

## **Gaslit Nation**

### The Blue Wave Continues: Kansas Rising

Andrea Chalupa

Sarah Kendzior

*[Audio Clip]*

*Emmanuel Macron: Souvenons-nous! N'oublions pas! Car le souvenir de ces sacrifices nous exhorte à être dignes de ceux qui sont morts pour nous, pour que nous puissions vivre libres! Souvenons-nous, ne retranchons rien de ce qu'il y avait de pureté, d'idéal, de principes supérieurs dans le patriotisme de nos aînés. Cette vision de la France comme Nation généreuse, de la France comme projet, de la France porteuse de valeurs universelles, a été dans ces heures sombres exactement le contraire de l'égoïsme d'un peuple qui ne regarde que ses intérêts. Car le patriotisme est l'exact contraire du nationalisme : le nationalisme est la trahison. En disant « nos intérêts d'abord et qu'importent les autres ! », on gomme ce qu'une Nation a de plus précieux, ce qui la fait vivre, ce qui la porte à être grande, ce qui est le plus important : ses valeurs morales.*

*Speaker 2: Let us remember, let us not forget because the remembrance of these sacrifices urges us to worthy of those who died for us so that we may live free. Let us remember, let us take away nothing from what was pure, the ideals and the lofty principles of our elders' patriotism, this vision of France as a generous nation, of France's project as France the bearer the universal values, was*

*displayed during these dark hours, as they very opposite of the selfishness of a nation which only looks after its own interests, because patriotism is the exact opposite of nationalism. Nationalism is a betrayal of patriotism by saying, "Our interests first, who cares about the others?" We erase what a nation holds dearest, what gives it life, what makes it great, is essential: its moral values.*

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[Theme music]

Sarah Kendzior: Hi! I'm Sarah Kendzior. I'm a journalist and scholar and the author of the book *The View from Flyover Country*.

Andrea Chalupa: I'm Andrea Chalupa, a writer, journalist, and filmmaker.

Sarah Kendzior: This is Gaslit Nation. We're a podcast covering corruption and the Trump administration and the rise of authoritarianism around the world.

Andrea Chalupa: And today, we have a rare guest appearance by... hope! We have some hope on the show this week. So [laughs] the blue wave continues, and I'm still on the blue wave steroids, which is really funny, cause Sarah and I were talking about how the media, because—maybe because many in the pundit class aren't going to be impacted by this far-right takeover, directly, anyway,

economically, their communities aren't on the front lines of the hatred that's been empowered under this whole Trump, rise of Trump, that they called the election too early by saying, "Oh, the blue wave didn't show up." Not only did it show up, but it's still going. [Laughs] So check out this beautiful thing: so from WaPo—from the Washington Post—Democrats appear poised to pick up between 35 and 40 seats in the House once the last races are tallied. That would represent the biggest Democratic gain in the House since the post-Watergate election of 1974. Even Josh Barro, the business columnist for New York Mag, wrote, "We haven't processed the magnitude of the political shift in Texas. It's not just Beto coming close. It's the House races, Dems picking up 14 seats in the state legislature. Close down ballot statewide races. Dems only need to gain a little more ground in Texas to win there." So again, what we saw in the 2018 was an incredible, important shift, moving the ball further down the field, so to speak, to use a football metaphor, which I don't often do, but in these extreme times I will, we're getting closer. We're building infrastructure. We're building a foundation that we're gonna continue to build on and benefit [from] for races to come. Now let's look at the Senate. According to Rep. Eric Swalwell, the Senate Republicans had the best Senate map in 100 years. There were 35 seats up for reelection in 2018, 26 held by Democrats. This is me talking now. For Republicans, this was like taking candy from a baby, which they probably literally did on the border, when they had children kidnapped from their families. Next up, in 2020, Republicans will have to defend 22 seats, compared to just 12 held by Democrats. So we have them in the crosshairs for 2020. The Senate could be

ours if we work hard enough. Now keep in mind, Paul Ryan is gone, Bob Goodlatte, whose own son [laughs] spoke out against him, said, "Do not vote for my dad," Bob Goodlatte was the representative who tried to get rid of the ethics watchdog in the House and spun it as some great, Orwellian thing that would improve government. No, that was a horror show when he tried to do that. Jason Chavez, thank God, is gone. Rohrabacher, Putin's Congressman, was defeated. Never thought that could ever happen. He's, he's held that seat. Scott Walker was defeated, Governor of Wisconsin, his own terrible voting rules, like, you know, making it harder to call a recount, kept him from calling a recount. That's just beautiful poetic justice. Now Susan Collins of Maine is next, and Steve King, we, we can get them this time around. We nearly got Steve King this time. So let's finish them off in 2020 by keeping the House, taking the Senate and the White House. If we continue to work hard, and, and work smart, we could soon be under one-party rule again. And that will be the party of a far more progressive Democratic Party. And that is when the real work begins. Because climate change is coming for us. So another thing we can celebrate: Jeff Flake, who lived up to his name as the flakiest Senator, pretending to care but then voting for Trump's agenda anyway, voting for Kavanaugh, even after an emotional confrontation by survivors pleading with him not to. Jeff Flake will be out of the Senate come January. He chose not to run, cause of course he's a coward, and Democrat Kyrsten Sinema will take his place. A woman with moral courage. That is incredible. And that is hard work that did that, and we will have to continue to work hard if we want to continue these amazing victories.

Another blue wave miracle: Mike Espy, a Democrat, could pull a Doug Jones in Mississippi. There's a video of his Republican challenger, Cynthia Hyde-Smith, saying, "If he invited me to a public hanging, I'd be on the front row." That's disgusting. So let's keep that bigot out of the Senate, please. Mike Espy needs volunteers, he needs people to make phone calls, send postcards, so check out his website on how to volunteer. We're very close to a blue wave miracle in Mississippi, so let's remember: never underestimate the power of hard work. That's what got us all this. The blue wave, of course, could have been even bigger if there wasn't such a gerrymandered map. So let's turn to the recounts happening. Gillum pulled his concession, and, in, in Georgia Stacey Abrams isn't giving up. She's fighting for a runoff. The recounts happening now in Florida and Georgia are not just recounts. They're movements. They're creating important political infrastructure to confront all the racist attacks on our voting rights that have gone on in those states for several years. So we need those movements to continue, and there are positives, cause those are pretty red states. Florida, of course, is a swing state, and it's gonna be critical in 2020. But there are transformations, important ones, happening on the ground. So how did these transformations happen? A young man in Kansas. So let's look at that. His lesson of the miracle that happened in Kansas. So I'm gonna read this by him, on Twitter. His name is Davis Hammet. His Twitter bio has him as "a professional citizen." He works to do outreach for young voters, and he works as a queer co-creator of Equality House. And so this is the lesson he shared for all of you who feel hopeless in red states, deeply red state, or very bruised purple states, like,

Sarah's red state, Missouri, had a very bad night on, on Election Night. So I hope this, this story from Davis Hammet gives you some hope. Cause I'm reading this for you, Sarah. So he wrote: "Year 2013: I'm a 22-year-old queer who moves to Kansas to paint a rainbow house across from a notorious hate group. I realize the politicians here are more dangerous than the hate group. However, the people seem nothing that the politics that dominate. I start to really like Kansas. My boss asks me when I'm coming back to New York, since this project was supposed to only be a few months. I tell him, 'I think I live in Kansas now.' 2014: The most extreme right-wing, one-sided government in Kansas history is elected. 2015: Brownback rescinds LBGTQ protections by executive order, making it legal to fire and harass LBGTQ state workers. The Kansas government increasingly prejudice and scapegoating to distract from their failing economic experiment. In response, we organize the largest protest in many years. I get messages from gay state workers who are scared for their safety and future. Kansas is a very dark place in this moment. A senator walks by me in the State House and softly mentions how wrong the attacks on the LBGTQ community are. 2016: I leave LBGTQ activism to devote myself completely to voter registration and turnout. I'm convinced that if more of young Kansas voted, things would be different. 2017: A third of the Kansas legislature is newly-elected as a rebuke to Brownback. The first week of session, they're greeted by over 1,000 Kansans screaming, 'Whose house? Our house!' We've united different groups under a Kansas People's Agenda demanding change. The legislature starts to turn things around and activism is growing. The Brownback

experiment is repealed. Some random lady messages me, saying she wants to talk about the future of Kansas. She's pretty great. 2018: That random lady, Sharice Davids, is elected the first LGBTQ Congressperson from Kansas. She gives a victory speech, surrounded by LGBTQ youth: 'I'm overwhelmed, thinking back to how most of my life, I thought accepting my sexuality meant forfeiting my future.' The same night, Brandon Woodard and Susan Ruiz are elected the first LGBTQ Kansas State Representatives. 2019: The Senator who softly spoke words of solidarity to me in 2015, Laura Kelly, is the Governor, and our first executive order is restoring LGBTQ protections to state workers. Nothing. Nothing. Nothing happens by accident. Every drop of decency is fought for."

Sarah Kendzior: Yeah, I'm glad that you've read that because I think sometimes people have an expectation that an election is just a day, you know, that instead of a process—or that change in one direction can't be reversed over time. And I think sometimes there's a tendency to forget what this is like for people, especially for marginalized communities, but generally people who value human rights and freedom and the inherent dignity, you know, of others, what it's like to live under a very repressive legislature that's dedicated to taking away all of that, and the emotional toll that it takes on an individual. So that was a really good thread. And, you know, I've been thinking about all the, the blue wave, and I'm gonna get very, very Missourian everybody, so just bear with me, but just this metaphor of the wave, like—I almost don't like that, cause waves come, and they crash, and they overwhelm, and they can recede. You know, and there's a

sort of sense of immediacy and of overwhelming force. And, you know, what I see this as—and I've been thinking about this, like, when I'm stressed out, as anybody who knows my Twitter would know this about me, you know, I go to the Missouri State Parks—like, I love the Missouri State Parks, and I especially love to go to rivers, and I love to go to caves. And the geology of Missouri is really unusual. You know, there's all these stones that look very secure, everywhere, there's limestone and sandstone. And you see all these bluffs and cliffs and caves. But what they're formed by is the propulsion of rivers, of water, moving over time and changing the formation of the rocks. You know, the rocks are porous. And you can walk on land, and then you can go underground, and you find these amazing caverns that took place over time. You know, from the force of that water, from it growing, and it literally reshapes the landscape around you. And that is what I think, kind of underlies our "blue wave." It's, like, blue rivers. It's blue tributaries. It's, like, the collective force reshaping the ground we walk on, breaking down barriers, in this case barriers of voter suppression, of gerrymandering, of dark money. In widening, you know, the paths that people are able to, to go by, to go from one place to the other. And, you know, just like in Missouri, you know, you'll be walking around, you think you're just in some sort of flat field, and then underneath it, there's just all this stuff going on. You know, underneath it, there's all these geological miracles. That's what I kind of see in Missouri politics. I think there's a lot of things underneath the surface. I feel like there's a lot of activism that's rising up, and, you know, much like our landscape, it can be volcanic, it can have the legacy of past eruptions around

us. It just shows [that] it takes time. Not like we, you know, exactly have time, but that it's not a one-day affair, it's not necessarily drama. It's the accumulation of hard work and effort over time. And, you know, sorry if that got weird and geological on you. You all should visit Missouri. Shout out to the Missouri State Park System, I love you. But that's what I've just been thinking of as I walk around dealing with my own plight in my bright red new legislature, led by Josh Hawley.

Andrea Chalupa: An incredibly deep and important reminder from Sarah, and an important story behind all those beautiful vacation photos she loves to post.

Sarah Kendzior: [Laughs] Yeah.

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[Theme Music]

Sarah Kendzior: Hey, everybody. This is Sarah. If you're like me, and busy trying to save America from an authoritarian takeover, personal style isn't exactly the first thing on your mind. That's why we like Stitch Fix, an online personal styling service that finds and delivers clothes, shoes, and accessories to fit your body, budget, and lifestyle. All you have to do is fill out an online survey and a personal stylist at Stitch Fix does the rest. They send you the clothes, you try them on, pay only for what you love, and return what you don't want. Shipping, exchanges, and returns are always free. There's no subscription required. You can sign up to receive scheduled shipments, or get your fix whenever you want.

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[Theme Music]

Andrea Chalupa: So Davis Hammet. His whole story, at the thread I read, it took five years to build that Kansas miracle. And it began with an art project. It began with being creative. When he came to Kansas, he went to do an incredibly important visibility project. And that was to paint a house rainbow, a house that was across from a hate group. And I remember that story, that news story, when it broke, became a national story. And painting a rainbow house across from a hate group, those visibility projects matter. Creativity, arts, all of it, letting who you are as a person, like all those colors out, that matters. If you look at the revolution in Ukraine, that was essentially a[n] art and music festival. People were facing off with the brutal cold and the violence, the threat of violence, from the riot police, for weeks on end, to protest a brutal, corrupt, pro-Putin, Manafort—Manafort-consulted regime. And meanwhile, the government was passing these dictatorship laws and closing in on them. And they still kept coming out to the square. And what—one thing that was really sustaining their soul[s] was there was music on the square, there were beautiful murals being painted of 19<sup>th</sup> century Ukrainian poets, all modernized. You know, it,

it was just this beautiful celebration of, of humanity out there, on the square in Kiev. And I have a friend who met his wife, another—he's a musician, and he met his wife, who's a musician. They fell into the group of musicians and they played for the protesters, to help, you know, to help lift their spirits. So visibility matters so much, and we need the artists, artists of all walks of life, whether you—whether you're a professional artist or not, doesn't matter. We need the creativity to come out more than ever, because when you make fun of dictators, when you put your light out there, you're gonna attract more light to you. So let me read quickly here a thread that I felt compelled to write on the night Trump was inaugurated, cause it was of course one of the darkest days in America's history, and I hope, if we're successful, it will be always be remembered in history books that way. We'll teach our kids the history of this far-right takeover as a warning, as a lesson to future generations, what the signs of it are, and that, yes, it can happen in America. It did happen in America. So this is a thread I wrote on that night, when I knew that we needed to hear something like this. "This is a thread about hope versus despair. Three years ago, I watched a livestream of riot police beating pro-democracy protesters in Kiev. The first protesters were killed. Meanwhile, CNN was reporting on Justin Bieber's arrest in Miami. I had never felt so helpless. To add to the despair, another livestream showed dolphins being slaughtered by Japanese fishermen. Why is there so much evil and indifference in the world? I curled up in a ball and cried, because the world was a painful place to witness. Instead of feeling helpless, I found kindred spirits online. Together we launched the #DigitalMaidan to help Ukraine. Joining

forces through #DigitalMaidan led to more actions, collaborations for human rights in Ukraine and Russia. Many found each other. It was so unlike my depression after working as a community organizer to stop Bush's reelection. I stayed in that despair far too long. I learned during the revolution in Ukraine to do something instead of nothing, fighting instead of crying. Despair will make a fool of you. Choose hope. If you see the truth, you are not alone. Take any little action you can to shine your light to call to others who also see the truth. We are our own leaders now. We are a nation of leaders rising. The eyes of the world are on us now. We must give them hope. No matter how dark it gets, no matter how often we fail, we must choose hope over despair every time. That is where we find our strength." I wanna to say all those people that really responded to our midterms special, that were calling me an optimist—"Oh, Andrea's such an optimist"—I'm actually—have been through so much hell, and Sarah and I have been talking for, like, almost an hour before recording this episode over how much hell the two of us have been through over the past few years alone. You know, we've had, you know, vicious attacks, and death threats, and just in the work I do, I've gone through failure after failure—I mean, it took me 14 years to raise \$10 million and finally produce my Soviet history screenplay and get that movie made with a three-time Academy Award nominated director. Took 14 years to do that! I went through so much failure. I went through so much humiliating rejection. Like, I had to fight for people to take me seriously. So it's not that I'm an optimist, I have faith in the power of hard work. And I trust my own ability to peel myself off the ground when I don't wanna get out of the

ground and I wanna just stay in bed all day. I know what it's like to get knocked down, repeatedly, and have to force yourself to get back up. So it's not that I'm just some Care Bear optimist. It's that I understand our strength lies, and it's in not giving up, no matter what. It's getting out of bed when you don't feel like it, and it's trusting that even if you lose, even if you go down yet another dead end, that hard work will get you closer to the ultimate goal. And that's what we're unlocking now, together, as a nation. We're all in this together, and we're finding our strengths in the struggle together.

Sarah Kendzior: That's exactly what I was going to say, you know, when you were reading that thread, is it's not hope as in sitting around and wishing that somebody else is going to solve your problems or expecting that to happen. It's taking matters into your own hands, it's doing what's right because it's the right thing to do, you know, you don't need a reason besides that. It's not just about winning. It's being able to live with yourself, no matter what comes. Cause these wins aren't easy, you know, these, these battles are going to be hard fought. You know, we've had progress over this week. You know, we have a reallocation of power, you know, within Congress that, you know, we'll see how effective it is when January comes. But I think that, you know, there is a bit of reawakening, at least on that level of, OK, you know, this is possible, these wins that no one would've foreseen years ago, you know, for example, a Democratic Senator in Arizona, are now happening. But, you know, we're locked in a day-to-day process, a day-to-day battle. I think we've all been knocked down quite a bit over the last two years. I think

anybody who values freedom, who is opposed to hate crimes, who is opposed to corruption, who wants accountability, is feeling pretty battered, but not yet broken. And I think that that's just it. Like, you have to force yourself up, you know, regardless of how you're feeling. That doesn't mean don't take a break, that doesn't mean don't have a support network to get you through all this. We're in the long haul. And, you know, on that note, I think we should discuss what's going on in Georgia and in Florida with the recounts. I'm very glad that Stacey Abrams is standing her ground and has been the whole time, and that Gillum in Florida is as well, where his concession speech did not keep him in any way from demanding a recount, demanding that all votes—in fact, be counted, period. So I'm glad that he's standing up, not just for himself, but for the democratic process. And there's been, you know, a lot of debate about this, you know, Trump has predictably amped up his rhetoric to try to dismiss the counting of votes as illegitimate, as some sort of partisan issue, where it's actually of our democratic process. And this is of course something, you know, everyone knew he was going to do. They knew other Republicans were going to do it, you know, this is a[n] administration that immediately after taking office tried to put together an election fraud department that was based on completely spurious accusations of illegal voting in California. I think it's interesting to kind of remember which states handed over all of their voter data in order to appease his desire to have this voter fraud group. One of those states was my state of Missouri, the one that won't even comply with real ID laws because they saw it violates citizens' privacy, handed over all of voter data to the

Trump administration. [I'm] kind of wondering who did what with that data. But what's been nice to see is that Democrats have grown a spine. We are not back in 2000, we're not having a lot of easy concessions. We're having people demand accountability and realizing that GOP is playing dirty, that they're intent is to have one-party rule, and that they have no interest in a representative democracy. And so I encourage all of those supporting the Democrats who are in tight races who are simply demanding transparency, a full count, full accountability, to keep backing them. They need that support. And we need to not let this go. Cause this is, again, another issue that's going to remain with us until we actually have a comprehensive look at the flaws of our election system, which include traditional voter suppression, the ramifications of the partial repeal of the VRA, and the new ID laws, and other bogus requirements, racist requirements, that were put in play, but also the question of can machines be tampered with? What exactly happened in Texas, when, you know, some Beto voters ended up voting for Cruz before realizing that that's what the machine said. You know, there's a lot of questions that should be examined, that have gone unanswered, in part because they take time to answer. They take thoroughness. I don't think that we should rush to any kind of conclusion, but that this should just be part of our life. It's, it's not a matter of we inherently doubt the integrity of the election process, it's that we need to see that integrity in action. We need transparency. We need to know that we can trust it because we know that the ruling party has no interest in bringing any integrity into that process. We're owed that as citizens. And it shouldn't be thought of as

something optional for us. It should be a necessary requirement of democracy.

Andrea Chalupa: And you had a grassroots, citizens-driven initiative out in Michigan to get rid of gerrymandering in the state. [Laughs] And that's incredible. It started with a Facebook post. It's called "Voters Not Politicians," and that became a ballot initiative to end gerrymandering in that state. So if you wanna understand—you know, yes, I know we have more Democrats in power now, but by depending on them, by waiting for them to save us, you're giving up your own power. So it's really the people who are in charge now. It's not the DNC or Nancy Pelosi or anybody at the top that's driving this. They're benefitting from it, and it's our energy, it's our creativity, it's us putting ourselves out there and choosing to be brave and choosing to unite together and, and find our people. That's what gonna transform our country over time, election cycle after election cycle. We're chipping away, and so I highly encourage everyone to look into ballot measures if you wanna confront gerrymandering in your state, if you wanna build election security in your state, and have paper ballots. If you want automatic, same-day registration, if you wanna clean up this far-right, racist cage that they've put on in some of these states, trying to keep people from voting because they know, the Republicans know, they can't win on the issues alone and that they have to make it harder for people to vote. And so turn to ballot measures. Twenty-six states, as well as Washington D.C. can do ballot measures. So look into that and just see how you can—you and your Indivisible group, your MoveOn.org group,

whatever group you have that you turn to for support in getting the vote out, start taking very seriously researching ballot measures and what you guys can do locally. Follow the example of Michigan. Look up “Voters Not Politicians.” Again, that started with someone’s Facebook post, and now it’s the law of—[laughs] now it’s gonna become law in Michigan. That’s huge. So the power’s in our hands. And never forget that.

Sarah Kendzior: We have this sort of—well, for Andrea—moments of sheer elation after the midterms. But, you know, even for me, in all of my Missouri disappointments, you know, I was very pleased to see the midterm results because, of course, I worried about other scenarios. I worried about just a mass refusal of the GOP to concede. We’re of course seeing that on an individual level, and it’s troubling. We’re seeing it from Trump, which of course a prelude to 2020, when, if he still in office as President then, you should expect him not to concede. You should expect him to, you know, voluntarily leave office, to be blunt, regardless of what the laws are. My point is, you know, we had this nice sort of day that felt good, and I think one of the reasons it felt good is because the whole focus of everybody was on the people of America. It was not just on the politicians, it was certainly not on Trump. It was on what we as voters, as citizens, as Americans, could accomplish. And that lasted about, I don’t know, seven hours, and then Jeff Sessions quit slash was fired slash was pressured to be fired, and the news cycle once again plunged into the hell and destruction of a Trump-led administration. In terms of Sessions, I mean, honestly, like good riddance, bye-bye Bilbo Bigot, like—I, I, I think he’s

possibly the most disgraceful Attorney General we've ever had. He's been in charge of the most brutal policies, you know, including the kidnapping of migrant children at the border. He's a longtime antagonist of civil rights, he is a racist, he's a liar, he's a serial perjurer. He should not be the Attorney General. And I'm glad that he was fired. And some people, you know, reacted to my Tweets saying that he deserved not just to be fired, but, honestly he deserves to be indicted. We need he lied on his clearance forms. We know he met illicitly with a lot of Russian officials. He's implicated, very deeply, in the Trump-Russia probe. So of course he shouldn't be there, and never honored his actual recusal in his role as Attorney General from that probe. He did things, like, went ahead and fired Comey. And so people were saying, no, no, this is very bad, you should, you know, mourn the departure of Jeff Sessions, Sarah, because he was protecting the Mueller probe. I'm sorry, that is total bullshit. Jeff Sessions never, ever had any intention of protecting Mueller from Trump. Because Mueller is very likely after Jeff Sessions. If he's not after Jeff Sessions, then I don't that Mueller's doing his job. You know, because, as I just said, of Sessions's role in his, I think Sessions was in that position, biding his time, trying to make it look like he was following the letter of the law, had no real interest in upholding justice and in bringing Trump to justice, but was just enjoying the chance to abuse his power in that position on an executive level that was never before able to obtain. And yes, it's bad that this threatens that stability of Rosenstein to remain in there, it threatens the ability of Mueller to continue his actions, but in my mind, that was always in jeopardy. And I felt on that day, the day that he stepped down, the whole country was

finally feeling what I have felt for the last year and a half, you know, since Mueller was appointed: that this is just inherently not safe. It is not protected. And, you know, on another initiative, if we're going to start talking about amendments and laws that should be passed, Congress needs to pass a law to protect the Mueller probe and to protect Mueller from being spuriously fired. Because that's absolutely what they're going to do, and it's always what they intended to do. This is just a matter of timing. This is another inevitability. And with Whittaker in there, I don't know whether he'll say, I feel like he's more of a placeholder that's going to be replaced with a more polished and equally terrible individual that will similarly try to shut down the probe, but nothing good comes of Jeff Sessions. Jeff Sessions never does the right thing. So this is not a loss. The loss was already there. The loss was in place from the moment that Trump was inaugurated and we went down this road of autocracy and foreign corruption, and likely treason that we remain on to this day.

Andrea Chalupa: Jeff Sessions got his karma in, in a wonderful way. He, of course, was, I think the first establishment figure to legitimize Trump, to stand by Trump very early on, and then he had meetings with the infamous Russian ambassador, Kislyak, and then repeatedly denied having those meetings later. And, of course, in addition to being just an abject racist, Jeff Sessions getting repeatedly humiliated, publicly, by the monster that he helped create was absolutely what he deserved, and the only inevitable endgame. So his fate, it's, like, if you build a monster, it will eventually turn

around and destroy you. And now a Democrat has his seat in the Senate.

Sarah Kendzior: I mean, I found it unnerving that he remained in that position for such a long period of time. You know, I remember in March of 2017, Flynn had been fired a month before, Sessions had been revealed to lie in his clearance forms, and there were all these rumors, that, yeah of course he's going to be gone, this is such a blatant breach of the law, a breach of protocol, and we have the hard evidence, so he's on his way out. He didn't go anywhere. And then there are endless palace intrigue stories, planted in the New York Times, saying that Sessions was this dignified man, whose, you know, greatest fealty was to law and order, and he and Trump were at odds, you know, that I never bought for a second. They're two white supremacists acting in tandem. You know, yes one of them is more of an establishment figure, you know he's a racist that understands bureaucracy extremely well, but their end goals were the same. And you kind of see the net effect of this in the appointment of people like Stephen Miller, who Jeff Sessions brought in to the Trump campaign and then into the White House, you know, who is a[n] absolute white supremacist, you know, enacting these terrible policies towards immigrants, towards migrants, against black people, against anybody who's not white. An extremely dangerous figure, you know, who should be ousted immediately. You know, that's, that's what Sessions contributed, and I feel like people have normalized this, or played down this threat, but it's extraordinarily dangerous, and we need to be looking at who comes in as the AG, not just in terms of their effect on

the Mueller probe, but in terms of their effect on justice and civil rights. Cause we may well end up with somebody equally bad or worse in that capacity, as well. And this isn't just about winning or losing in the Mueller probe. This is about the quality of life for Americans, for all Americans. And guaranteeing that their rights are upheld, and, you know, this administration has absolutely no desire to do that. I do feel like it's likely that they will try to kill the Mueller probe in a fairly substantial way before January. And I guess my question there is whether the House Intel Committee, now led by the Democrats, likely led by Adam Schiff, who has been a very forceful individual when it comes to investigating illicit ties between Trump and the Kremlin and oligarchs, whether they'll have the capacity to actually bring about change, and actually bring about some indictments or removal of people from office who are obviously compromised. Like, for example, Jared Kushner or something.

Andrea Chalupa: Well, I think obviously this is a[n] FBI that's, that is operating cautiously, and they're taking their hits carefully. Mueller essentially went underground in the weeks leading up to the election. And so now that the election's over and the dust is settling, and Trump has carried out his tantrum, as we all knew he would, by appointing this used car salesman lackey, Whittaker, to replace Jeff Sessions—that was a massive tantrum, there—and if Mueller comes out in the next few weeks with a couple more indictments, and Don Jr., yes, has reason to worry, as many legal experts have pointed out, and if Don Jr. is not indicted in the coming weeks, then something's wrong internally there—

Sarah Kendzior: —yes.

Andrea Chalupa: —and maybe Whittaker coming in is gonna delay things that should've gone into motion? I can't imagine that these guys don't have anticipated the tantrums from Trump, and, and [have] sort of safeguards against them. Some good news is that, of course, the Mueller investigation is funded through 2019, and now that Democrats have the House, we control the purse strings, and what Eric Swalwell was saying on MSNBC the other night, that they're gonna make sure that the GOP doesn't get the budget they want or get anything when it comes to budgetary negotiations, unless there's assurances passed to make sure that Mueller's probe is protected. And that better be protected beyond 2019, because this is a massive crime. Russiagate dwarfs Watergate, and so we better keep these guys fighting and the FBI, Mueller's team, working on this for many years to come, because there's a lot of people that need to come out of the woodwork still. And if you think about what we achieved in the midterms in 2018, and the horrendous smile and wink that Putin exchanged in France, during the World War I commemoration, with world leaders, that infamous photo, where you have Macron, Emmanuel Macron, the President of France, and Angela Merkel, Chancellor Merkel, just doing the right thing by glaring at Putin, looking like leaders of the free world, and then Trump just looks like a chump next to them, like, grinning as though he's, like, looking at, like, his sugar daddy. And so what's you're really seeing here, is, you know, Putin is in Trump's ear. Putin and Trump talk all the time on, on the phone.

You better believe that the Russians have studied what we were able to accomplish here with this wave and they're keeping an eye on it. They're going to be, you know, studying it for many months to come. Cause they're gonna try to do what they can to help Trump or anybody that could serve their interests, whether Trump chooses to run again, in 2020. They're gonna have to change up the playbook because a lot of what worked in 2016 simply can't work anymore, cause we're on to their tricks. But they'll be trying again. Of course they will. And they're gonna pivot, and they're gonna try new things. And they're gonna need intermediaries, just like they had with Maria Butina and coffee boy foreign policy expert George Papadopolous, and others, people that were lower status, that kind of, like, went under the radar, but were incredibly effective and instrumental to helping build this coalition of corruption. At the end of the day, Russiagate is just a classic story of coalition building. And it's a coalition of corruption, but it's coalition building. And, you know, we on, we on the left have to do our own coalition building and bring force together for good, and to protect our democracy. But what I wanna, like, really hit home for people, is that it's really sad that we have all these basic problems to go after, like, hey, you know, voting is a right, let us vote. Like that—I can't believe we're still fighting that. And the American far-right, the far-right internationally, for me it's Phase 1 of the problem. Once we defeat them, and contain them, and drive them back underground where their hate belongs—cause you'll never get rid of them completely. They've always been there, it's just right now they've been empowered by leaders by Bannon and others finding each other and working

together in a really extraordinary way. They, they've been very effective in rattling the bushes and bringing the insects out. What really needs to happen is we defeat the far-right, we put them back in the box, contain them, and then Phase 2 is, after replacing them with really smart leaders, fearless leaders who believe in science, Phase 2 really is defeating the other monster. Cause Trump is just the first monster, the first hurdle we have to get over. The over monster that's coming for us is climate change. And that's really the bigger monster. And as we've seen, when power goes unchecked, there's always a correction. And the abuse of power that we humans have been inflicting on the planet, nature is now correcting that. And she has every right to, but she's also terrifying. And she's the most terrifying monster of all when she's angry. And she has every right to be angry, with these killer storms, but we have to understand that we have to hurry up, put the work in, get rid of the first monsters so that we can battle the much bigger monster that's coming for us.

Sarah Kendzior: You can't separate the threat of climate change from these autocratic practices. And, you know, we did basically an episode about this. I can't remember the title, but basically a renouncement of gas—gas station —

Andrea Chalupa: —it was “A Foreign Policy for the Left. Put Gas Station Dictatorships out of Business.”

Sarah Kendzior: That's the other corollary, you know, you do find a kleptocratic alignment. You do find all of these leaders whose basic goal is to abuse executive power to

enhance their personal wealth, who are engaged in all these business deals on the side, who've blurred the line between criminality and corporations and government. You know, you see that Trump, you see that with Putin, you see that with Erdogan, you see that with leaders of smaller countries like in Azerbaijan, that the Trumps have dealt with, with other former Soviet regimes where corruption runs rampant, and then you also see, you know, as you mentioned, this white supremacist alignment. You know, I'm hesitant to call Bannon a leader. I feel like the US media loves to call him a leader, but he can't even, like, fill up a room in Kansas, you know, this is a guy who is being promoted not just by far-right wing outfits, but by liberal outfits, the New Yorker, or, or that conference where he spoke in Canada, you know, which contrary to popular belief, did not sell out because of Bannon's presence. It sells out every year. But Bannon has no real, you know, fanbase. He's a fringe figure who's treated as a mainstream figure, and I think that that's true of the majority of these little Nazis, you know, who are having small protests around the world that are nevertheless very damaging, because, you know, as we saw in Charlottesville, they kill people, and they intend to kill people, and it doesn't take a lot of people to cause an enormous problem. So they still are a serious threat and should be considered as such, and as their rhetoric does become more mainstream, they become an even bigger threat. But I think, you know, the third linked factor between, you know, these transnational alliances of autocrats is a total disregard for climate change, a reliance on fossil fuels, and the kleptocratic practice of using fossil fuels as a way to uphold dictatorship. You know, you see

this in Russia. You see this in Saudi Arabia. And that is the model that Trump seeks to emulate. And, you know, moving to a green economy, moving away from that energy market, moves you away from dictatorship. It gives people more power over their lives. It weakens the power of these autocracies, and most importantly, it prevents our planet from imminent destruction. Cause we're at the point where this is a political problem, and we're going to have to deal with the repercussions of things like climate refugees. And you have to ask yourself, do you wanna live in a country where someone like Trump, you know, who treats two year olds at the Texas border as a massive security threat, is going to deal with refugees from Miami, refugees coming in from the coast. We already have an example of how he would deal with it this week, with the California wildfires, where he basically yelled at people and was on the side of the fire. You know, that is what he's going to do. And we do not need that kind of leader. You know, we need a leader who is environmentally conscious, who has common sense, who has compassion, and who has an actual plan. Cause we don't have this kind of time to waste.

Andrea Chalupa: The liberal media elite, or whatever, the New Yorker club, they are far more curious about Bannon than his impact deserves, but my point earlier was simply this: he represents the fake news weapon that helped elect Trump, Breitbart, that was instrumental in really sowing the field for the rise of Trumpism, and as we saw with the Harvard study, far-right media like Breitbart, carried a lot of weight in the national debate. And it was legitimized by mainstream outlets like the New York Times,

and so it was really that fake news apparatus that helped usher Trump into power. That's what Bannon's the bloated poster boy for. You know, fake news is dangerous cause it pollutes the discussion, it can drive people to shoot up places of worship. It can really empower the racists to come out and be violent, to try to be intimidating. But in terms of the veil being lifted, of Bannon having any sort of mystique, that's all gone, and it's pathetic for any organization, like, any outlet, like the Economist, the New Yorker, to invite him anywhere. The Klan will always be there. There's always gonna be terrible people. That's just a matter of science. I believe there's, like, a number, like, out of 35 people, one's going to be a psychopath.

Sarah Kendzior: And they're all going to join the Trump administration, so...

Andrea Chalupa: They'll all have Cabinet positions! [Laughs] And so, they're all out there, but the big difference is that they have been empowered by fake news like Breitbart, and the Kremlin's English equivalent, Sputnik, and in Russia, there's a reason why the Kremlin just took over, Putin took over the media, the televisions in Russia. It's because they fear the truth, they fear being united, they fear us trusting each other. They fear that. And one of the biggest casualties of dictatorships is trust. They fear community, they fear our colors, and that's why you go build a rainbow across from hate groups. That's why you let your rainbows fly, whatever those rainbows are. You show them. Visibility matters. And, and they really try to keep you scared and suppress you, and that's why you have to really let your colors in their faces. We are gonna

get through this. We just have to more organized than they are.

Sarah Kendzior: It's very interesting to me that we did have this blue wave, however you want to define, you know, it was historic. We had record turnout. We had the highest midterms turnout in 100 years. We had the highest turnout since woman got suffrage. We had the best midterms results for Democrats since after Watergate. And so, you can kind of see where public will is. And that's to say we're all in lockstep, you know, obviously there are people who sincerely back Trump. You know, obviously we're a country where people have a range of opinions, and, you know, unless they are actually Nazis, I think that's a good thing. You know, I think a country where everyone agrees, and conforms, is a dictatorship. It's a sign that something is deeply wrong. So I think it's good that we differences among ourselves, as long as they're addressed in a healthy fashion. You don't see that, though, represented in the mainstream media. You know, Bannon is an example, you know, the ones that we've already given of him. It's also worth noting, he was a literal partner of the New York Times during the Trump campaign. He worked with them to promote the book *Clinton Cash*, which was just, you know, a compilation of lies presented as facts. So this kind of relationship between the alternative fact, fake news Breitbart industry and the mainstream media legacy outlets, which have all his prestige and which are taken so seriously, like the New York Times, that lines has become blurred, and it is to the detriment not only of the public, who are just trying to find out factual information, but to journalism itself. And I think

we really saw that last week with the attack on a Acosta at CNN, where he was portrayed as somebody assaulting a White House intern in a video that was released by the White House after being doctored in what looks like an alt-right source, from what I understand, it came from Infowars. And, you know, we had this whole discussion, this whole sort of fatuous debate about was Acosta out of line for asking basic questions of the President and it just showed how the press has been digging their own graves. And meanwhile, while it's happening, Trump is not just attacking Acosta, but he was attacking, once again, a number of black female journalists, you know, who most other journalists are not standing up for, you know they really should be working, like, en masse to fight this assault on free speech and on speech press that's coming directly from the White House. I don't think they should be sending really anyone but one person to those press briefings. I think they should just send a camera and run the damn thing on CSPAN and have, like, one person ask the questions and boycott it, and go out and talk to the public and go to different states and not just report from coastal hubs, and, and inform the American public on, on what is going on in their lives. Because this access journalist, and this collaboration with incredibly shady people like Bannon, has done them no good. And I think they now realize this, but whether it actually makes a change, cause a lot of this change is—it comes from the top. And it's not necessarily the fault of the reporters in question as much as the corporations and editorial staff that guides them. But they need to do something because Trump becomes emboldened, every step of the way, when they refuse to fight back in unison.

Andrea Chalupa: Well, there's a new word to capture that, actually. It's called "Appelbauming." It's when a population is being gaslit by its abusive government or a leading powerful news organization is derelict in its duty to authentically acknowledge that—

Sarah Kendzior: —Oh, that guy! [Laughs]

Andrea Chalupa: —and it's inspired by—it was inspired by a Tweet by Binyamin Appelbaum when he wrote last week, "I don't know what the word 'gaslighting' means and I wish people would stop using it. There are plenty of actual English words." Well, of course, our show got a lot of shoutouts [laughs], people were directing him to our show.

Sarah Kendzior: Thank you, Binyamin Appelbaum! Now you can go look up "irony."

Andrea Chalupa: Yeah, and so now "Appelbauming," guys. Put that in the lexicon. Let the dictionary know. "Appelbauming" sums it all up. That's the crime committed by media when they just simply act like they don't care and simply don't care, and they, and they don't give us the coverage we desperately need right now in these incredible that we're living in. Even the dictionary chimed in and defined "gaslighting" for this New York Times correspondent. [Laughs]

Sarah Kendzior: I can't imagine being this dude, and just, like, [laughs], like, you're working at the biggest paper in

America, you don't know a basic word, which, OK, you don't know it, like, you can look it up. You can Google it, you can see that it's in the dictionary, like, unless he was doing some sort of meta-experiment, which I really don't think he was, based on his incredibly defensive reaction to all of this, and, as you said, he now knows what "re-showed" me. It sort of shows, you know, we did that previous episode about the media, about the declining standards of quality, and about its continued domination by white privileged men living on the coasts, and I think, you know, you kinda see this in action here, where, you know, the whole world can call you out with a few keystrokes on Google, and, and you just remain in your blissful bubble, unaware of what words men.

Andrea Chalupa: So look up our media episode, where we break the horrific demographics of newsroom today and how it's white men that are deciding what's newsworthy and how to tell those stories. One thing that really makes me furious about all those dapper Nazi pieces that the mainstream media was producing for so long, namely the New York Times, is that we were really deprived of far more fascinating stories about how running for office, how growing and leading communities are transforming the lives of regular woman across our country, especially women of color, who were primarily responsible, who were the heart of this blue wave. We have the most diverse class of women entering Congress now, and that is going to create a sea change that's gonna affect the next generation of women they're gonna pull up with them. That's why this is so important, and that's why this is so historical. And I feel like for

every single dapper Nazi piece, they could've done a fascinating look at each of these individual women and just sort of, like, how is this run for office, how is this changing the life around you? What challenges are you navigating? How are you navigating them? I love those articles. I learn so much about different corners of the world. That's the kind of coverage that we desperately needed instead of this, like, morbid curiosity of Nazis. I find Nazis boring at this point. Cause they're not very bright. They're not bright people. Nazis are dumb. A lot of these Nazis profiled, like, the Proud Boys, they're meatheads. And if you look at how human beings evolved, we evolved out of communities that were collaborative. That was what our survival literally was dependent on. Not this chest-beating ape. I just find Nazis to be very primitive, and not interesting.

Sarah Kendzior: When you look at this administration, you know, one of the things that's been frustrating about these pieces is this attempt to portray these guys as some sort of principled rebels, or some sort of radical outsider, where they're literally, you know, represented within the administration in people like Jeff Sessions, in people like the President. They are the establishment. We have a tyranny of a minority. We have a tyranny of white supremacists. And that doesn't represent, you know, the greater population of the US or the will of the people at all. But, you know, this is not some sort of cruel, like, "I'm being rebellious, I'm really taking on the man" kind of uprising thing. These are just a bunch of lackeys on the street, promoting violence. So yeah, I would've much rather have read profiles of the women

running for office, or profiles of the people who've been affected by these policies. You know, we often don't see that. You know, we see local papers doing a much better job of covering things like the effect of the Trump administration on immigrants and on civil rights, and on people who, you know, have been hurt by it. But the priority, I think, should always be to look at who's been hurt, to at who's suffering and to look at the dynamic of power and not to try to reaffirm it through this flattering coverage. So I think eventually we're going to get to the bottom of why so many of those pieces came out and often focused on the same figures. You know, to me it looked as if they were getting recommendations from PR firms, because they, they shared so many of the same descriptions, and it's very, very strange. [Laughs] You know, I don't know in whose interest it was, because it pissed off so many people, you know, caused people to cancel subscriptions right and left and ultimately kind of flamed out on its own. And as sort of a[n] exposé on what caused all these liberal outlets to start promoting Nazis. That's something I would actually read.

Andrea Chalupa: I completely agree with you. Maybe we need to do that exposé.

Sarah Kendzior: Trump gave out the National Medal of Honors, and the main recipient was Miriam Adelson, the wife of Sheldon Adelson, who is the bankroller of the Republican Party and a all-around—I mean, I don't know, maybe I shouldn't say anything cause he sues media outlets right and left—but, you know, among things that Sheldon Adelson has said is that he wants to nuke Iran.

There's a video of him saying he regrets having served in the US military because his real loyalty is to the Israeli military. Miriam Adelson has not really done anything significant enough to merit a National Medal of Honor. This was a reward for their enormous financial contributions to Trump, to Trump's inauguration, and to the GOP. They are now the biggest backers. So this is just yet another indication that to Trump, the state is something that you sell. You could say the award has been drained of its meaning, you know, some folks are saying that, but I think it's more important to kind of look at the kleptocratic practice and the financial tradeoffs we have. Because, you know, Sheldon Adelson of course also bought himself an embassy. He was behind the move of the embassy to Jerusalem. And so when a billionaire donor has that kind of outside influence, no matter who they are, you know, it, it's an influence that should be checked, it should be examined, and it should not be reaffirmed through giving out these medals. And I also think it's interesting that Trump awarded some dead people. Elvis has gotten a, a Medal this year. Babe Ruth. I feel like he picked a couple of all-American icons.

Andrea Chalupa: His boyhood heroes, basically.

Sarah Kendzior: Maybe. I'm not sure he has heroes. That's, like, the one thing Trump ever said that I related how. He said he didn't have heroes. And I also don't have heroes, so I felt like a sort of deep hole inside me open up when I realized we were kind of on the page [laughs], just the concept is sort of not quite—you know, there's people I admire, but I wouldn't them heroes.

Anyway, besides the point. I feel like he threw in these, like, all-American types for whom people have so much nostalgia—you know, Elvis, Babe Ruth—to kind of cover up the fact that this was a transnational kleptocratic payoff in the form of, you know, a medal that obviously, for whatever reason, the Adelson coveted, or maybe Trump just assumed that they did. Yet another national symbol tarnished by Trump. But that's the kind of thing, though, you know, these sort of symbolic practices, awards, and whatnot, you can get that back. There are things you can't get back, like courts packed with conservative judges, environmental policies that destroy the world, like, that's more a focus. But I do think that the dark money aspect, the donors can buy policy aspect, you know, that's something to concentrate on here.

Andrea Chalupa: Germany has been very, very, very good at Holocaust education at schools so they don't repeat that history. And I feel like that's something that we need to—if we get this through this, and where we can, adopt it here, and really teach the Trump years as a warning of what fascism looks like, and yes it can happen here. And this is not a normal administration. None of this is normal. The constant attacks against the free press, the constant attacks against voting, the constant lies being spewed out and hate being spewed out by this regime, the deliberate human rights crisis of terror that created deliberately on the border to terrorize populations are fleeing terror. So all of this is inhumane, and it has to get taught in history classes, in schools. We cannot treat this as, like, oh we survived Trump, like we survived George W. Bush. Yes, the Bush and Cheney

years were horrendous as well, and, and they opened up the plague on the planet with the invasions in Iraq and Afghanistan. But what has to happen with Trump is these years have to be remembered as fascist education, what fascism looks like, and as a reminder for generations to come that yes, it can happen here because it has happened here.

Sarah Kendzior: I think if we had had a more honest teaching of US history and atrocities within US history, we would have been better prepared for Trump. I mean, you and I were relatively prepared. A lot of Americans have this “it can’t happen here” attitude. Basically blowing off slavery, genocide of Native Americans, World War II internment camps, but also, you know, lesser-known things, like the East St. Louis white mob violence in 1917, or the bombing of Black Wall Street in Tulsa, you know, we have all these atrocities which for, you know, in America are mostly raced-based. You know, and so when you’re looking at what Trump is going to do, you need to combine knowledge of foreign authoritarian states with our own corrupt history. You know, and, and in more recent cases, you know, in terms of government corruption, you know, we of course have the precursor of Watergate, and the fact that people involved in Watergate were not only unpunished but went on to do things like run the Trump campaign. You know, people like Roger Stone, or Trump’s mentor, Roy Cohn. We have this very dark history. We have, you know, a history full of atrocities, and if we are able to talk about them in a straightforward way and educated people, then they’re not only able to see what’s coming, they may be able to

move to prevent it early. You know, I feel like if our media had had a better education in sort of a baseline understanding of American history, maybe they wouldn't have covered Trump in the way in the way they did, as a sort of entertaining, or odd, or unfamiliar figure. Maybe they would've recognized in him a familiar demagogue in the long history of white supremacist demagogues in the US, and as a foreign kleptocrat, which he resembled even before taking office. We also need to put this in that lineage, you know, not distance ourselves from it. I think the only thing that's kind of new, you know, maybe the role of digital media and how that played out in propaganda, but the problems are unfortunately, you know, as old as America itself. And we're betraying our consciences to deny that because in, in doing so we deny the hurt that's been caused to people and they've suffering they've endured, and also the struggles that they undertook to turn that tide around, you know, which is of course I think what people are trying to do now.

Andrea Chalupa: I can see years to come, they're going to be robust public debates and protests and fights in the street over Trump statutes going up in places, or Trump busts going up in places, just like there are about taking down Confederate monuments.

Sarah Kendzior: God, help me.

Andrea Chalupa: [Laughs] So...

Sarah Kendzior: Oh, God.

Andrea Chalupa: Let's focus on Phase 1, which is driving the far-right back into their hole, and we knocked down quite a few of them, and we've got a lot more to go, and we stand a very strong chance in 2020 in holding onto the House and taking back the Senate and the White House. And if we continue doing what we're doing and challenge ourselves to do more, then we can achieve that. Phase 2: unleash this new generation of fearless, smart, fact-drive leaders to take on climate change, and, and really turn America into a world leader on fighting climate change, because Mother Nature, she's got her own blue wave, and it's coming.

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[Theme Music]

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Sarah Kendzior: Our editors are Karlyn Daigle and Nicholas Torres. This episode was edited by Nicholas Torres.

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

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

Andrea Chalupa: Gaslit Nation would like to thank our supporters on Patreon at the Producer level: Andreas Chinavin, Anne Marshall, Kathy Kavanaugh, David Porter, Ari LaGuardia, Ethan Mann, Janet Cox, Jennifer Slavic, Lawrence Graham, Melissa Hayden, Mike Tripico, Peter Case, Rhonda White, Stephanie Roskum-Holtz, and Timothy Michael Wilson. We could not make this show without you.