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**NOVA “CHASING CARBON ZERO”**

**WINTER 2023 TCA PRESS TOUR PANELIST BIOS**

**(IN ALPHABETICAL ORDER):**

**DONNEL BAIRD**

**Founder and CEO, BlocPower**

**Advisor, Rewiring America**

Donnel Baird is the founder of BlocPower, a climate tech startup based in Brooklyn. BlocPower’s tech platform analyzes, finances and installs clean energy and building decarbonization upgrades in buildings in underserved communities. BlocPower creates jobs for qualified local low-income workers and energy savings for building owners, reduces carbon emissions and asthma rates, and provides financial returns to investors. In 2021, the company announced an historic partnership with Ithaca, New York, to decarbonize 100% of the city’s buildings — the first such project in the United States.

BlocPower is backed by Kapor Capital, Andreessen Horowitz, Eric and Wendy Schmidt, the American Family Institute for social and environmental impact, and Salesforce. Baird is a graduate of Duke University and Columbia Business School, where he was a recipient of the Board of Overseers Fellowship and a recipient of investment from the Lang Fund for Entrepreneurial Initiatives. He spent four years as a political and community organizer, and more than two years managing a national initiative to leverage American Reinvestment and Recovery Act energy efficiency investments in underserved communities. He sits on various boards including the New York Federal Reserve Bank Advisory Board. Baird lives in New Jersey with his wife and children.

**CHEF CHRISTOPHER A. GALARZA  
Founder/Culinary Sustainability Consultant  
Forward Dining Solutions LLC.**

Entrepreneur, author, public speaker and podcaster Chef Chris Galarza is renowned for his work in kitchen electrification and is the founder of Forward Dining Solutions LLC. As the country’s foremost expert in commercial electric kitchens, Galarza works with governments, manufacturers, brands, designers and chefs to create lasting sustainable kitchens and culinary ecosystems. Galarza has worked on notable projects such as Chatham University’s Eden Hall Campus ([the world’s first fully self-sustained university campus](https://archive.triblive.com/lifestyles/food-drink/chathams-new-sustainable-campus-boasted-as-first-in-the-world/)), Microsoft HQ and Castilleja All-Girls School.

Galarza worked for several prestigious establishments such as Carnegie Melon University, Monterey Bay of Pittsburgh and the Greenbrier Resort in West Virginia, where he apprenticed under several Certified Master Chefs and culinary Olympians. Galarza leverages his experience as a culinarian, educator and consultant to get projects moving forward, and leaves operators educated and prepared to successfully, efficiently and safely run their kitchens for years to come.

**MELISSA C. LOTT**

**Director of Research, Center on Global Energy Policy**

**Senior Research Scholar, School of International and Public Affairs**

**Columbia University**

Dr. Melissa C. Lott is the Director of Research and a Senior Research Scholar at Columbia University’s SIPA Center on Global Energy Policy, where she co-leads the Center’s Power Sector Research Initiative and hosts *The Big Switch* podcast. Dr. Lott also serves on the United Nations Council of Engineers for the Energy Transition (CEET), an independent advisory council to the UN Secretary-General.

Dr. Lott has worked as an engineer and researcher for nearly 20 years in the U.S., Europe and Asia. She specializes in technology and policy research, working to increase our understanding of the impacts of our energy systems on air pollution and public health. She directly applies this understanding to help decision-makers mobilize solutions to support the low-carbon transition. Internationally recognized for her work on electricity and transportation, Dr. Lott has been featured as a *Solar 100* Thought Leader, an IEEE *Women in Power* and a Forbes *30 under 30* *in Energy*,and has been featured in media outlets including PBS, National Public Radio, the BBC World Service, the *Guardian*, “Good Morning America,” Bloomberg, the *Wall Street Journal* and the *New York Times*. She has authored hundreds of scientific articles, columns, op-eds and reports on the energy sector and energy technology transition. Prior to joining CGEP, Dr. Lott held roles at the Asia Pacific Energy Research Centre, International Energy Agency and U.S. Department of Energy. Throughout, she has worked as an engineer at YarCom Inc. Dr. Lott holds degrees from UC Davis, UT Austin and University College London.

**MILES O’BRIEN**

**Producer, Director and Science Correspondent**

Miles O’Brien is a veteran independent journalist who focuses on science, technology and aerospace.

He is the science correspondent for PBS NEWSHOUR; a producer, director, writer and correspondent for the PBS documentary programs NOVA and FRONTLINE; and an aviation analyst for CNN. He owns MOBIAS Media, Inc., a production company that creates award-winning documentary films primarily for PBS as well as several educational and corporate clients.

For nearly 17 of his 40 years in the news business, he was a staff correspondent and anchor with CNN, based in Atlanta and New York. He served as the science, environment and aerospace correspondent and the anchor of various programs, including “American Morning.”

While at CNN, O’Brien secured a deal with NASA to become the first journalist to fly on the space shuttle to the International Space Station. The project ended with the loss of Columbia and her crew in 2003 — a story he told to the world in a critically acclaimed 16-hour marathon of live coverage.

Prior to joining CNN, he worked as a reporter at television stations in St. Joseph, Missouri; Albany, New York; Tampa, Florida; and Boston. He began his television career as a desk assistant at WRC-TV in Washington, DC.

O’Brien is an instrument-rated pilot with more than 2,600 hours logged in numerous aircraft types. His interest in aviation was sparked as a boy flying in the right seat beside his private pilot father.

He has won numerous awards over the years, including six Emmys, a Peabody and a duPont-Columbia Award.

He has produced, written and directed 10 films for NOVA: *Mind of a Rampage Killer* (2013), *Manhunt Boston Bombers* (2013), *Megastorm Aftermath* (2013), *Why Planes Vanish* (2014), *Nuclear Meltdown Disaster* (2015), *Fifteen Years of Terror* (2016), *The Nuclear Option* (2017), *Inside the Megafire* (2019), *The Great Electric Airplane Race* (2021)and *Chasing Carbon Zero* (2023).

He also produced, wrote and directed FRONTLINE *Coronavirus Pandemic* (2020) and was a writer and correspondent for four FRONTLINE episodes: *Flying Cheap* (2010), *Flying Cheaper* (2011), *Nuclear Aftershocks* (2012)and *Dollars and Dentists* (2012).

In February of 2014, a heavy equipment case fell on his forearm while he was on assignment. He developed acute compartment syndrome, which necessitated the emergency amputation of his left arm above the elbow. Despite the loss of his arm, he has completed two marathons, several ultra-distance bike rides, a half Ironman, and has been re-certified to pilot airplanes.

Born in Detroit and raised in Grosse Pointe Farms, Michigan, he is based in Falmouth, Massachusetts. He was a history major at Georgetown University. Miles has two grown children. His son is a U.S. Navy lieutenant stationed in Sigonella, Italy, and his daughter is a social worker in New York City.

**CHRIS SCHMIDT**

**Co-Executive Producer, NOVA**

Chris is an award-winning producer and director of documentaries and factual television series. Along with Co-EP Julia Cort, Chris oversees NOVA’s development team in creating new multi-hour projects in collaboration with U.S. filmmakers and international co-producers. Since joining NOVA in 2012, he has developed and guided more than 100 groundbreaking films and series including *The Planets, Black Hole Apocalypse, Great Math Mystery, Einstein’s Quantum Riddle, Hunting the Elements, Human Nature, Arctic Sinkholes, Alaskan Dinosaurs*and *Zero to Infinity.*Prior to working full-time at NOVA ,Chris was an independent filmmaker and executive producer making programs for factual networks including Discovery, National Geographic, History, Animal Planet and PBS.  In love with stories of human ingenuity and discovery, Chris’s curiosity and persistence have led him up Chinese construction cranes, into the Sahara Desert in search of whale skeletons, catapulted him off of an aircraft carrier, and made it possible to hang out with some of the world’s most dedicated scientists, mathematicians and engineers. His work has received the prestigious Alfred I. duPont-Columbia University Award, the AAAS Gold Kavli Science Journalism award, the Cine Golden Eagle and many nominations for the News and Documentary Emmy Award.

A graduate of Northwestern University and University of Chicago, Chris currently lives in Concord, Massachusetts.



**ADDITIONAL ON-SITE PRODUCERS:**

**JULIA CORT**

**Co-Executive Producer, NOVA**

**(she/her)**

Julia Cort, together with Co-EP Chris Schmidt, oversees the long-running PBS science series NOVA and is committed to making inclusive science documentaries that are accessible to all. During her time at the series, Julia has contributed to more than 100 films and miniseries, covering everything from quantum mechanics to genetic engineering to climate change. She has developed and overseen some of NOVA’s most acclaimed episodes, miniseries, and digital content, including*Ultimate Space Telescope, The Cannabis Question, Looking for Life on Mars, Decoding COVID-19, Polar Extremes, NOVA Wonders, Poisoned Water*and *Antarctic Extremes.* In her quest to make complex science engaging for all, Julia has traveled deep underground to investigate the hunt for dark matter, waded into leech-infested swamps and attempted to re-create the technological feats of ancient engineers. Her work has been honored with the George Foster Peabody Award, the National Academies Keck Communication Award, the AAAS Science Journalism Award, the American Institute of Physics Science Writing Award, the Alfred I. duPont-Columbia Award and the News & Documentary Emmy.

**CAITLIN SAKS**

**Producer, NOVA**

Caitlin Saks is a producer for the science documentary series NOVA on PBS. Much of Caitlin’s work has focused on climate and environmental topics. She is currently senior producing *Weathering the Future*and *Chasing Carbon Zero*. Previously, she senior produced  [*Arctic Drift* (2021)](https://www.pbs.org/video/arctic-drift-ipy883/) and [*Can We Cool the Planet?* (2020)](https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/nova/video/can-we-cool-the-planet/). Caitlin also produced and co-hosted NOVA’s digital series [*Antarctic Extremes* (2020)](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BA3YdJHv5AE&list=PLnNZYWyBGJ1H2IlDRx1v_CvpVJabDlGUG), hosted its online companion game the [Polar Lab (2020)](https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/nova/labs/lab/polar/research), co-produced NOVA's Emmy-nominated television special on climate change, [*Decoding the Weather Machine* (2018)](https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/nova/video/decoding-the-weather-machine/), and co-produced the virtual reality experience [*Greenland Melting* (2018)](https://store.steampowered.com/app/1012510/Greenland_Melting/).

She also produces content on a variety of other science topics, including senior producing the five-part series [*Universe Revealed* (2021)](https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/nova/series/nova-universe-revealed/), producing/writing/directing the short documentary [*Gene-Editing Reality Check* (2020)](https://www.pbs.org/video/gene-editing-reality-check-xnjtfy/), and co-producing the duPont Award-winning [*Decoding COVID-19* (2020)](https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/nova/video/decoding-covid-19/). Previously, as science editor for NOVA, Caitlin developed story content for programs including *Polar Extremes* and the Emmy-nominated, Kavli Award-winning film *Poisoned Water*. Before joining NOVA, Caitlin worked on a variety of films for FRONTLINE, including [*League of Denial* (2013)](https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/frontline/documentary/league-of-denial/), [*The Choice 2012* (2012)](https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/frontline/documentary/choice-2012/) and [*Money, Power, and Wall Street* (2012)](https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/frontline/documentary/money-power-wall-street/).

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