

= Special Project =

" Special Project " is the fourteenth episode of the eighth season of the American comedy television series The Office and the show 's 166th episode overall . The episode aired on NBC in the United States on February 9 , 2012 . It was written by Amelie Gillette and was directed by David Rogers .

The series ? presented as if it were a real documentary ? depicts the everyday lives of office employees in the Scranton , Pennsylvania , branch of the fictional Dunder Mifflin Paper Company . In the episode , Pam Halpert (Jenna Fischer) returns from her maternity leave , and Dwight Schrute (Rainn Wilson) and Andy Bernard (Ed Helms) must select employees to accompany Dwight to Tallahassee after he is sent on an assignment . Meanwhile , Darryl Philbin (Craig Robinson) receives a beanie from warehouse worker Val (Ameenah Kaplan) and is unsure if she intended it as a romantic gift or simply one of friendship .

" Special Project " introduced a six @-@ episode arc which featured several of the office workers working on a special project for Sabre in Tallahassee , Florida . The episode received largely positive reviews from critics , with many reviewers looking forward to the " special projects " storyline . The ending scene featuring Cathy 's phone conversation about Jim and Pam 's marriage has also received significant attention from critics . According to Nielsen Media Research , " Special Project " drew 5 @.@ 16 million viewers and received a 2 @.@ 5 rating / 6 % share in the 18 ? 49 demographic , marking a three @-@ tenths drop in ratings from the previous episode , " Jury Duty , " and becoming one of the lowest @-@ rated episodes of the series . Despite this , it was the highest @-@ rated NBC series of the night .

= = Plot = =

Just as Pam Halpert 's (Jenna Fischer) maternity leave ends and Angela Martin (Angela Kinsey) also returns , Dwight Schrute (Rainn Wilson) is assigned with the task of forming a team and traveling down to Florida for three weeks to help Sabre launch a chain of retail stores . He and Andy Bernard (Ed Helms) must select employees to accompany Dwight to Tallahassee . At first Dwight chooses Darryl Philbin (Craig Robinson) , Phyllis Vance (Phyllis Smith) , Toby Flenderson (Paul Lieberstein) , Angela Martin (Angela Kinsey) , and Oscar Martinez (Oscar Nunez) , but Andy refuses to let so many essential employees leave for three weeks . While letting Dwight have Darryl and Phyllis , Andy chooses Kelly Kapoor (Mindy Kaling) , Kevin Malone (Brian Baumgartner) and Cathy Simms (Lindsey Broad) to join the team instead , upsetting Dwight . Dwight then prematurely announces the picks and deliberately riles up the employees , hoping to change the team . Andy decides to let people convince him why they should go before making his final decision .

Meanwhile Jim Halpert (John Krasinski) receives a text from Robert California inviting him on the trip to Tallahassee . After unsuccessfully trying to back out via text , Jim and Pam both agree Jim should just go . During Jim 's request session with Andy and Dwight , Jim shows the texts from California , shocking both Andy and Dwight , making it all but official that Jim will be going to Tallahassee . The final team includes Cathy , Ryan Howard (B.J. Novak) , Stanley Hudson (Leslie David Baker) , Erin Hannon (Ellie Kemper) and Jim , infuriating Dwight . At first he tries to convince the members to change their minds , but after realizing they all have excellent ideas for the project , he is content with the team .

Erin expresses frustration that Andy is still with Jessica . After Andy and Dwight jointly choose her for the project team , she relates in a talking head that she is not going to return to Scranton once she arrives in Florida . At the end of the episode , it is revealed that Cathy has ulterior motives for the trip , intending to seduce Jim while the two are in Florida together , stating , during a cell phone conversation to an unidentified friend , that " ... Definitely we will . It 's three weeks in Tallahassee . What else is there to do ? "

Darryl discovers warehouse worker Val (Ameenah Kaplan) has knitted him a beanie . Unsure if she intended it as a romantic gift or simply one of friendship , Darryl decides to find out by giving her a Valentine 's Day gift of an expensive pair of cashmere ladies ' gloves with a romantic card . Upon discovering that Val had knitted a beanie for everyone in the warehouse , an embarrassed Darryl

passes the gloves off to warehouse worker Nate (Mark Proksch) , who 's moved by the gift . Darryl is further disappointed when a man named Brandon calls asking for the address of the warehouse to send flowers to his girlfriend Val . He 's intrigued , however , when she says the flowers were from her mother , despite him pointing out the caller had had a deep voice and gone by the name Brandon . Darryl decides Val 's gift was " a love beanie " .

= = Production = =

The episode was written by story editor Amelie Gillette , her second writing credit for the series after joining the writing staff in the seventh season . It was directed by series producer and editor David Rogers , his fifth directing credit for the series . The episode also marks the eighth appearance of Lindsey Broad , who plays Cathy , Pam 's replacement during her maternity leave . She appeared in a recurring role for the season , after she initially appeared in " Pam 's Replacement " . She makes an appearance in the episode , despite the fact that Pam arrives back in work , which is referenced in the episode by Meredith Palmer . The episode introduced a six @-@ episode arc which featured several of the office workers working on a special project for Sabre in Tallahassee , Florida . The Season Eight DVD contains a number of deleted scenes from this episode . Notable cut scenes include more clips of Dwight forming his group , Cathy mentioning a former boyfriend to the camera , and more clips of the office workers attempting to join the special projects group .

= = Cultural references = =

Stanley says that he 's the only one in the office who watches the television series , Burn Notice . Dwight says after finishing work on the special project in Florida , they will be able to go visit Cape Canaveral and go sea kayaking with Gloria Estefan . While attempting to convince his group not to go to Florida , pictures of Casey Anthony , Katherine Harris , Brooke Hogan and Tony Montana are used .

= = Reception = =

= = = Ratings = = =

The episode first aired on NBC in the United States on February 9 , 2012 . The episode was viewed by an estimated 5 @.@ 16 million viewers and received a 2 @.@ 5 rating / 6 % share among adults between the ages of 18 and 49 . This means that it was seen by 2 @.@ 5 % of all 18- to 49 @-@ year @-@ olds , and 6 % of all 18- to 49 @-@ year @-@ olds watching television at the time of the broadcast . This marked a three @-@ tenths drop in the ratings from the previous episode , " Jury Duty " . The episode finished third in its time slot , being beaten by Grey 's Anatomy which received a 3 @.@ 9 rating / 10 % share and the CBS drama Person of Interest which received a 3 @.@ 3 rating / 8 % share in the 18 ? 49 demographic . The episode beat the Fox drama series The Finder and The CW drama series The Secret Circle . Despite this , " Special Project " was the highest @-@ rated NBC television episode of the night . After DVR usage was taken into account , the episode increased its viewership by 64 % , being viewed by a total of 7 @.@ 842 million viewers .

= = = Critical response = = =

" Special Project " received mainly positive reviews from critics , with many looking forward to the " special projects " plotline . The A.V. Club reviewer Myles McNutt praised the episode and the introduction of the special projects plotline , comparing it to the third season arc featuring Jim in Stamford , Connecticut , and the " Michael Scott Paper Company " arc from the fifth season . He praised the episode for feeling " like a big answer to many of the issues that have plagued the show so far this season " , specifically pointing to Dwight 's meta @-@ commentary on Cathy 's " lack of

personality ". He moreover wrote that he was looking forward to the rest of the season and the change in dynamic . Despite this , he criticized Dwight 's role in the episode , comparing his orientation to Michael 's conference room lectures and wrote he had a " distaste " for the broader moments for the character . He ultimately gave the episode an A- , his highest grade for an eighth @-@ season episode .

New York writer Michael Tedder gave the episode a positive review for avoiding the " cutesy " moments that were featured in the first half of the season . He praised several of the cast members ' performances in the episode , including Ellie Kemper and Mark Proksch . He also complimented the sub @-@ plot featuring Darryl and Val , but wrote that the producers should just get the two together , because " Not every ongoing plotline needs to last all season " . IGN writer Cindy White wrote a positive review for the episode for allowing the " less prominent characters of the ensemble " to get some lines in the episode , specifically mentioning Stanley and Ryan . She also complimented the Darryl @-@ Val subplot , writing that they 're one of the few romantic pairings on the show that she 's " rooting " for . She ultimately gave the episode an 8 @. @ 0 / 10 , calling it " impressive " .

However , not all reviews were positive . Lizzie Fhur of Buzz Sugar wrote that while the " special projects " storyline has potential , " this week just kind of landed flat for me " . Brian Marder of Hollywood called the episode a " giant step back " , especially following the previous episode which he called " promising " . He wrote that the jokes and story of the episode went " nowhere " and he criticized the episode for its loud , " laugh @-@ track @-@ worthy " jokes compared to the early seasons of the series that featured more subtle humor . Despite the mostly negative review , he wrote that he hoped the episode would lead to a better storyline in the following episodes . The ending scene featuring Cathy 's phone conversation about Jim and Pam 's marriage has also received significant attention . Cindy White criticized the suggestion that Cathy will break Jim and Pam , calling it a " cheap plow " and that if Cathy and Jim would have an affair , it would cause " serious damage to [Jim 's] character " , while Myles McNutt felt it would allow Cathy to become an actual character in the series .