When Trump got elected, it was a wake up call for me and so many people I knew. I worked with the homeless organization PATH, People Assisting The Homeless, and as the Executive Director, I had spent a lot of my time and energy over the years really working to develop policy and build the political will to address homelessness here on the local level. That was culminating with getting Prop HHH on the ballot in November of 2016. So we got it onto the ballot and it was a huge deal.

SP: And, what was Prop HHH?

KH: It was a housing measure, a bond measure, to build permanent supportive and affordable housing and really address homelessness on the scale that we've never done, and, certainly in LA and really, in any community across the country, there's never been an investment that significant. It was over a billion dollars and over a course of time, and so it's an exciting ballot initiative. We were optimistic that it would pass, but we didn't want to let anything up. And it was a grassroots effort to try and get it to pass. And it did. It passed with almost 80% of the vote. But instead of being able to celebrate, everyone was in my office the next day crying saying "Donald Trump is President." We've got a Republican held House and Senate and they ran a campaign on getting rid of the Affordable Care Act, which is so crucial in the work that we do. I mean, it had made it possible for people to, you know, it was literally saving lives, people who were dying on the streets before had access to health care. And, it was funding a lot of the services that we were providing and it meant jobs were on the line, people's lives were on the line. And, the victory that we had had with Prop HHH was almost in a way just as an afterthought, because without the services housing can only do so much and so I didn't have a good answer for my team. And other than to say, "Well, we've got to continue to fight on local funding and initiatives. And we have to, we're going to have to flip the House. That's the first opportunity we're going to get to put a check on what this administration can do and the sort of attempts to get to roll back coverage and to rollback programs that we know are so vital." So, we started working on the local initiative called Measure H, which was the corresponding county initiative to provide services, dollars, service dollars. And that was one side of it. But on the other side, I said, "Okay, how am I going to get involved in the midterms?" I want to do something, and I'd never frankly, I'd never really done political campaigns in any real way. That just wasn't something that I, you know, I voted. And I was always following politics, but where I got involved was on the NGO side, on the nonprofit side. I mean, everyone's here with Planned Parenthood and with other organizations like the homeless services organizations and things like that, but I was like, this is the time this is the time I have to get involved in a campaign. And, I know there were literally millions of people across the country who had that same exact thought after the 2016 election. And so, in the months following, I started thinking about "Okay, where the districts that I, you know, I knew that it was about flipping the house, where are the districts that we can flip. And so I start doing a little bit of research about it. And it was a Swing Left was the website that I found. So I plug in my zip code, I think it was you search by zip code, right? Was that what it was?

SP: Yep.

KH: And, the district, the swing district that popped up was my own district. And I was like, “Wait a second, no way.” I mean, I grew up in in the 25th district, where it had been held by Republican my whole life. In its current form, it's never been held by a Democrat until now. And it's where cops and firefighters live. It's a huge veterans community. The former representative before Steve Knight was Chairman of Armed Services. And it was it's a place where people, if you if you were to say, “Oh, yeah, this is a district that could flip to a Democrat,” people, like literally would laugh in your face, right? So it didn't even occur to me that that could be a possibility. Until I saw it, and I was like, “This is great. I'm gonna get involved in my own district. This is amazing.” And I didn't even know before looking that up that Hillary Clinton had won in our district. And so I was like, “Okay, this is this is really amazing.” So I was like, “Okay, who's gonna run, who's the candidate?” And I ended up finding out that the candidate from the last time around who had run in 2016, the Democratic nominee, was the likeliest to run again. And I just didn't feel like his background was one that resonated with our district. And, we saw that, right? We saw that Hillary Clinton had won by almost seven, but he had lost by six. And Steve Knight, the Republican incumbent, had won by six. So, to me, that's a significant gap. And one that we have to figure out how to close and so I'm complaining about this, right? I'm like saying to my, to my friends and colleagues like, “Okay, we got, we got to find somebody who can run who's like from this community who really understands it, who knows how to talk to law enforcement and to the, to the people who are really in the middle of it – ”

SP: See what happens when you do too much can complaining?

KH: I know now and so, that's what that's what one of my mentors said. “Just like, well, you're complaining an awful lot about this. You've got that kind of background, why don't you run?” And I was like, “No, no, no, no, that's not something that people like me do.” I didn't know any politicians, I mean, that was certainly not something in my family. My dad's a cop, my mom's a nurse. My grandfather was a political science professor. But that was something you studied, not something that you did. And so finally, I was like, “Well, you know what, if ever there was a moment to do something like this, this is the time,” and I remember talking to my loved ones and saying, “You know, if I'm going to try something like this, I don't have the money that a normal political campaign comes with. I don't have the connections or the backing of the institutions. This is going to be a truly grassroots campaign that starts with all of us, that really starts with the networks that we have, the community that we've built.” So the first meeting that we had, I gathered my family and friends together and we met at a Chili's restaurant in Stevenson Ranch.

SP: Did you have baby back ribs?

KH: We just had drinks, honestly, and some chips, I think. And we kind of like laid it out and and it just grew from there. So, it's just amazing to think how far things have come and just seeing that growth over time how many volunteers came on board and by the end of it all, how

this was so much more. It was it wasn't about me, you know what I mean? It was just about what's possible for our country; what's possible for our generation; what's possible, and what we have to do to reflect the values and the diversity and everything that this nation stands for.

MC: That's really well said. And also as you're talking about Chili's and the people in your community who knew you from PATH and who knew you from whatever job you had as a teenager and elementary school. And now you represent them in Congress. What is it like going back to your home district?

KH: Oh, yeah, it's so funny. I mean. So now, people know me everywhere. And it's very easy for me when I'm back home to just kind of forget that I'm now a figure, right? So I go out and I didn't have my makeup, I had my hair up, I'm wearing whatever. And, then I go to Barnes & Noble, I'm going to get a book because I'm going to be on the plane. And I'm trying to use this work period, as a little bit more relaxing than you normally have. So, I'm going to read a book. This is so exciting. And so I go to Barnes & Noble which by the way, I used to work at I worked at right after high school. And so I'm going through thinking - not even thinking - it doesn't even occur to me that people recognize me. So, I go up to the counter to buy the book. And the guy goes like so how's Washington? I'm like, "Who are you? How do I know you?" And then I'm like, "Oh, wait. Of course, you just know who I am." And it's like "You got on some really good committees," and I'm like, "Yeah." And then today, I went into the frozen yogurt place and somebody was like, "Is that the Congresswoman?" And, so it's just not something that I'm used to at all. And, these are people who, in some cases, you've run into people that you've known since you were a little kid and but now you're, I don't know, representing them and it's a strange contrast when you go to DC.

MC: What book did you get?

SP: That's what I was gonna ask. I was going to ask two follow-ups. I want to know what book you got and what flavor frozen yogurt you got.

KH: Okay, okay. So, I ended up buying a couple books. The book that I read on the flight was *Play It as It Lays* by Joan Didion. It's a very, if you haven't read it, then it's a serious read for sure. But it's really, really good. And then the other is called *The Power*. Its a feminist novel, so I'm excited to read it. I haven't gotten there yet. And then frozen yogurt. I am an original tart flavor person with chocolate chips and almonds.

SP: Nice.

KH: Yeah. Yeah. It's always the same.

SP: I'm the same. I don't know if it's Jamba or Jomba.

KH: Jamba.

SP: Is it Jamba? For sure?

KH: For sure.

SP: Because my daughter always gives me a hard time about it. Anyway...

KH: Does she say it's Jomba or Jamba?

SP: I say it so many different ways just to mess with her that I don't even know anymore.

KH: No, it's Jamba.

SP: It's Jamba.

MC: Are you talking about Jamba Juice?

KH/SP: Yeah.

MC: It's Jamba. Yeah.

SP: Jamba? Okay.

KH: I'm glad we cleared that up for you.

SP: I think we should just keep talking about Jamba Juice, I think that's the direction we should go right now. But, back to your campaign.

KH: Sure.

SP: Which was fueled, I think in part by Jamba Juice.

KH: Oh, 100%. And Lacroix, and Monster Energy, I mean, like, let's just give the real corporate shout outs here.

SP: And the Mexican restaurant next to your campaign office –

KH: Oh, yeah.

SP: – who gave all those beautiful breakfast burritos on election day. That was really nice.

KH: Wait, I don't remember which one.... Chuy's? Yes. Next to this the one in Stevenson Ranch. Yeah, Chuy's. They're great.

SP: Anyway, I digress. But, you did have this incredible amount of volunteer energy.

KH: Yes.

SP: The turnout for your canvases were ridiculous.

KH: That was amazing.

SP: It was really amazing. How? I mean, it's kind of an obvious question, how important were your volunteers to you? But also, was there a particular experience with a volunteer that really stood out for you?

KH: Gosh, there's so many because we started the primary, I announced in March of 2017, so it was a very long campaign. And it started with such a small number of people, but it kept growing over time. And so throughout the course of the primary, I was like, this is incredible how many volunteers we have showing up to help us in a primary where there were unprecedented numbers of people who are helping us even then, but then after the primary it just like the floodgates opened and what I still hear constantly when I'm out in the community is that "Man, your people" – they call them 'our people', not our volunteers or our staff or whatever, just 'our people' – "did such a great job of going around the community. They came to our neighborhoods so many times they knocked on my door so many times I got all that literature like with notes on it from people saying that they stopped by and I just didn't have a choice. I had to go vote." And I'm like, "That is exactly what it's supposed to be." And just during Get Out The Vote weekend, we had over 5000 volunteers who came out from all across the state, and certainly across the region. I think the stories that just stand out to me with really, it's really the young people that I think were the most incredible. And kids I mean, really, really young people who were - who are - paying attention, who were into it not just because their parents were dragging them around, but they were the ones I heard from, and from many parents that it was their 10- or 11-year-old who said, "We have to we have to do something about this," and that that's how they ended up getting involved. And then on the other side, I heard over and over again from people who said that they hadn't done it, from older folks who said that they hadn't done something like this since Kennedy.

We're just at this moment, when it requires all of us to step up in a way. Probably, of the people who showed up to volunteer for us, I would say 90% solidly had never done anything political, or if they had it had been marginal, maybe they did a day in Vegas for one of the presidentials before or something like that. But it was a first time experience for so many people. And I hope that they had a good enough experience that they're going to come back and if it's not for me then for the presidential race or for some of the other key districts across the country, because we have to keep the House. There's no doubt about that. We need to flip the Senate and we need to take back the White House. So yeah.

MC: I think a lot of people in Southern California know you because they've probably volunteered for your campaign. But I think people outside of California probably know you from the Vice News documentaries that have aired on HBO.

KH: That's true, yeah.

MC: Talk about a commitment to transparency.

KH: Oh, yeah. Yeah.

MC: What was it like being followed around by those crews? And is it something that you do again?

KH: Yeah. So when I decided to... so, originally, the kind of pitch from Vice was "We'll follow you around for a little bit. And we just want to give an eight or nine minute segment on what a campaign is like." This was early in the primary process, and they wanted to do it about women, though the women who are running in the primaries. And, I thought this is important to me as somebody who's coming into this for the first time. All of the things that I'd learned by being involved. As a candidate, I felt like people should know, I think that if you want people across the board to buy into democracy and to get involved, they need to know what happens behind the scenes, and they need to understand that it needs to be accessible in a way that it hasn't been. And so I was like, I want to do this and my consultants, my team, were very nervous. Because it is this level of transparency. I mean, I was –

SP: Kelsey was totally cool with it, though, right?

KH: Kelsey was cool with it.

MC: She's shaking her head.

KH: She's my campaign manager, who's been with me since the very beginning. But she and the rest of the team were like, "Okay, well, we'll try it." But normally, historically, and I think even to a certain extent still, politicians have a cultivated image that you work to create and maintain. And when you have a crew following you around nonstop, I mean, they were with us constantly. You don't you don't get to do that. Even if you tried, which I wasn't really trying, but even if you did try it, you get so used to having cameras around that you've you forget. And that's I mean, that shows you that they're good at their jobs, right, like the point of a documentary kind of crew. There were a couple of points where things that happened in it were caused a little bit of trouble, but I feel like overall, I wouldn't I wouldn't change anything about it. I think even the things that were probably less than ideal were ones that I feel showed that this wasn't this wasn't a commercial. This wasn't something that we had any kind of editorial say over. This was a real attempt for me to hopefully show people what it's like and also that I - and not just me, but so many of my colleagues - we're regular people and trying to do something good.

SP: I feel like you continue that transparency now as Representative.

KH: Thank you.

SP: The way you communicate putting out videos. Do you feel like because there's a lot of other new Congress members who are doing the same?

KH: Yeah, yeah.

SP: Do you feel like it's a new way that we do communicating?

KH: I really do. And I think that what people are finding is that that's the only way you can relate anymore. I mean, I feel like our generation has just an incredibly astute sense of bullshit. And if you did, they're never going to believe a campaign ad. But if you're just talking to them, like a regular person, they get a sense of whether you're sincere and whether you are saying what you mean and meaning what you say. I feel like my colleagues get that and I think it comes from the fact that we have a different age group that has now come to Congress. I mean, we had two millennials before this wave. Now, I don't even know what the number is. But our group of 64 freshmen Democrats, we lowered the age of the average age of a member of Congress by 10 years just through this class, which is wild when you think about it. And I just think that completely changes how over the long run that's going to change how politics works. And it's certainly going to change the focus and the priorities and and hopefully the level of accountability that we've got to regular people as opposed to –

SP: An accessibility for people who don't feel like they can relate or have a voice we have in our politics.

KH: Yeah. And, I think it's important to recognize that most people will never have a face to face interaction with their representative just because they work. Many people work two jobs; they've got kids; they've got extracurricular activities; they're living their lives. And, they're not going to make it to a town hall or they're not going to have an opportunity to go to some kind of an event that's happening even if they want to. I'd never met my member of Congress before –

SP: You didn't hang out with Steve Knight before this?

KH: I didn't. Granted, I'd met other members of Congress, but through my job, and that's because I had a job that required that. But yeah, regular people, that's not something that you that you feel connected to in any way. And I think that that's why in large part, we've had low voter participation because people haven't felt the connection to the person who's representing them, they haven't felt a connection to the impact that those decisions that are being made have on their day-to-day lives. And they haven't felt like they're actually being represented. And so these kinds of videos; the way that we're trying to connect people over social media, I feel like

that really matters in terms of you are able to know, and I guess in air quotes, your representative in a way that you just wouldn't previously.

SP: Right. Well, you talk really briefly about fundraising. I don't want to talk too much about fundraising, because that's not a fun conversation.

KH: But, it is important. And I'm glad that you're bringing it up at all, because it is one of those things that it's like, oh, we want to stay away from that topic. But it's so important for people to understand A.) Why we have to do it, and B.) that this is, I hope people who are listening to this podcast, that many of them are considering running for some kind of office at some point now. And, and so knowing the role that fundraising is going to have to play in your life is something to be aware of.

MC: Did you know that going in?

KH: I did, at least on some level, because I knew going into the conversations that you hear over and over again, from anyone who's run for office, "Fundraising, fundraising, fundraising." And, you're like, "Yeah, yeah, sure." So, I knew that I was gonna have to raise a lot to try and defeat an incumbent, but when you think about a lot, you're not fully able to comprehend. I never would have thought eight and a half million dollars, which is what we ended up having to raise by the end of it. And frankly, if you'd said eight and a half million dollars to me from individual donations that are no higher than \$2,700 from a single person, I would have laughed and said, "All right, well count me out now because that's never going to happen." So it was these incremental goals that seemed so impossible each step of the way that you somehow managed to achieve that. That worked us up to that final number, but I didn't think about how much, how truly important it is to getting your final message out. Because, initially a politician, including myself or somebody who wants to be a politician, that is not coming from kind of a formally educated political background. And you think grassroots, right? You're like, "I'm going to do it with the people. I'm going to go out I'm going to talk to, to everybody. And that's how I'm going to do it." But, the reality is that in a congressional district, you're representing 725,000 people, and I don't care how much time you spent out on the streets, you will never talk to all those people. And so it took some time for me to come to terms with the fact that the only way that you're going to be able to actually get your message out to a lot of those people is by raising the money to be able to do that through TV; through mail; through social media, and that's just the that's just the reality of it.

SP: And Swing Left had our district funds that raised money.

KH: Oh, that was such a big help right after the primary.

SP: I got to hand you that big golf check.

KH: That was so fun.

SP: That was an awesome afternoon.

KH: That was so great.

SP: Yeah. And you were pretty much tapped out at that point after expensive primary.

KH: Oh, yeah. And every one of my colleagues that made it through the primary, I don't think anyone had anything left. I didn't want to go into debt during the primary because either I was going to be out and not able to raise any money or we were going to need everything after to go towards the general. So, you finish the primary and you're like, suddenly, "Okay, we've got to go into the general election, you have to staff up, not down." And your next payroll is two weeks out or less than that. And, so the fact that the Swing Left funds came in when they did was just, it was so great. I mean, literally the next day, we found out that it was coming. It's like this huge sigh of relief.

MC: And so it sounds like you've learned a lot since you've been in Congress and a lot from running your first winning first campaign, first Winning Campaign. What lessons are you going to take from 2018 moving into 2020 that we could all learn from as well?

KH: Gosh, that's a great question. Well, I guess the number one thing that I came out of 2018 with was that the field mattered so much, and that the turnout was vital. And I feel like you're still hearing this debate between people of whether persuasion is the way to win these districts or if turnout is, and I would argue very strongly that it's both, but that you cannot, I honestly believe that you cannot win these races and turn and flip them without turnout. So, I think you have to have the persuasion element as well, but you don't have the option of leaving votes on the table.

SP: Explain briefly, the difference between turnout and persuasion.

KH: So, turnout means that you are literally getting people to show up and vote. Barack Obama talks about this all the time and you hear others, but if you just look at the population in general of eligible voters well over 55 to 60% are Democratic, Democratic leaning, likely to vote for Democrats, right? But we just don't show up in the numbers that we should. So if we're able to mobilize and ensure that people are able to vote and know why they need to and feel like their voices are going to be heard, and their vote matters and is going to be counted, then we win every time. But that requires people power and it requires a lot of time and effort. It means that you really have to have those boots on the ground of people knocking on doors. And I heard from those in my district who said "Your people did such a great job." It means going out, going back over and over and over again and saying "Hey, can we count on your support? Hey, are you definitely going to show up and vote? Do you have any questions about your polling place?" Or, now that we're doing mail in ballots, or the whole voting system is changing for 2020. In California, we have to be really on top of that in terms of making sure that people know how to vote, that they're registered, that they're registered with the right address. It's really important to

go to inform people. And that's important in California. Just imagine how important that is in places where voting rights are under attack and where the state legislatures have and the powers that be have made it as difficult as possible to suppress the vote. So the activism that needs to happen in states, in the south, it's going to be absolutely vital for this, the volunteers to assist in that effort. Okay, so I got off off target a little bit. But persuasion –

SP: That's important though. But before you talk about persuasion, because I think it's important to understand, like you said, that voting rights are still very much under attack. And so the work that we do on the ground is so essential, because it's not a fair fight.

KH: Yep. Exactly. Exactly. And, and so I'm just such a believer and in field and I knew I was before, but after having them through it, it's just solidified that belief for me a million times over. And the power of volunteers, I think that we didn't do a huge amount of paid field because we had this incredible grassroots energy. But if people keep showing up, that allows us to go so much further, every dollar is able to go so much further and invest in the areas that you really need to because you've got people on the ground who are doing that critically important work. But yeah, that's my biggest takeaway, but I would all as far as persuasion goes. Persuasion is kind of that group of people in the middle who can be persuaded either way to vote for Republican or Democrat. Your Independent voters typically fall into that category, but you also have certain Democrats and Republicans towards the middle that fall into the persuasion category. And you don't want to leave a single vote on the table. So, if somebody is really dissatisfied with the President or they have, for example, one of the persuasion areas that I think has gotten more and more important, especially for suburban women, is the issue of gun violence. And so if they are frustrated, feeling insecure about their kids safety, and with the Senate, they're persuadables, right? They might have voted Republican forever, but this could be the chance to change their minds and and the only way that you can really effectively change somebody's mind is through a concerted effort, which is also through field.

SP: Right. Well, that's a good segue actually into the work that you're doing now as Representative. One thing that I think is really frustrating is all this amazing work that you guys are doing and the House of Representatives and specifically some of the gun legislation that you've passed through. And, and then it doesn't even get a look in Senate. So what are some things that we can do to help support that and to put pressure on to get that legislation through?

KH: Yeah. Well, the answer is not a great answer, because the reality is that the public pressure is what's going to make anything happen. And if the public pressure isn't enough, because Mitch McConnell won't budge from it or others won't budge from it. The President just doesn't care beyond his base, etc, etc. Then, the public pressure has to come next November. And, that is where, Swing Left as an organization and all of these grassroots organizations are going to be absolutely vital. And, I feel like there was a certain amount of awareness going in that, well, we're coming in, we're going to have the House, control of the House, but we won't have the Senate, we won't have the White House. So most legislation is not going to happen. Right? We just know that, especially knowing where Mitch McConnell is on things; where President Trump

is on things and, and how divided the parties are right now. But I feel very strongly that what we're doing now, in terms of passing this legislation is laying a marker that shows what Democrats will do; what we're willing to do; what we stand for; and what we should be doing as soon as we get people in power who reflect our values. And to me, I don't think we have an option but to flip the Senate and the White House. Certainly, to me, that's a given. But I hear a lot of people say, "Oh, well, it's not very likely that we're going to get the Senate this cycle." No, no, don't say that. First of all, that's totally discounting how people are going to show up this time in a way that they've - that I don't think we will have seen turnout on the scale that we're going to see in 2020. But also, if you say, we're not going to get the Senate, then we're not going to get the Senate because you're not going to try.

SP: Right.

KH: And I think it is completely possible to get the Senate if you –

SP: In four seats, right.

KH: If you focus on getting people to show up. I mean, these are not areas where only Republicans live in this state. It's just a matter of overcoming the barriers that exists in terms of voting rights, in terms of voter suppression, but also making sure that people really feel like this is an opportunity for their voices to be heard and why their Representative is failing so much. And frankly, I think we can do a lot better than four seats.

SP: Yeah.

MC: Fingers crossed and get to work everybody, I think is that important message. Also in addition to the gun safety issues, people are feeling a similar frustration and urgency around what's happening at the border, and I know that you were recently there. Can you talk a little bit about what you saw? And if what you saw changes how you're approaching policies.

KH: So, I actually went to the Northern Triangle, which is Guatemala, El Salvador, and Honduras. Those are the three countries where we're seeing the vast majority of immigrants coming to our border. They're coming from Central America and through Mexico and trying to come here to build a better life, better lives for their families. And, then at the border I went to MacAllen, Texas and saw one of the largest facilities for processing. What I saw during the trip to Central America was that there are three driving factors that are pushing people out:

Violence, just gang violence and other violence that is on a scale that we really couldn't even imagine. I mean, eight-year-olds are getting recruited to gangs and when I say recruited, it's coerced, it's threats of violence to their families. It's saying to an eight-year-old that if you don't do this, we're going to rape your sister. I mean, can you even imagine an eight-year-old having to process that? So it's horrible things like that happening. Gender violence, sexual violence is just through the roof. And from the cartel; all kinds of different factors.

Poverty, climate change has played a big role in this. And in Guatemala, Honduras, there's there's been just epic drought and one in two Guatemalan kids under the age of five are so malnourished that their growth has been stunted. So especially the indigenous people are being pushed out like farming isn't possible in the way that it used to be.

Then third, you just have corruption and happening on us on a scale that, frankly, I would normally say that we couldn't even imagine, we can imagine it now.

SP: That's too bad.

KH: Horrifyingly. What I learned about the aid that were that we've been providing – that the White House has – that this administration has cut off to these countries, is I think there's actually a misconception that we're just giving money to these governments. And, I can understand why if you feel like what we know, that these governments are corrupt, that we shouldn't be just giving money to them. But the money is not going to the government, the money is going to our own agencies, including in some cases, the FBI, the DEA, it's going to our State Department to USA ID, which grants funds to really, really reputable NGOs, nonprofits that are just doing vital work that is that is focused on keeping people from having to migrate in the first place. And that funding absolutely should not be cut if we want to stem the flow of migration. And in fact, we should be revealing what works and we should be increasing investments in that regard because we the US has responsibility and needs to take responsibility for some of the interventions that we've that we've done over the decades that have caused destabilization in the region. That's one set of things. We've got to make the effort to keep people from migrating in the first place.

The second is at the border. And, I didn't see unsanitary conditions. I didn't see people drinking from toilets or anything like that. And the crowding had actually gone down pretty significantly from what it had been previous weeks. This is anticipated because of the summer migration just slows down in general, but also, the "Remain in Mexico" policies. I mean, ethically, I don't agree with them. But regardless, people aren't making it to the border in the same way they were. So I didn't see that. But what I did see was just that we are treating people who are fleeing out of desperation like criminals. There's no real softer way of defining that. 18- and 19-year-old women who aren't technically minors, but they're teenagers who, knowing what I learned from the trip to the Northern Triangle, I can guarantee you that they have experienced sexual trauma in a way that we - like, multiple times and levels that, again, don't even occur to us. And they're in a cell behind glass, behind these steel doors. And, as we're going through, as group of members of Congress kind of getting the tour, I guess, you just see them. It's like this window here where their hands are up, and tears are streaming down their face. And I mean, it's just heartbreaking. And, yes, they broke the law to come here. Well, they're going to apply for asylum, I hope, but they don't have representation that's telling them exactly how to, because, now domestic violence is a qualifier for asylum, but who knows if it'll be done right. And if they get sent back? What's going to happen to them, especially since the aid that was helping to fund

the resources that would help people if they got some back to their home country has been cut? I mean, it's it's really devastating. And then families. Same kind of thing, right? Yes, you can always find examples of horrible situations where kids are being trafficked and criminals are trying to use kids to kind of find loopholes there. I'm sure there are examples that has happened. I'm not going to deny that, but the vast majority of people are really just here because they don't feel like they have another option. And so, I think the fundamental problem with our system is that it does treat people like criminals in that way. And I think we need to have more avenues for legal immigration, so that it isn't a matter of committing a crime to be able to try and come here. I hear a lot about like, well, they should go through the line, they should do it the right way like everybody else has to is. There is no way of doing that now. I mean, the waiting list doesn't exist, there isn't a process that makes it possible for someone to actually come here, quote, unquote, the right way. Now, especially with the attempts by this administration to stop legal immigration.

And I saw the trauma that was happening to border patrol agents from from experiencing the same thing day in and day out of literally having kids in cages, there's no other way to put it. That's the reality of what it is and, and they said I had multiple of the Border Patrol agents say to me, "Yeah, it's really, really sad every single day because we know how lucky we are to be born here, because if we were on the other side of the border, if we were in one of those countries, we would be doing the exact same thing." And, I feel like it's important for us to not dehumanize the border patrol agents or people who are trying to do their jobs. There are bad people or, there are cultural problems in certain segments within the agency, but overall, I think it's a systemic problem that exists within the way that we think about immigration now, and that fundamentally has to shift. And, the way that it shifts is by shifting attitudes among our elected officials to finally create comprehensive immigration reform in the way that that truly does reflect our values.

SP: And if we can't shift those attitudes –

KH: Oh, I meant shift it by voting them out. You're not going to shift their opinions at this point.

MC: We were talking earlier about how transparent you are and you engage with people on social media, and I remember seeing, I think it was a Snap of you running into Pelosi –

KH: Oh, yeah. Yeah.

MC: – early on, on the way to DC, I think. But it seems like you all just get along so well, and you've got this Speaker Pelosi seal of approval. And I thought this is so interesting, because they think you represent this new Blue Wave. It's blue, but I don't think everybody thought of themselves as part of the Democratic Party in the way that everybody kind of now is. And we all kind of realize that we have to work together to win again in 2020. So how do traditional Democrats and the new Blue Wave work together successfully moving forward?

KH: Yeah, I agree with you. As far as I'm concerned, and again I don't think that I'm alone in this, from what I know from my freshman colleagues, is we went in we knew that we were coming in as a class of disruptors and that we weren't just running to flip these seats to regular, just another Democrat, we were running because we felt like the system as a whole was messed up. And that in large part, that's why Trump came to power. And, so the fact that so many of us ran, saying that we weren't going to take corporate money from the very beginning. There was no organized effort of trying to go around the country and say, "Hey, will you say this?" This was organically coming from people deciding to launch their campaigns by saying, "I am not going to be accountable to special interests, I'm going to be accountable to the people I'm running to represent." But we came in and because of that energy, we as freshmen, we signed a letter basically saying that the first thing we wanted to take up was HR1, which was about transparency and government about, I'm getting big money out of politics and voting rights. I mean, it's such an important package –

SP: It's a spectacular, historic piece of legislation.

KH: So, a side note, if we take the Senate and we have a President that's a Democrat, the first thing we have to do after 2020 is pass HR1, because as we go into redistricting, the census happens, we go into redistricting at 2022. If we pass HR1 that has the redistricting reforms that prevents gerrymandering, like we've seen before, then we will not be in the situation, again, that we were in leading up to 2018. It will not be possible we will actually have representation. It's not going to be perfect, but it will not be able to be as misrepresentative as it has been. So, just keep that on everybody's radar.

SP: And yet another reason to go ahead –

KH: Oh yeah. This is why I think it is so important to get a Senate and President that are going to sign HR1 as our first order of business.

SP: Absolutely.

KH: We came in knowing that we were disrupting the status quo and that we were doing things differently. And that there was probably going to be a fair amount of resistance to us, we thought that we were going to be butting heads and saying, like, "No, no, this is, this isn't the way that we're okay with doing things. Don't tell us to shut up and be quiet and sit in the corner, because it's not gonna work. You got a whole bunch of stubborn, strong willed people who have the people behind them across the country." But that wasn't the case. And when people ask me what I'm most surprised by being in Congress or having having been there now for a chunk of time one of the most frequent answers I give is that we have a seat at the table, that our voices matter, and that leadership and the more senior members really respect the fact that we represent a new wave of politics and a new generation of people whose voices haven't been heard before. And so I think the tension that we were expecting just hasn't been there in the way. That's not to say that it doesn't exist. It does in some cases and you see that play out with

two sides of the party, right? And probably the clearest way, but part of what I see my role as one of the freshman representatives to leadership is helping to bridge that divide. I've been through the same kinds of challenges that our front liners faced, not even as bad as those who are in districts where Trump won by 16 points, which some of my colleagues do represent. But also being from California and right next to LA, I have the latitude to be more progressive than some of my peers from the other 40 seats that flipped. Serving on Oversight I've become friends good, pretty good friends with Rashida and Ilhan and Alex and Ayana. And so I feel like part of my job is to kind of try to keep an eye on what matters and not on this inner party fighting, because at the end of the day, we're so much closer on every single thing that matters than the Republican Party, and certainly than Trump and certainly than Mitch McConnell. And that's what we've got to stay focused on. Because the media loves to try and focus on these splits –

SP: They love it, yeah.

KH: – and every narrative. I mean, every article that you see, you're like, “Yeah, who made that you made that up? That wasn't even a thing.” And so we've really got to stay focused on that. And the impeachment issue is one that I know that has that has people concerned. I will just say, “Have some faith. It's going to be okay.” But yeah, I don't know. We can't we can't afford the inner party divisiveness.

SP: Well, I want to wrap up with three questions kind of related. And these are the big questions.

One, what's your biggest concern going into 2020 into the election? And what should Democrats really be doing more of

Two, what gives you the most hope for the future?

And then, of course, how can we help?

KH: Sure. So my biggest concern is making sure that people vote. Again, it's about really focusing on empowering people and making sure that that every single person in frankly in any district, but also specifically in states that need to flip Senate seats in these other districts. I'm not comfortable with the majority we've got in the House, I think our majority needs to be a lot bigger. And you have to protect those 40 seats –

SP: We might get those 41 soon.

KH: Yeah, let's hope.

SP: With North Carolina coming up in a few weeks.

KH: But to be able to be as bold as possible and as aggressive as possible on dealing with the challenges that I don't think we have an option, but to go after, with every single thing that we've got from healthcare, to climate change to gun safety, we need that big majority. And we need to be aggressively voting people out who don't stand for what we believe needs to happen at the Senate level, at the House level, and of course at the White House. So making sure that we are empowering people to vote has to be the number one priority and making sure that they are able to exercise their voice and know that they need to and that we're counting on them and that the country in our future and the future of the world is counting on them.

So that ties back into how you all can help. I mean, that is the way that the army of volunteers that showed up in 2018 can again. And I would say that, well, the presidential is absolutely vital. We can't lose sight of the other part because, if you're frustrated that we flipped the House, and that was so great, but the legislation is dying at the Senate. Now, imagine how frustrated you're going to be if we have a President and a House of Representatives that are Democratically controlled, but we still have a Senate that's not going to do anything. So we have to focus on all three at once. And imagine how horrible it would be if you lost the House because we were so focused on the White House. And so we need to –

SP: These are horrible thoughts. I'm imagining it right now. I don't like anything in my brain right now.

KH: But where there's hope is that we saw record turnout in 2018. Truly, double the size of past midterms, and especially record turnout among young people, people of color, that's so important. And those are the groups of people who've typically not had a voice, who have felt like there's no reason for them to vote. And in many cases for who it's harder to vote, that we need to get to show up more. And again, I feel like just from what I'm seeing from young people who have been engaged in our campaign, from the high school students that I talked to, all the way down that we've hit a moment where that's going to happen. That's not to say that we can just hope that it happens, but I really honestly believe that we are going to have turnout and and young people who are showing up. By young people, I mean, anybody who was under baby boomer age.

SP: That's generous.

KH: Yeah, well, because when you when you look at the way that people vote, if you're under 50, you pretty much overwhelmingly start to vote for Democrats. And that's because I think that the world has changed in such a way that we we've moved on from these really archaic beliefs about equality and about that a gun should have more rights than a woman. So I think that there's the really that focus is something I believe in, that gives me hope. And that makes me feel like this is a pivotal moment with 2020. But it's just the beginning. It's not the end, and that ultimately will be able to replace everybody in the legislature that is of this old mindset. And maybe eventually the two parties that exist are going to be the Progressives and the Democrats. And can you imagine how much will be able to get done then?

SP: I'll leave that wonderful thought, as our last one. That would be awesome. Representative Katie Hill from CA-25. Thank you so much for being here, for talking with us.

KH: Thank you. Happy to be here. Thanks for all the work that you do. Thank you to your listeners.

SP: If you want to support Katie Hill, and why wouldn't you? Go to katiehillforcongress.com. And we'll also have her link up on our page for you to click and donate and all that good stuff.

KH: Thanks so much

SP: So, Katie, you rock. Thank you.

MC: Let's go get fro yo.

[Music]

MC: So Katie talked a lot about not only focusing on the presidential election, which is, I think, a really important point, because there are other races and Swing Left has figured out where we need to focus our energy and they're calling these places Super States.

SP: Right. Obviously, the presidential is what most people pay attention to. But as Katie pointed out, we have to take back the Senate –

MC: Right.

SP: – and stop all this great legislation from getting blocked –

MC: Right.

SP: – we need four seats to do that. So that's doable. And also there's a real opportunity for us before the census happens –

MC: Right.

SP: – to redraw some of these terribly gerrymandered lines. So we have local legislators and gubernatorial races and even a state Supreme Court race that will have a huge impact on gerrymandering. When you look at those three main things, also, of course, defending our house seats, that creates a number of states that have a combination of one or all three of those things. So that's where we really want to focus our energy right now is registering voters in those super states. There's 11 of them, and their states like Texas and Georgia and North Carolina, Florida, Arizona, the rust belt, Wisconsin, Michigan, Ohio, of course, and Maine. I think

I got them all. Go to swingleft.org our super estate strategy is there. We want to give people strategic focus for their work so that they know they're making an impact.

MC: Yeah, I think that's really smart because even when we went back to the White House next year, we're going to be kicking ourselves if we don't fix this gerrymandering issue.

SP: Yeah. And Katie said it so well when she was talking about if you are frustrated that we won back the house, but we're having trouble getting any legislation through the Senate.

MC: Right.

SP: Imagine how frustrated you'll be when we win the Presidency –

MC: Yeah.

SP: – and the House, but we still don't have the Senate.

MC: Right. And Mitch McConnell is still there blocking everything.

SP: Yeah, yeah. It's so so important. So, by focusing on these strategic states, we are going to make a huge impact.

[Music]

MC: Thanks, everybody, for joining us today. And thank you for stepping up and taking action. This is how we win, we win when we all get involved, but our work has to start now.

SP: Help introduce more people to this movement. Subscribe and share this podcast everywhere on social media, Facebook, Twitter, Insta, and use the hashtag [howwewin2020](https://www.instagram.com/howwewin2020). We want to hear from you too. Are there people that you would like to hear from on the podcast or questions that you want answered? You can email us at [podcast at swingleft dot org](mailto:podcast@swingleft.org).

MC: And, be sure to come back next week for the next episode of How We Win.

SP: See you then.

[End Music]