

Sarah Kendzior: I'm Sarah Kendzior, the author of the bestselling essay collection, *The View from Flyover Country* and the upcoming book *Hiding in Plain Sight*.

Andrea Chalupa: I'm Andrea Chalupa, a filmmaker and journalist, and a writer and the producer of the upcoming journalistic thriller, *Mr. Jones*.

Sarah Kendzior: This is Gaslit Nation, a podcast covering corruption in the Trump Administration and rising autocracy around the world. We're an independent podcast supported by our listeners and we encourage you to sign up for our Patreon to keep the show going and to get extra bonus features. So today Andrea is interviewing a special guest for the show. Do you want to tell us more about who we've got on Andrea?

Andrea Chalupa: We have Congresswoman Barbara Lee here today to help inspire us with her example of moral courage. People are throwing around the term "democracy fatigue" or "democracy depression" because the news has been horrendous and autocracy is on the rise worldwide and democracy is on the decline. If you talk to people from vulnerable communities, historically marginalized communities like black women, they do not have the luxury of democracy depression or democracy fatigue. They have to keep fighting because it's their lives and their children's lives that are on the line and so we need to join them. Victories are not won overnight. Success is not a clear upward line. There is going to be moments of horror and there's going to be moments of hope and we just have to stay in the game. We have to stay engaged and we have to keep fighting for our future and our children's future.

Andrea Chalupa: We have no choice. Nobody has the luxury of giving up. Address your own despair by going to the Gaslit Nation action guide on gaslitnationpod.com and we have so many choices there. Just pick one area and stay engaged with that one community and keep showing up for each other and refuse to abandon each other and to help us stay engaged heading into 2020. The biggest battle we have yet ahead of us, 2020. Congresswoman Barbara Lee is going to share her stories on how she refuses to give up. How she refuses to give into her despair. How she is committed to showing up for us in all that she does. Her example is one that we all can take great heart in. She is most famously of course the single member of Congress—we're talking about both the House and the Senate—the only member of Congress to vote against authorizing the use of force in response to 9/11. This was her single stance, the entire U.S. Congress standing up against what became Bush's Forever Wars.

Andrea Chalupa: She went through harassment and death threats because of that. She stood strong and she of course, as anybody paying attention to the time, was on the right side of history. So she's going to help us hold on to our own courage as we enter 2020 so we can all be on the right side of history. So a generation from now we can tell our children and grandchildren what we did to try to stop the Trump Crime Family and hold them accountable and take them out of power. The eyes of history are on us now as we enter 2020. It's important to note that the Washington Post just came out with an incredible report from the

Washington Post I'm reading now, "a controversial trove of government documents obtained by the Washington Post reveals that senior U.S. officials failed to tell the truth about the war in Afghanistan throughout the 18 year campaign, making rosy pronouncements they knew to be false and hiding unmistakable evidence the war had become unwinnable."

Andrea Chalupa: Well, okay. So that's where we are now with Afghanistan that that has been confirmed by the Washington Post. Barbara Lee did not need to know that then. Back in 2001, she had moral courage. She had common sense. She had empathy and that's where true leadership comes from. That's where we all need to center ourselves now and she walks us through an incredibly important inspiring conversation.

Sarah Kendzior: Yeah. I just want to add one thing, just to kind of situate our listeners. You interviewed Congresswoman Lee in early November and we're recording this introduction on December 16th, Monday. The House is scheduled to vote on Articles of Impeachment on Wednesday and you should be hearing this episode about two weeks from now. So God knows what's going to happen between then and now. There's supposed to be protests. The Senate is looking for a show trial. There's going to be, I think, a lot of dark and dramatic moments over the next few weeks and certainly going into 2020. So I'm glad we have Barbara Lee on the show because I think that there are two qualities that you need to kind of get through this time and she has them. One of them is foresight—the ability to kind of look at a situation objectively, to try to look into the future, to see the big picture, and to envision the worst outcome.

Sarah Kendzior: A lot of people mistake that ability as pessimism or fatalism, but it's not. It's inactive compassionate realism. The reason to envision the worst possible outcome is to avoid it. It's to look at every kind of contingency, everything that could go wrong, and think what can I do to protect people? What can I do to stop suffering? What can I do to strengthen our own position as a country and as human beings? The other quality that I think is admirable here is defiance. It's the willingness to go at it alone. Even if you're in the minority in seeing these things and seeing the situation for what it is or how potentially bad it could be, even if everyone is yelling at you and calling you names. You need to stay strong, you need to stand with your principles, and you need to show moral courage. I think that in this case she certainly exemplifies that. So for those who think that the government is currently bereft of these qualities, we have someone thankfully who is showcasing them right here.

Andrea Chalupa: Yes. Without question. I want to just share also as you may recall from previous episodes, I organized a fundraiser for Congresswoman Lee because she's working hard to build a more progressive union. She's raising money for not just her own reelection campaign as a representative from California, but also to help elect more progressive leaders, bring more Progressives into Congress. The way we're going to defeat Trump is by defeating Trumpism, rooting out corruption at the core of it, and building a freer and fairer America for all, preventing people from falling through the safety net, the fraying social safety

net that we have. The Republicans have been chipping away at for many years. So it's all about strengthening what unites us and building a more progressive union race by race, election cycle after election cycle and thinking larger than Trump. That is how we defeat the Trump Crime Family because as we keep saying on this show, Ivanka Trump is next.

Andrea Chalupa: Ivanka Trump is next. They really want her to be the first woman President. Okay? So we need to stop that from happening by getting at the root of what even got Trump elected in the first place. That is corruption. That is growing income inequality. And the solution to defeating Trumpism is building a more progressive union. So I hope you will join me in donating to Barbara Lee's PAC to help get more Progressives elected. That is the One Voice Pact and you can find the link to donate to her at the top of our show notes for this interview for this episode. I think it's important that going into 2020 we think larger than Trump because even if he steals another election, which could happen, we have to at the very least make progress on the state level and bring in more Progressive into Congress, take over more state governments, turn more states blue.

Andrea Chalupa: The only power we have left in this uncertain time is grassroots power. That's the most reliable power we have. Barbara Lee is very much a champion of grassroots power. So I hope you'll join me in supporting her. Thank you so much for joining us on Gaslit Nation.

Barbara Lee: Glad to be with you and really look forward to talking with you.

Andrea Chalupa: Well, I'm grateful for the time we have. I think the most important question that we want to start off with is obviously we're living in a time where we need greater moral courage. Your story exemplifies that. You are of course, famously the lone vote in the entire Congress against authorizing military force in reaction to 9/11. What advice do you have for all of the brave patriots right now who are on the front lines of an extraordinarily corrupt White House and are under grave threat and pressures? What advice do you have for those who are faced with all that immense pressure and how did you dare to stand alone and what was that experience like and what advice do you have to pass on?

Barbara Lee: Well, I think it's very important, especially now, to do the right thing and tell the truth. That's what I tried to do when I voted alone, unfortunately, against the 2001 authorization to use force. I read that resolution. It was 60 words and it did provide a blank check to any President to use force to start wars forever. So it set the stage for perpetual war. Now, one has to follow the Constitution as an elected official and I knew that this was unconstitutional and that it would take Congress out of the mix because we have a responsibility to authorize or not authorize wars, but I also know it's important to follow your conscience and stand up and be counted. It's in the tough moments like right after 9/11 that I'm reminded of today when we talk about what it takes.

Barbara Lee: That is be truthful, be honest to yourself, and understand what is required of us if we're going to truly move forward and make sure that we fight for peace and

security and liberty and justice for all. That moment again is here with this Trump Administration, which is a very dangerous administration and which is violating the Constitution, has pushed our democracy to the brink, and knows no boundaries. It's a lawless administration. So it's time for us to speak out, stay strong, and fight hard to make sure that this administration is no more.

Andrea Chalupa: You faced death threats for that lone vote. It was a time of great hysteria and the Far Right was getting their base frothed up. How did you navigate that? You and your family?

Barbara Lee: Well, I have to just thank the Capitol police and all of the security forces and individuals who really provided that circle of protection for me. It was very difficult because I had death threats, phone calls, emails, people harassed me, my family, and we got through it. It was not easy. Of course I'm a person of faith and so I pray and there's a scripture in Ephesians that reminded me of what I had to do. That was just stand. Paraphrasing, it says, when all hell is breaking loose around you and all of the evil forces are after you, you just stand and this too shall pass. It did, but it took a heck of a lot. It took a lot of friends, family, the security, the police, the Capitol police, and a lot of people to really watch my back and they still watch my back.

Barbara Lee: I'm very grateful for that because for most members of Congress if you're on the cutting edge, speaking out, trying to move the country forward instead of backwards, people are very exposed and that doesn't stop us, but we just have to be careful and know what we're doing and keep fighting the good fight.

Andrea Chalupa: So you and your dear friend, Congresswoman Maxine Waters, are quite close in the Congress and you're both on the front lines and speaking your truth with your community inside the Congress. How are you both navigating this bizarre, surreal terrain that we're now in?

Barbara Lee: Well, first Congresswoman Waters, Chairwoman Waters, she chairs the Financial Services Committee and she is always though stood for impeaching this lawless, unconstitutional President. So she's been able to navigate both without giving up her principle. She's a great chair, she's looking out for consumers, she's looking out for the homeless. She's looking out for making sure that Wall Street is reigned in in terms of the financial issues that she addresses and that working men and women are dealt the policies that would result in more equality, economic equality. So she does all of this each and every day, but yet she holds her ground and stands her principles as it relates to what's constitutional and what isn't. So we can do both. I'm a member of the leadership, first African American woman ever. I serve on the Appropriations Committee, Vice Chair of the State and Foreign Operations Subcommittee, which funds all of our international efforts that are non defense.

Barbara Lee: I know the legislative process very well and how to navigate being inside a body and how to move to a point where we can get agreement because we have to do the people's work and we're working for the people. We don't have to give

up our principles. I know what my bottom line is and so I think it's important for people to know whether elected, whether activists, whether both, which I consider myself, or whomever to know what your principles are, what your values are. Then you work between all of that and you start as a Progressive. I'm certainly not going to start in the middle because if I start in the middle on any policy, the only place to go is to the Right and when you have an extreme Right Wing government and Republicans in Congress, you've got to start where you should be and that's at a progressive position so you have wiggle room to move. And they're going to move and that's how you really solve problems.

Andrea Chalupa: We talk a lot about the power of community on this show. You came up through the grassroots movement in Oakland and you are under immense pressure by the FBI for your activism. Could you talk a little bit about that pressure, how you learned to handle it and the power of community?

Barbara Lee: Sure, and the power of community is everything. That's what democracy is about. Yes, coming from Oakland, California, power to the people. That was the slogan of the Black Panther Party. I was a community worker with the Black Panther Party. I wasn't a member, but I was a community worker. I bagged groceries, sold newspapers, participated in survival rallies. I was Bobby Seale's Campaign Finance Chair when he ran for mayor of Oakland. So I worked in the community and I was also President of the Black Student Union. So it was important for me during that time to make sure that my activism drove my work. Also I had a class in government where I invited the first African American woman elected to Congress to my class, well to the student body and she was running for President and that was Shirley Chisholm. She encouraged me to register to vote.

Barbara Lee: It's a long story, but bottom line is I passed a class that I was going to flunk because part of the requirement was to work in a campaign and I was going to flunk because I wasn't going to work in McGovern Humphrey campaign. So what happened during that period of time in my life was that I was mentored by a great woman, great black Progressive woman, who encouraged me to participate in politics and register to vote.

Andrea Chalupa: That's wonderful. So Shirley Chisholm, she was so outspoken, fighting on two fronts against the patriarchy and against white supremacy and what were some of the most important things you learned from Shirley Chisholm?

Barbara Lee: That's what we're still fighting. She taught us very quickly. She taught me that you can't tinker around the edges. You've got to change the rules of the game. You've got to fight for systemic and institutional change. Shirley Chisholm was a great woman. She spoke fluent Spanish, she was an educator, she was against the Vietnam War. She wanted to crack that cycle of poverty. She was a person who had to work inside this House of Representatives as a black woman, the very first and God knows, I saw how she did that. Here now we have 20 probably 23, 24 phenomenal black women in the Black Caucus and more women of color. We're still fighting this male-dominated institution, but

because of Shirley Chisholm and others, Bella Abzug and others, we've made a lot of progress.

Barbara Lee: Shirley Chisholm took it on and she took it on big time and she would not back down. She always said, she was confronted with sexism and racism and she made sure that every speech she gave, every policy she championed, every bit of her work reflected her sentiment and her fight to break down these barriers, not just tinker around the edges and put band-aids on solutions.

Andrea Chalupa: So speaking of that, could you speak a little bit about the social conditions that you think contributed to the rise of Trump?

Barbara Lee: Well, the rise of Trump. I tell you, I've thought about this a lot and when you look at it first in terms of the election, Hillary won what by 3 million votes. So Trump really didn't win the popular vote. Secondly, Donald Trump, he won by what 80,000 votes? These votes were in key precincts where you had young people and people of color. So often times, I think about how he was elected. He had his hardcore base and then those who did not vote elected Donald Trump. I think the country is tired of the whole inequality that is felt both in rural and in urban communities. They're tired of racism and white supremacy.

Barbara Lee: I think many people may have thought that at least he would speak to their issues in terms of the wage gap and in terms of unemployment, in terms of making sure that they had access to the American Dream. I think they were, quite frankly, tricked. So, I see the pendulum swinging back. His hardcore supporters are going to be there, but I think there are many Obama supporters who voted for Donald Trump who understand now that that was then, this is now, and know that he has failed them in many, many ways.

Andrea Chalupa: What do you say to cable news pundits that say that a Progressive can't be elected President of the United States?

Barbara Lee: I don't think they really understand the realities of what is taking place in the United States. First of all, the country has become more progressive and when you look at the Progressive Caucus, we're one of the largest caucuses in Congress. When you look at the issues that we have championed, which were considered "progressive issues" or "fringe issues", for instance, the fight for 15. \$15 an hour minimum wage, that's mainstream now. When you talk about universal affordable healthcare, that's mainstream. When you talk about affordable housing, all these issues, climate change. I mean you remember when climate change was only a progressive agenda item, a progressive policy that we had to address? Well now the entire country, with the exception of the corporate Trump people are recognizing that climate change is impacting our planet and impacting our communities in a way that is very unhealthy and very dangerous.

Barbara Lee: That used to be a progressive issue, period. Now it's mainstream America. So I think what we saw in the elections were Progressives coming out to elect people, members of Congress and local and state officials by their turnout and by really making sure that the grassroots movement was there. I believe that the country is a lot more progressive when you look at the issues, when you look at the fact that 77% of the country believes that abortion should be accessible and safe, when you look at the fact that the majority of people really believe that income inequality is a big issue, and that CEO compensation is off the scale and needs to be reigned in. These are American values that some would see as progressive values, but believe you me now the movement has made them mainstream values.

Andrea Chalupa: Yes, absolutely. I mean it's the grassroots level that matters and I think when you talk to people without that cable news bubble filter, we have a lot more in common than what divides us.

Barbara Lee: Absolutely. When you look at what I'm trying to do as an example of repealing the authorization to use military force, the one I voted against Afghanistan 2001 and then Iraq in 2002. Well we got both of these passed in the House of Representatives, defense appropriations, and defense authorization bills and that took a heck of a lot. That took a movement of people for 18 years just to get us to this point. Now of course we don't know what the Senate is going to do, but we got this through the House. So if the Senate takes us out of our bills, then we'll start all over again next year, but building that kind of support in the public in a bipartisan way is really behind these efforts. So it takes time unfortunately, because we want it now. We want to win now and this is a marathon and I'm probably as impatient as most.

Andrea Chalupa: So on that note, what advice do you have for people who are disenchanted with the Democratic establishment and want to leave the party or not vote?

Barbara Lee: Well, my advice is please rethink that because that's where I was when I mentioned that it was Shirley Chisholm who convinced me to register to vote because we need those voices and those people in the Democratic Party to make real change. Otherwise, the voices of others will be heard. I share a lot of these concerns. Let me tell you, I'm on the DNC and I fought hard to have a climate change debate and we lost that. I fought very hard for that because I thought that was absolutely necessary. So I'm constantly trying to push the Democratic Party to be more inclusive, to be more equitable, and to be more progressive. So for those who are disenchanted with the party, I hear you, I see you. I'm still begging you to come in and help me because we need a lot of younger people, people of color, and Progressives to really turn this Democratic Party around and I think it is moving in the correct direction now.

Andrea Chalupa: What advice do you have for people running for office, especially women and especially mothers, because you were a single mother when you were starting your career in public service?

Barbara Lee: Yeah, I was a single mother and I was on public assistance and for the life of me sometimes I wonder how I did it, but it took a lot. It took a village and it took then a government that had a safety net and support systems there so I could go to college, take care of my kids, and move on and get a job as a Chief of Staff to a great member of Congress, Ron Dellums. So I say that women have several hurdles to which I still have myself and that's money. Money in politics is a barrier and it's very discriminatory against women because, to this second, my fundraising as an African American woman progressive on the appropriations committee on steering and policy. I still don't raise the kind of money that white guys do who have been here with less seniority, less clout, and don't really have to work as hard as I do to raise money.

Barbara Lee: So women and through women's organizations and developing PACs such as Emily's List and all of the other financial infrastructure, women can do it. I would say just break out if you want to run for office based on your record of service. I wouldn't suggest anyone just deciding to run to run. You have to have a record. People have to recognize how brilliant you are and how passionate and compassionate and how community-oriented you are. Then don't wait until someone says it's your time. If you think that there's an opponent that deserves to be challenged or if you think in an open seat, you can win, then you can put it together. Women are very creative. We have to do it all. Again, going back to when I was on public assistance. I had to do it all and it was really, really hard then.

Barbara Lee: It's really, really hard now. That's not going to deter me. As a black woman, I mean we've been through so much in this country that this is just another one of those things you have to fight to overcome. I'm so proud of black women and what they're doing throughout the country. Finally, running for public office. Running for the Presidency and just saying, we're not going to wait anymore. Electing candidates that would never have won without African American women. So now it's our time to run for office and to insist that the powers to be and the status quo know that we're here to stay.

Andrea Chalupa: What advice do you have for people, all American citizens entering 2020, a year that has never felt so high stakes?

Barbara Lee: The stakes are very high, most important election ever. Register to vote, get organized, mobilized, get involved, like now. I mean we need to start voter education and mobilization today. So please don't just let others do this. Your voice is important and your involvement and your ability to organize, register people to vote, support the candidates who you think will best represent you. Don't sit this one out. As we say in my district, we have to stay woke because being woke right now means that we're not sleeping through another election and not allowing Donald Trump and his really reactionary white supremacist agenda to continue as it is now.

Andrea Chalupa: So you have a PAC that you started to expand the squad to help bring more Progressives into leadership. Could you tell us a little bit about that?

Barbara Lee: Sure. My PAC, I started several years ago and it's called One Voice and we decided to call it One Voice because we thought that it was only by unifying and by coming together, speaking with one voice that we could elect Progressives, women, women of color to Congress, and it's a PAC that I raise money for and it's again, hard to raise money, but we're raising money. Not for Barbara Lee for Congress through my PAC, but to help other women. We have some phenomenal women that we elected last time. My PAC helped a lot of these women. We have 47 women of color now and we have probably the most diverse Congress ever in history.

Barbara Lee: I think it's 37% in terms of women of color serving in Congress. So PACs such as One Voice really helps do that. We have specific criteria with my PAC. It's a PAC that reflects. We don't support everyone, but we support LGBTQI individuals, people of color, women, people who reflect a progressive agenda, and who support for instance, a woman's right to reproductive health and reproductive choice, or individuals who are running for office who support gun safety, or individuals running for office who are supporting the equality act. So we have some specific guidelines and standards that as Progressives, my PAC will or will not support candidates who do or do not reflect those values.

Andrea Chalupa: Are there any candidates we should look out for in 2020 that are supported by your PAC?

Barbara Lee: Right now we're in the process of looking at all of the candidates, but there are several women who we're looking at and several people. Actually, there's several candidates in New York. Right now we're still discussing that. So I don't want to go into and preempt what the PAC is going to do, but they're definitely going to play big time in this next election.

Andrea Chalupa: Fantastic. So how can people support it?

Barbara Lee: Well, people can support it by sending money to my PAC. Of course, I would have to give them the contact information. I think if you could give them that later, because I don't have it in front of me how to do that. A contribution to my PAC would be extremely helpful.

Andrea Chalupa: I imagine every little bit helps.

Barbara Lee: Hey, let me tell you. I pride myself on low donor donations. I mean if I had like 50,000 donors who contributed \$10 a month, we would be off and running. So any amount, any amount that's consistent, any one time donation, every dime counts. So I thank anyone who wants to contribute and advance and just know that your money will be used to support really great individuals who are seen as having the ability to win these elections.

Andrea Chalupa: Fantastic, and bring the much needed systemic change to make our democracy Trump-proof.

Barbara Lee: That's why we have elections. That's why we support candidates because we've got to. We've got to shake the system up, Andrea, you know that. I mean we're electing candidates who are going to do just that because our democracy is very fragile right now. We're on the brink and I hate to think about where we could go if in fact Donald Trump were reelected. So it's a defining moment. It's a critical moment and it's a very scary moment. Having said that, yes, we're going to elect great candidates and we're going to elect a Democrat to the White House and we're going to move forward not backwards as Donald Trump has tried to take us.

Andrea Chalupa: Yes. I've always thought that progress can be delayed, but it can't be stopped. So we always have to take the long view and I think nobody knows that better than, I mean obviously we're all impatient. We all need human rights now and equality now, but obviously the struggle for equality and justice for black women has been such a long, hard fight. It's been an exhausting fight and it's been going on generation after generation. What advice do you have if the worst should happen, if he should steal the election in 2020 or the electoral college just comes down to just those few swing states that go his way. What advice do you have for us Americans if that should happen? How should we react in that moment?

Barbara Lee: I'm not even thinking about that right now. I really can't even fathom this happening, so I've got to stay focused on what we can do. I know we can win and I know we will win. So if we don't, then we have to decide. We have to be prepared for anything. I'm confident that with what's going on here in Washington DC in terms of the inquiry, impeachment inquiry hearings, that people are really beginning to see the truth about what this administration is. That they're lawless, they're not upholding our Constitution. I don't believe the public really wants to reelect a criminal, somebody who has really in many ways destroyed our system of Checks and Balances, re-elected to the White House.

Andrea Chalupa: Well, we're not going to know for sure unless we work hard for that outcome.

Barbara Lee: Yeah. That's what I'm encouraging people to do. Like starting now. Not tomorrow, but today.

Andrea Chalupa: Excellent. Well thank you so much for your time, Congresswoman Barbara Lee. We will share information on your PAC, One Voice, so we can get started now in making our democracy Trump proof.

Barbara Lee: Thank you very much. Nice talking with you.

Andrea Chalupa: Our discussion continues and you can get access to that by signing up on our Patreon at the truth teller level or higher.

Sarah Kendzior: We want to encourage our listeners to donate to RAICES, a Texas-based nonprofit agency that provides free and low cost legal services to underserved

immigrant children, families, and refugees. They're helping with the crisis facing migrant families at the Texas border and need your support.

Andrea Chalupa: We also encourage you to donate to help critically endangered orangutans already under pressure from the palm oil industry. Donate to the orangutan project at theorangutanproject.org. Gaslit Nation produced by Sarah Kendzior and Andrea Chalupa. If you like what we do, leave us a review on iTunes. It helps us reach more listeners and check out our Patreon. It keeps us going.

Sarah Kendzior: Our production managers are Nicholas Torres and Karlyn Daigle. Our episodes are edited by Nicholas Torres and our Patreon exclusive content is edited by Karlyn Daigle.

Andrea Chalupa: Original music in Gaslit Nation produced by David Whitehead, Martin Visonberg, Nick Farr, Damian Arriaga, and Karlyn Daigle.

Sarah Kendzior: Our logo design was donated to us by Hamish Smyth of the New York based firm Order. Thank you so much, Hamish.