

Gaslit Nation // Transcript
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The Republican Party is on Trial

Hakeem Jeffries: Why are we here? Let me see if I can just pause it and answer to that question. We are here, sir, because President Trump pressured a foreign government to target an American citizen for political and personal gain. We are here, sir, because President Trump solicited foreign interference in the 2020 election and corrupted our democracy. We are here, sir, because President Trump withheld \$391 million in military aid from a vulnerable Ukraine without justification in a manner that has been deemed unlawful.

Hakeem Jeffries: We are here, sir, because President Donald Trump elevated his personal political interests and subordinated the national security interests of the United States of America. We are here, sir, because President Trump corruptly abused his power and then he tried to cover it up and we are here, sir, to follow the facts, apply to law, be guided by the Constitution and present the truth to the American people. That is why we are here, Mr. Sekulow. And if you don't know, now you know.

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*, which is coming out in April and available for pre-order now.

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

Sarah Kendzior: And this is Gaslit Nation, a podcast covering corruption in the Trump Administration and rising autocracy around the world. This is our first new episode since the media blitz of Lev Parnas, the indicted Giuliani goon and mafioso who made the cable news rounds after hundreds of incriminating text messages were released. The texts confirmed yet again what we already know: this is a transnational crime syndicate masquerading as a government. And one of their goals was seemingly putting a hit on former US ambassador to Ukraine, Marie Yovanovitch.

Sarah Kendzior: In his televised interviews, Parnas asserted that Trump himself was an active participant in the Ukraine shakedown scheme, that Mike Pence and Devin Nunes were as well. And that a key goal was taking down Joe Biden. He denied being part of the plot to endanger Yovanovitch and instead presented himself as being in danger.

Sarah Kendzior: And so, just a couple of observations to start us off here. The information that Parnas was putting out there corresponds to information that we already knew, because Yovanovitch and others had already testified about it. She spoke repeatedly of being in danger. We also know the other witnesses at the impeachment hearings, like Vindman and Hill, got death threats.

Sarah Kendzior: These witnesses join a very long list of people who spoke out about getting death threats by members of this administration, or people associated with them, including but not limited to Stormy Daniels, the judge in the Paul Manafort case, the jury in the Paul Manafort case, the judge in the Roger Stone case, Lisa Page and other former members of the FBI, Jamal Khashoggi, who was of course then murdered, countless other members of the media, every woman who has come forward and alleged Trump committed sexual assault and many more. So, there is a consistent history of mafia activity by members of this administration. And we've also had multiple witnesses testify that under oath for years.

Sarah Kendzior: At his hearing in February 2019, Michael Cohen described Trump acting like a Mafia Don and said that Cohen was directed by Trump to threaten over 500 people. James Comey, in his 2017 testimony, also described Trump as behaving like a mafioso in office. Yeah, Trump of course also behaved like a mafioso for several decades before taking office, not that Comey seemed to give a shit then. Anyway, all of the people who Trump has targeted, much like the witnesses who testified for impeachment say the same thing about the Trump team's constant threats of violence.

Sarah Kendzior: So, my question is, why in the world did it take a mobster who ran a company called "Fraud Guarantee" to convince people of this? Like it's some sort of revelation? Why is it Parnas, who is being imbued with this kind of integrity as a trustworthy figure, blowing the lid off of this or breaking the dam open? There's so many people on Twitter saying, "Why is the co-founder of Fraud Guarantee the one who is trusted to tell the whole truth?" So, what are your thoughts? Is he trustworthy, Andrea? Why are we making such a big deal out of him?

Andrea Chalupa: First of all, I want to say I'm grateful for the Lev Parnas interview, even though he is obviously an unreliable narrator, because of his very clear links to organized crime. He's connected to Dmytro Firtash, the Ukrainian oligarch, Gas King, who worked closely with Semion Mogilevich, "The Brainy Don", a Ukrainian, who was considered the head of the Russian mafia. And as we know, Mogilevich was on the FBI's Ten Most Wanted List and Robert Mueller's now famous—thanks to Gaslit Nation, because we keep bringing it up—

Andrea Chalupa: also in Robert Mueller's 2011 speech, the Iron Triangle speech, he describes the Russian mafia organized crime in the 21st century, which is blood money regimes in struggling democracies, where kleptocracy corruption spreads enthusiastically, is welcomed in the West, through fancy accounting firms in Western capitals, like London and New York and through real estate deals for money laundering and fancy law firms that help structure all these offshore accounts in Panama and the Caribbean and so forth.

Andrea Chalupa: And then you have these blood money operatives who are like bees circulating pollen everywhere that are helping this whole slush fund of global dirty money move around the world. Mueller had Mogilevich out of the Russian mafia on the

FBI's Ten Most Wanted list, promise he'd stay there until he was caught for some mysterious reason.

Andrea Chalupa: Well, we know the reason we were given—James Comey took Mogilevich off the FBI's Ten Most Wanted list in December 2015 and a year later, a Russian mafia asset, Donald Trump, was the President-elect of the United States, a big Russian mafia coup. If you want to know the background on that, just look at our transcripts on gasolitionpod.com and read all about it. I would direct people to the episodes with Olga Lautman, a Russian mafia expert, and also Craig Unger who wrote *House of Trump, House of Putin*, looking at Trump's decades-long connections to Russian organized crime and his family's dependency on Russian money.

Andrea Chalupa: So, all of that is to point out that Firtash having Lev Parnas on his payroll, there was money that was I think around a million euros, a million dollars that Firtash's lawyer was paying Lev Parnas. All of that indicates that Lev Parnas is very much in the pocket of Russian organized crime and the fact that he's coming forward and giving this big juicy interview—what is it really telling us? It's infuriatingly pointing out what we already know. The Russian mafia was not stopped sooner. The election of Donald Trump was a massive intelligence failure by the US. Our allies from the UK, Australia tried to warn us, tried to prevent this, but it happened anyway. So that's first and foremost.

Andrea Chalupa: The other thing is that, what is Parnas trying to do? Is he opening his mouth and incriminating everyone? Basically, pointing out what we already know?—that William Barr, the Iran-Contra cleanup guy, is behaving like Donald Trump's Roy Cohn. He is the mafia lawyer, the consulate for Trump protecting him, which is why the investigations in the Southern District of New York should not be relied on, because Barr's going to clearly do what he can to slow that down. Just like he tried to cover up the Mueller Report, which worked initially with all of the front pages of major US newspapers saying that Mueller exonerates Trump. That was Barr's work.

Andrea Chalupa: So why would you trust him in the Southern District of New York? He must be clearly slowing down or tampering with those investigations because that is his long history in serving the Far Right coup of the Republican Party. The sweeping corruption operation, which married perfectly, culturally speaking, with Russian organized crime. And that is how we got Donald Trump.

Andrea Chalupa: But what is Lev Parnas' game here? I mean, is he doing—as he said and as Rachel Maddow pointed out—is he trying to spill all he can? So, this information gets out there and he incriminates as many people as possible. So, therefore, there's no point in killing him because if you kill a Lev Parnas then you're proving him right. So, is that his motivation for doing this or is that something you know more layered here? Where he's still serving the interests of Firtash even though he's trying to distance himself from all these bad guys generally. Is he still serving the interests of Firtash by coming clean, trying to be like a clean player out of fear that Trump's just been impeached?

Andrea Chalupa: Firtash, being a savvy businessman, is keeping his options open should the Democrats manage to win the White House. It was under Obama when Firtash was first nailed for bribery charges. Maybe Firtash is, through Lev Parnas, coming clean with all this stuff. Firtash himself could not come clean because he needs to play both sides in case Donald Trump wins. Firtash is too savvy to do this dirty work. Firtash is someone that operates like Trump, like Putin, with plausible deniability. He would never get his hands dirty.

Andrea Chalupa: So, is Lev Parnas—who got a lot of money through Firtash’s network previously—is Lev Parnas basically doing all that finger pointing just to serve Democratic interests in case the Democrats should win the presidency? I point that out only to say that guys like Parnas, given their long history of being wrapped up with organized crime interests, you have to always challenge what they say. You always have to keep the larger game at play because these monsters have criminal minds and they do play both sides. They do leave their options open. They do try to fool you into thinking that you can negotiate with them. Deripaska did it for years with Bruce Ohr at the FBI.

Andrea Chalupa: So, you can never negotiate with the Russian mafia. These guys are ruthless. That is their superpower. That is how they win because they keep outplaying the good guys because the good guys tend to take people at face value and tend to think that people are rational players to act in their own self interests.

Andrea Chalupa: You'll remember in that great documentary that everyone should watch on Obama's foreign policy team called *The Final Year*, they show how shocked Ben Rhodes, Obama's foreign policy brain, how shocked Ben Rhodes looked on election night when Trump won. And out of Ben Rhodes' mouth were "Well, I guess we thought Putin would act in his own interests". They underestimated Putin.

Andrea Chalupa: They thought that the Russian sanctions would force Putin to recalculate and the oligarchs around him to recalculate, to try to play ball with the West. And instead, Putin's Mafia State doubled down and got their asset elected. They did that with the help of weaponizing our own corruption against us. And so, you can never underestimate Russian organized crime. It's absolutely ruthless and it's far-reaching and it's powerful. And Putin himself is arguably the richest man in the world, especially if you calculate the oligarchs that he has under his thumb.

Sarah Kendzior: I think one thing to take into consideration is the time we're living in now and that Parnas has been involved in these schemes for years. It comes forward now and he's coming forward in a time of entrenched elite criminal impunity in which most of the major players in the Trump fold who have committed crimes, confess to crimes, were not punished for those crimes.

Sarah Kendzior: And even though Trump was recently impeached, the stranglehold that the GOP has as an extension of this transnational crime syndicate on US government is stronger than before. And so, one thing I'm wondering about is like, yes, he can

come forward. Yes, he was indicted. Is he really expecting any kind of punishment? Because basically no one besides I guess Manafort and Cohen and even there, the punishment was relatively small, was actually incarcerated for their actions.

Sarah Kendzior: And another thing is that as much as he told on television, that is incriminating. And I think the text messages are more so and are more important than his televised musings. But one of the main tactics of the Trump Team has always been to hide crime with scandal. But if that's not possible, they try to hide an enormous crime with a smaller crime. And so when he went on television, he could give the details of the Ukraine shakedown because it's focusing attention on a smaller scope of criminal activity instead of this vast apparatus you were just describing in which Trump, Putin, and many other leaders are engaged.

Sarah Kendzior: The apparatus that extends to Semion Mogilevich, who people refuse to discuss on television, despite his centrality to all of these cases. And so here Parnas is really benefiting from the way that the Democrats structured impeachment by limiting the scope to the 2019 Ukraine shakedown and omitting the broader context of this.

Sarah Kendzior: And the other thing, in watching him not just on MSNBC and CNN, but also just sort of seeing all these photos popping up everywhere. It's like the Where's Waldo of crime. Like, Parnas is in every photo with every leader and media personality and what have you. It reminds me a lot of Felix Sater, another Russian mafioso turned informant who plays both sides constantly—both to try to protect himself, to incriminate the people with whom he has associated and to muddy the media waters—and both, Parnas and Sater are very good at this.

Sarah Kendzior: We've seen other people in their fold who aren't quite as good—Carter Page, for example—but they capitalize on this perception that they are just sort of wacky, dirty tricksters. They go through the Roger Stone narrative machine or that if they're confessing this on television, I mean it's a sort of weird double standard. On one hand people are like, well, it must be true. Like, the dam has broken, the real story is being told and now action will be taken. But their ability to confess this narrow version of what actually transpired relies on the fact that they're never punished. Almost nobody in their fold is punished.

Sarah Kendzior: So, there's a certain kind of safety with that. And as you said, publicity may be a shield for him. It may also be a weapon for him because I'm watching people fall down the same propaganda holes again and again. I'm watching media personalities taking photos with Lev Parnas, a criminal, a mafioso greening broadly, acting like this is just a joke. This is just a ratings bonanza. This is not intrinsically linked to the death of democracy in the United States and no one learns anything. We're like the Groundhog Day of organized crime on the show.

Sarah Kendzior: I feel like I make the same complaints over and over and the only thing that changes are the names and the faces, but that's why people should pay attention. They need to pay attention to the broad pattern that we've been

enduring here. Instead of looking for criminals as saviors, like Lev Parnas has joined the resistance or whatever kind of nonsense that people are churning out. I get that everyone's so worn down and maybe not fully having a hold of their senses, but come on, just, ugh.

Andrea Chalupa: I want to do a bit of a travel blog here for everyone because Ukraine is so much at the focus of this, again and again. And I encourage anyone anywhere in the world listening who's not in Ukraine at this moment to visit Ukraine to experience Ukraine because it's an incredibly enchanting country. From all the years I've been visiting there to research my film, *Mr. Jones*.

Andrea Chalupa: And so, I've seen Kyiv, for instance, evolve and become more Brooklyn-ized and I'm very, very grateful that I was able to live in Ukraine in 2005 before the country became discovered by the West through the 2013-2014 Euromaidan Revolution. Now there's bars and restaurants I stumble into in Kyiv that I feel like I'm in New York or LA. It's pretty weird. It's a gorgeous country still, beautiful mixes of culture from its centuries-old history and so I can go off and off and be like a big massive tour guide where everyone would go to Ukraine and it's safe for you to go.

Andrea Chalupa: I have a friend who is sanctioned by Russia and he goes to Ukraine and quite a bit from the West and he gave me really good advice. He said, "Ukraine is safe as long as you haven't messed with anyone's money." So, if you haven't messed with anyone's money, go to Ukraine and be a tourist and eat and drink vodka. Your mind will be blown by how special this place is because what I'm going to say next might deter you from actually following through on that and I don't want it to because it's not representative of the country and its people.

Andrea Chalupa: So, when I was living there in 2005, I was hanging out in a pub with a bunch of ex-pats, Western ex-pats. One woman who joined us, an older woman, middle-aged who worked at a law firm in Kyiv. She came in wearing practically a turban of gauze around her head and she had the funny dry line where she said, "Well, I've taken up smoking again." So, it turned out that when she was coming out of her office, some massive towering goon slammed a brick in her head and just walked off. And that was done to intimidate her because of whatever she was working on there for the country. And she's laughing through all of us.

Andrea Chalupa: Because there's a bit of that sort of, not to the extent of today's certainly for Westerners, but back as Ukraine was emerging from the Car Bomb '90s, there was still horrific corruption that could target people that weren't big fish, so to speak. I would say today that's very much still true, unfortunately for some of Ukraine's biggest activists and journalists. And there's one horrific, heartbreaking story of an anti-corruption activist named Kateryna Handzyuk who exposed corruption in where she lived in Kherson, Ukraine in the South and she was attacked with sulfuric acid and died months later.

Andrea Chalupa: And Marie Yovanovitch had hosted a ceremony honoring this brave young anti-corruption activist who gave her life for her country, who gave her life to

strengthen Ukraine, to bring it closer to Europe to make it more like a full-functioning Western democracy and pull it out of Russia's shadow of corruption. Russia has weaponized and furthered and deepened Ukraine's corruption to keep it in its orbit. And here, this young woman, Kateryna Handzyuk, died. One of countless Ukrainians who have given their lives for a better future for Ukraine.

Andrea Chalupa: And Marie Yovanovitch hosting the ceremony in this young woman's honor and leaving the ceremony, it's a heartbreaking story. And imagine Marie Yovanovitch in Kyiv, speaking words about what Kateryna Handzyuk did for her country, sharing her story with people being there, present among her family and friends. And then right after that, finding out that she's being called back from Kyiv and told by the White House, told by her own government that she needs to return, that she's being recalled, which is shocking.

Andrea Chalupa: So, I just want to put you in that mindset of the realities on the ground in Ukraine for people that are there to stick their necks out and the most vulnerable. And so, Lev Parnas, he can deny all he wants, the threats. It was very clear the pressure that Yovanovitch was under. And even though these Stone and Manafort goons can be comical villains with their twirling mustaches and all that, at the heart of it, they are endangering good people that we desperately need in order to turn this world around. And so, we cannot forget that.

Andrea Chalupa: We cannot forget the most vulnerable here and we cannot forget that these threats reverberate. So, what was done to Kateryna Handzyuk, what was done to Marie Yovanovitch, that sends a chilling message to others who are on the front lines of fighting powerful forces and risking their lives and risking their family's lives to do so.

Sarah Kendzior: A lot of what you said, it gets lost in this kind of frenzied media narrative to have the villain in the hot seat. And to present them as this kind of bumbling buffoon or whatever kind of a veneer they want to put on Parnas. These are deeply dangerous people and it's honestly very disturbing to see how quickly the testimonies were forgotten, to have Yovanovitch's own words taken less seriously than Parnas' alleged confession. To have the fact that so many people have been threatened with physical violence, have been stalked, in some cases have been murdered. This is the story of the Trump Administration and it's one that the media is very unwilling to tell. And when you tell it, they'll label you alarmist or hysterical.

Sarah Kendzior: And I think it's just an inability of them to process that this is happening in the US, even though of course, things like this have always happened in the United States. But that it's happening in a streamlined way through the executive branch with, obviously, the complicity of actors that are in the institutions and agencies that are supposed to stop this.

Sarah Kendzior: We have a mafia White House and people don't want to confront that reality. They don't want to call it what it is. And they failed in this regard. So, in so many

ways, they failed during the Mueller Probe and afterwards, and unfortunately, they failed in the impeachment hearings. The ones they did have were good. They were very powerful. Americans learned information that they needed to know. But that was the tip of the iceberg. That was the beginning of the story. And as I'm talking now, Pelosi has now passed the Articles on to the Senate and they're currently debating what kind of rules are going to be enacted when the Senate has its own hearings. And so, this is a frustrating situation because it seems like it can go in one of two ways. Maybe a mix of both.

Sarah Kendzior: Some Republicans are obviously aching for a show trial. We've said that from the get-go, that if we don't have impeachment hearings, you'll end up with a show trial. And so, we had it, a very small, narrow impeachment hearing. And now we're getting the GOP wanting to do things like drag Hunter Biden in, create a spectacle, turn the accusers into the villains, flip the script. All the things we worried about are coming to pass. They also seem to want to rush it. They seem to want to do this under the cover of night with as little scrutiny as possible. That's actually interesting to me because I'm not sure what, exactly, the GOP is afraid of here because they lie so flagrantly. Impeachment did change the minds of American people about Trump and his network of criminality.

Sarah Kendzior: The majority of the American public want him removed. But what's been consistent throughout this Administration and even predates it with the Republicans, is how little the Republicans care about the will of the American people. In their mind, the will of the American people exists to be subverted. That's why they have voter suppression. That's why they have a giant propaganda apparatus in Fox News. They completely don't care what even their own voters want, even the people voting Republican, even the people who love Trump. They don't care what anybody actually wants. This is purely about the accumulation of their own power.

Sarah Kendzior: I'm really puzzled by what, exactly, the Democrats were seeking to accomplish by first holding the Articles and then passing them to the Senate when they did, because it was smart to hold the Articles. That was a wise move and what I was hoping is that holding them was going to be part of a process of adding additional Articles of Impeachment. Both having to do with Ukraine. Like for example, we know of all these incriminating text messages and additional evidence that was never included. We know, for example, Nunes was involved. That was never a focal point. But also, the obstruction charges from the Mueller Probe, the kidnapping and abuse of migrant children at the border, the abuse of the Pardon Power. There's a long list of impeachable offenses and we've gone over that.

Sarah Kendzior: I thought perhaps Pelosi's holding them so that she can then continue this path forward. And I think Trump's recent aggression in Iran may have also fallen under the realm of an impeachable offense. Instead she passes them on now. And the only thing I sort of see as significant about why now is she's out of the country. She's not here. She's in Israel for a long-ago announced gathering to

commemorate victims of the Holocaust. There's I think over 40 leaders coming there worldwide. She's going to be meeting with Netanyahu, Putin, Macron, I think Prince Charles. All these different people are there. And she brought along a large contingent of Democratic Representatives with her and she knew that this event was happening. This is long scheduled.

Sarah Kendzior: Why schedule the Senate hearings for this exact point in time? And yes, Pelosi does not need to be here for the Senate hearings. And there are managers that have been chosen to do this process, but both the optics of it and just kind of like, don't you want to be here to see how this plays out? Don't you want to be here if things go wrong?

Sarah Kendzior: It's also weird by the way that Pence is going. Pence, who's technically the head of the Senate, is also in Israel. So is Kushner. And then meanwhile we have Trump, I believe in Switzerland. So, the top three people in the order of succession are all out of the country as the Senate launches this completely batshit propagandistic-obscured, non-democratic process of pre-ordained trial in the Senate. So, at any rate, all this does point to a dysfunction at best.

Andrea Chalupa: Once again, I'm going to do a callback to that great reading series that Gaslit Nation did over the summer, which we encourage everyone to check out because it goes to the roots of our horrific abusive news cycle. So, I mentioned earlier our interviews on the Russian mafia with Olga Lautman and also Vanity Fair contributing editor, Craig Unger. So those are core listening right there. But then what does the issue of impeachment and the Democrat's strategy that reminds me is part of that reading series. The interview we did with the Washington Post's Greg Sargent.

Andrea Chalupa: What Greg pointed out to us was that Democrats are driven by acting in good faith and good governance. And in terms of being a big sledgehammer to the face, they outsource that to their grassroots space, which is growing angrier and angrier. And that frees up the Democratic establishment to try to establish a culture of respect and decency in the highest offices of power in our country.

Andrea Chalupa: And that, I would argue, is important because culture is powerful as we've seen. Because Donald Trump, for instance, is leading a culture of brutality. In 2016, wherever he held a Hitler-like rally, there was a massive spike in hate crimes in those counties. So that's a culture that he actively worked to establish, and it's alluded to copycat crimes around the world from a mosque being shot up in New Zealand to Canada and so forth. So, culture is powerful. Culture is important.

Andrea Chalupa: So, in terms of what Nancy Pelosi's doing on this, with this US unity tour with leaders of both parties going to Israel. That a longtime important ally of the US, which is ironically having a similar struggle to the one we're having with Netanyahu, having been indicted, with Trump having been impeached. So, they're going there on this goodwill mission. And one could argue that as Pelosi

showing leadership and unity to try to help bring stability to the country during this incredibly frightening time.

Andrea Chalupa: A decade ago in Trump years, which was just a week or so ago, they shot down the second most powerful person in Iran, which could have easily tipped us into World War III, and that was a sleepless night or two that the world had over that. And so, I would argue that Pelosi's doing her darnedest to try to work towards stability as much as possible. And she's outsourced impeachment itself to her managers. But why did she send the Articles now?

Andrea Chalupa: We initially applauded her for holding onto them and I think that obviously, Sarah, if you and I were in charge, which one day if we're all lucky we may be, could you imagine? But so, what would you and I do? Likely we'd be like, "you know what Mitch, we're not ready for your show trial yet." We would call it a show trial and we would say "We're going to hold onto these Articles of Impeachment because we would like to have some more investigations, especially into Devin Nunes." And so, in front of Devin Nunes' face, because that'd be great television as we know, we would be investigating him; we would bring in witnesses and he'll be forced to step... Basically you confront the Republican Party with their own Kremlin clown car tactics to their faces.

Andrea Chalupa: So, they collapse under the ridicule because that, as we've seen, is very well possible. We've seen an Exodus of Republican leaders not seeking re-election because they cannot stand how dehumanizing this has been. Becoming the party of Donald Trump, which will become the party of Ivanka Trump and so forth. So, I think clearly the Democrats have always struggled with having this brass knuckles approach to fighting the Republicans' fire with fire because they've always sort of tried to raise themselves to a higher level of decency in order to extend good faith.

Andrea Chalupa: I think there is also a fear that if they went down to that level and started putting people in handcuffs for defying Congress and so forth. That those tactics could then be used on them, the next time Republicans own the House. Because keep in mind our elections are a pendulum in America. It keeps swinging back and forth. A Republican becomes President, burns the House to the ground, and things have to become so bad before most of the Electoral College is willing to vote for a Democrat. And so that's sort of been a pattern. And so, I think the Democrats are very careful to use the full extent of their power, especially in such an aggressive way.

Andrea Chalupa: A way that you and I could argue is desperately needed in these fragile times, but I think in their minds what they're calculating is that the pendulum politically could swing back where the Republicans control the House again and then use those same tactics on them for small, stupid invented show trial stuff. We saw just with Hillary Clinton alone, how many investigations they had into the non-scandal of Benghazi. That was a show trial. We already had show trials in this country.

- Andrea Chalupa: That's why we could easily say they're coming around again because Hillary Clinton suffered her own show trials by the Republican-controlled House. So, I think that's where the restraint comes from. The restraint in the Democratic side comes from not wanting to cross that line because that can so easily be used against them by their Republican colleagues.
- Sarah Kendzior: You're right that that's where the hesitation lies. But of course, the Republicans are going to do this anyway. As you said, they have done it with Bill Barr implanted. They're ramping it up, they're becoming more aggressive, they're acting with more impunity. And that's in part because they've gutted the institutions that were supposed to stand outside this process, were supposed to be objective actors, and they filled them with their lackeys. We've seen over and over institutions failing, whether it's the FBI, whether it's the NSA, who Adam Schiff recently called out for refusing to cooperate with the Ukraine investigation and refusing to provide necessary documentation.
- Sarah Kendzior: The CIA, every intelligence agency that allowed a mafia syndicate to move into the White House is implicated in this. And then lately, once again, we're seeing the failure of SDNY, which is another organizational body that people kept holding up as some kind of savior. Like, "Oh, if Trump isn't going to be prosecuted while he's president because of the LLC memo, then it's all going to go to SDNY? They're going to catch them. They're going to get them.", completely ignoring the track record of failure and complicity that embodies this organization, like, for example, the text messages that I was discussing before, the really incriminating ones about putting a hit on Marie Yovanovitch.
- Sarah Kendzior: The FBI had those for months and SDNY had those for months and no one did anything, despite the fact that this information needed to be known and despite the fact that people's lives are in danger and this is a pattern with them, like just a few examples of ways that SDNY has failed America. They did not bother to indict Jeffrey Epstein until 2019. They only did it because the Miami Herald exposés, the ones written by Julie K. Brown, had pushed the case back into the spotlight, horrified people who didn't already know about it and also had to be revealed how easy US officials had gone on Epstein and his cohort already. He continued trafficking girls as young as 12 years old all the way until 2018 and SDNY did nothing.
- Sarah Kendzior: They also did nothing about Trump and the Trump Crime Family. They never bothered to indict Trump, the Trump children, Manafort or others that fall in their jurisdiction, who had been committing crimes brazenly for decades. Even though this activity was well known, you also saw SDNY siding with Trump over the release of his tax returns, which would have provided more of a window into how exactly that activity functions. And so, they are acting in some sense as accomplices. The only Trump associate that SDNY has bothered indicting was Michael Cohen. And that was only after he flipped and he confessed his crimes openly, in some sense leaving them no choice.

Sarah Kendzior: They are not aggressively pursuing these dangerous criminals. They are not doing anything to make us safer. And so, it's yet another failed organizational body that we cannot count on. And that's a very frightening thing. I mean, that's one of the reasons I'm so annoyed with the butchering of the impeachment process because it was one of the few means of leverage that the Democrats had and it was never going to succeed in the sense that the Senate was going to convict. We've said that from the start, but there were things they could do. There were subpoena powers that they never implemented. There were ways of dragging this out to at least get the full story out there.

Sarah Kendzior: The more information you have, the better means you have of wielding it, using it, letting the American people know what's transpired, putting the pieces together, like they blew this opportunity. And when all the surrounding institutions are broken, when there is no one left to rely on, like why do that? Why give away one of the few points of leverage that you have?

Sarah Kendzior: And so, I want to talk about Trump and his lawyers from hell. So, Trump has selected his legal team and the legal goon squad has risen yet again. It's important to remember that the most important figures in Trump's life have always been his lawyers, from Roy Cohn to Rudy Giuliani to Michael Cohen. As I just mentioned, these lawyers are often implicated in crimes themselves.

Sarah Kendzior: You saw both Cohn and Cohen indicted and of course, Giuliani is suspected of multiple offenses, probably least among them being an unregistered foreign agent. He is a partner to the mafia. So anyway, this trend has continued with the individuals that Trump has selected for his impeachment defense. We have Ken Starr of Clinton Witch Hunt fame and Baylor University's sexual assault cover-up fame.

Sarah Kendzior: We have Jay Sekulow, who's been under investigation by the House Intelligence Committee for falsifying testimony. And worst of all, we have Alan Dershowitz who defended Jeffrey Epstein as a lawyer, but also socialized with him as a friend and was one of his clients when he was trafficking underage girls. It was Dershowitz who secured Epstein's mysterious federal plea deal in 2008. In 2014, Dershowitz was accused of raping an underage girl, procured by Epstein. He denied it saying he only got a massage and kept his underwear on, and has denied other allegations of rape and sexual assault. But in addition to his connection with Epstein, which spans decades, Dershowitz was a key player in other scandals and crimes involving people tied to the Trump Administration.

Sarah Kendzior: So, just a few examples: In 2011, Dershowitz served as Julian Assange's defense attorney, and proclaimed that WikiLeaks was "the 21st century Pentagon Papers." His main nemesis in that case was of course, Hillary Clinton. You also see Dershowitz defending Beny Steinmetz, an Israeli partner of Jared Kushner accused of money laundering and bribery schemes all over the world. Steinmetz helped Kushner fund his properties in New York. Some of which were also suspected of being money laundering venues.

Sarah Kendzior: The properties that Kushner and Steinmetz purchased jointly were worth over \$188 million. Steinmetz was featured in the Panama Papers because his schemes were so vast. He was arrested multiple times, but as a billionaire, he manages to weasel his way out of this with the help of people like Dershowitz. You also know Dershowitz from representing a lot of grotesque, more average Americans, most famously OJ Simpson, but that's not what I am criticizing here. Everyone is entitled to legal representation. What I'm criticizing is Dershowitz has a voluntary association with sex traffickers and organized crime.

Sarah Kendzior: He has also lied about the nature of law itself, saying about the Trump case that a President cannot be removed for abuse of power or for obstruction of Congress—the two things with which Trump was charged. That is a lie. He has also previously said that lying to the FBI is not a crime when he was discussing Michael Flynn's case. This is also a lie and notably this is not Dershowitz acting strange or doing something new, which is a way a lot of famous fancy people like to present this, because they've been hanging out with Dershowitz themselves for decades. Inviting him on TV, inviting him to the Hamptons parties or what have you. He has always been this way.

Sarah Kendzior: You can find comments on Nixon's impeachment and the associated trials going back to 1974, where he said, and I quote, "I am not happy seeing Nixon's gang being tried by blacks and liberals." So that that is who Alan Dershowitz is. He's disgusting. He disregards the rule of law. He voluntarily associates with pedophiles, rapists and mafiosos. That is who Trump chose for a reason. These are not attributes that Trump dislikes. This is what he seeks out. He is somebody who has inhabited this world of organized crime, linked not just to Trump but to others in the campaign and the administration for decades.

Sarah Kendzior: It therefore makes them trustworthy to Trump, much in the way that Rudy Giuliani is viewed as trustworthy. It doesn't matter that these individuals are sometimes mocked or derided for their blatant lies and hypocrisy. None of that is relevant. The shamelessness is an asset and so this is another, yet again, another very dangerous situation that I think the DC punditry really underestimates.

Sarah Kendzior: They can't bring themselves to admit that the social circles they inhabit are dominated by people like Dershowitz, like Jeffrey Epstein, like Donald Trump. That they are fine just looking the other way, never digging deeper. And I think that that kind of humiliation and that desire to protect themselves, protect their own reputations is outweighing their obligation to tell the truth. And that is a shame.

Andrea Chalupa: I wouldn't want to be anywhere near those fellows because they're karmically challenged and who knows what kind of animals are going to crash on them from out of the sky. It's just a creepy germ fest that Trump has surrounded himself with because that is what he is himself. So, when your lawyer needs to be under investigation, that's when you know what you're about. And I would say Ken Starr specifically, he was part of that effort to really cross the line in

American political culture with Bill Clinton's impeachment. In going into the graphic details of a blowjob, which really was a moment that shocked our country. I was a child when that scandal hit the news and it felt like the world was coming to an end. It felt like a very scary moment to witness as a kid.

Andrea Chalupa: And that was Ken Starr lacking any decency. So, I feel like ever since the defeat of Nixon, the monster of Nixon has just risen back scarier and greater like that monster in a horror movie that you think is dead. But then it grabs your ankles, you're walking away. I feel like we're just been dealing with, like, the risen corpse of Richard Nixon's criminal enterprise ever since we thought we defeated that monster. And that was for a lot of reasons because that wasn't a thorough job.

Andrea Chalupa: I think America's story is a story of unfinished business, whether it was the failed reconstruction following the Civil War and all the racist policies that came after and the impact they had for generations. That story of unfinished business, a lack of accountability followed Nixon. That story of unfinished business and a lack of accountability followed Reagan's Iran-Contra. Oh. And that story of unfinished business and the lack of accountability followed George W. Bush and his horrific invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq and his policies that helped Wall Street become a gambling den, which brought down the world economy. All of this is just a big story of unfinished business and a lack of accountability.

Andrea Chalupa: So, with that said, I think we should move on to some hopeful news to some exciting news. And that is, drum roll please. [drum roll]. That is the Gaslit Nation Democratic Presidential endorsement. Are you ready, Sarah?

Sarah Kendzior: I am ready.

Andrea Chalupa: I am so excited. Okay. So, first and foremost, let us remind you that this is a show that looks corruption in the face. This is a show that stares disaster in the face. And one thing we're always bleeding on about is that in 2008, Americans elected the first black person as President of United States. And we thought that racism was over. Well, white people did anyway, I'd say. And we thought that our work was done, and we could all celebrate and then go home. So, Americans have a pretty bad tendency of believing in Hollywood happy endings. That is, granted, one of our largest exports as a country with all that soft power of those Hollywood movies we send around the globe. But those only exist in Hollywood.

Andrea Chalupa: So, during the eight years of Obama's two terms, Karl Rove and the far-right engineered a massive takeover of states turning state governments red, creating red trifectas where the entire government is in Republican hands. And that weakened our democracy and quality of life across the map. And now that you have Republicans in the state governments attacking people's right to vote, to help further their corruption and hold onto power.

Andrea Chalupa: Democrats woke up to that reality with the surprise election of Donald Trump, and they've been trying and succeeding amazingly to try to turn more and more states blue. And congratulations to all those grassroots superstars on the ground that are doing that all important work and taking back our country, because that's what we need. So, I'm pointing that out because our work, no matter who becomes President is far from over.

Andrea Chalupa: All of us alive today have to dedicate our lives, ensuring that we have to finish the unfinished business and a fight for accountability. We have to fight corruption and stare disaster in their face. That's the only way we're getting out of this, being attacked by all these crises at once from Russian organized crime to American Far Right corruption, nuclear weapons of Facebook and so forth. And of course, the Climate Crisis that's coming for us.

Andrea Chalupa: We are not going to survive as a species unless we stay engaged and stay in the fight. So, our advice, first and foremost, to every American listening is to be perfectly honest with yourself. Have heart-to-hearts with yourself on who in your heart you want to see out of the Democratic group. Who do you want to see President of the United States, who is still in the race, of course, and get off the couch and fight with all your heart and soul for that person? Because by showing up for your chosen candidate, whoever your heart is leading you to, that is your North Star.

Andrea Chalupa: That is how you're going to find your family. That is how you are going to find your Sarah Kendzior. Sarah and I were brought together in this loving friendship because of our shared interests and because we both dove headfirst into our passions and what we really cared about and that was confronting this horrible corruption, confronting Kremlin aggression and so forth, and we did that at great personal risk to ourselves and we paid the price of hit pieces, but we weathered through it because of our friendship that sustained us all these years.

Andrea Chalupa: So, you will find if you haven't already or you will deepen your own community if you go out and show up for the candidate you believe in. And whether your candidate wins or loses, the family that you make right now on the ground during these primaries. This family that strengthen and expand by showing up and fighting your heart out during these primaries.

Andrea Chalupa: That's the family that is going to sustain you over the next decade of work that we desperately need you, that we desperately need me and Sarah and desperately need all of us to do together to protect our country, to protect the world and to protect all the vulnerable species out there including our own species. And so that's first and foremost. In that spirit, Sarah and I are going to be perfectly honest with ourselves and we're going to be perfectly honest with you about who we full-heartedly, with our hearts and souls, who we endorse.

Andrea Chalupa: Keeping in mind that not a single one of these people are perfect in the Democratic group. None of them are. The only person that can win a purity test

is a baby and I should know that because I've been spending a lot of time with babies. I just had one. This candidate that has energized us is the one that we want to share with you. We want to share our love letter now about why this candidate helps us sleep at night and makes us hopeful. With your over-bubbling enthusiasm, do you want to share who that is?

Sarah Kendzior: Yes, it is Elizabeth Warren, and I actually am enthusiastic, and Andrea can vouch for the fact that this never happens. I'm more enthusiastic about Warren as a potential President than I've been about any person who ran for office in my life. And this is a time where it's hard obviously to be a beat. It's hard to cheerlead. That's not my nature anyway, but you know what we're dealing with, our existential crises. We're dealing with multiple existential crises, autocracy, climate change, organized crime, being inserted into multiple governments that are acting together in a new access of authoritarianism.

Sarah Kendzior: Whoever is coming in is going to have challenges, unlike any President that has ever come before. And when the primary started, I really thought the choice is just going to be Trump versus not Trump. The possibility of a Democrat winning is there, but one who's actually capable of beginning to clean up this horrible entrenched mess that we're in. I thought the possibility of that happening was slim. But I do believe that Warren is capable of doing that.

Sarah Kendzior: I do believe she sees things for what they are. She sees the depth of that corruption. She has pragmatic plans to solve it. She's not afraid to take the lead on things, like impeachment. She's not afraid to make enemies out of terrible people. That's why billionaires hate her. That's why Wall Street hates her, but she's also able to actually get along with others to pass through legislation. It's a really rare combination and she has actually created fleeting moments of relief for me in the last few horrible years of this Administration. Just to know that someone else can see these problems.

Sarah Kendzior: Someone else realizes that kleptocracy in the United States is inseparable from kleptocracy abroad and is thinking and is listening and is meeting with people and is able to take in others' ideas without being defensive and build upon them and create ways of starting to get us out of this situation. Because I don't want to overstate what she can and cannot do because the situation is very dire. But I think she knows that. She has that realism. She has a combination of realism and warmth that I think is rare. And so, this is the first candidate that I've been this confident in, in their abilities to operate at multiple facets of governing. So, we're lucky that we have Warren for this moment in time.

Andrea Chalupa: Yes, without question. And I think one article we're going to share with everyone at the very top of our show notes, especially for the people that see Warren as a social list or what have you—there's an excellent case study on why a wealth tax is desperately needed now because you have to think of it as you're investing in yourself, you're investing in your community. And I know people listening say, "I don't want my taxes to go up", but think about it this way:

Andrea Chalupa: My God, the trouble that we're in as a nation, we are the richest nation in the world, the most powerful nation in the world. And yet we have rapidly growing income inequality and we have a falling life expectancy rate and we have the highest prison incarceration rate in the world, and we have some of the most embarrassing Far Right politicians in the world currently. And that says a lot when you have a global rise of the Far Right.

Andrea Chalupa: So, something has got to give. That is where we are. We are at a breaking point where something has got to give. And there's an incredible heartwarming story that the New York Times covered of an incredibly wealthy man by the name of Harris Rosen, who owns a chain of successful hotels. Harris Rosen invested, gave away, let's say, but really, it's an investment because he's strengthened his own country by doing this. Harris Rosen gave away millions of dollars to turn around a community in Florida and he invested in schools and early education. And what he saw by essentially living out Elizabeth Warren's wealth tax was he saw this once troubled community blossom into high school and college graduates completely turn itself around.

Andrea Chalupa: And so I want to then go into how Elizabeth Warren is essential because what she does that Bernie Sanders does not do, and this is not a knock against Bernie by any means, because if he is the candidate, we will be so happy if Biden's a candidate, if Klobuchar, if any Democrat, we will get behind this person first and foremost.

Andrea Chalupa: But just to touch on Bernie, because we are happy about all of the people like AOC he has inspired to join the political process and we need more of that. We like how Bernie's crotchety, he's like grumpy old man. I think that's very endearing. I personally have that side of me. Sarah certainly does. That's kind of what binds us together. But one thing that I wish he did more of is put white supremacy front and center into his policies for economic justice.

Andrea Chalupa: And Elizabeth Warren does that because for the simple fact that, we are living in a world of white supremacy and it's gotten to the point where the FBI has had to say that white supremacy terrorism is one of the greatest threats that the world faces today, that we as a country face today. And it's been spreading around the world and that matters for a whole list of reasons. We're dealing with an ideology of hate that has united all of these forces around the world. Putin's Mafia Terrorist State funds white supremacist groups, and is worshiped by Trump's whole movement of white supremacy terrorism.

Andrea Chalupa: As I mentioned before this, there was a spike in hate crimes were Trump held rallies in 2016. There's expected to be a spike in hate crimes when Brexit finally becomes official in the UK. You even had the MAGA hats. The Trump supporters ruin Star Wars. They ruined episode nine of Star Wars.

Andrea Chalupa: There was this great Washington Post article, which we'll put in our show notes about this whole cottage industry of white supremacist hate against the beautiful *Star Wars* film, *The Last Jedi*, which empowered women, which

empowered people of color. Well, Disney went to the dark side by catering to that cottage industry with *Star Wars*, *The Rise of Skywalker* by bringing in white male centrality like bringing in the white male to the center of the story and taking out characters that were women of color, that were sources of hate for the MAGA hats.

Andrea Chalupa: So, what we're telling you is that across the board you have to make white supremacy central to where we are right now in the world and how we got here and people in power. Enough people in power are failing to do that because the people in power are white, overwhelmingly white and they benefit from the system. So therefore, it goes underneath their nose and they hardly notice it.

Andrea Chalupa: Again, I'm going to go back to our excellent summer reading series where we interviewed the sociologist, Dr. Crystal Marie Fleming, who wrote a really vulnerable, beautiful, warmly funny book called *How to Be Less Stupid About Race*. It's a difficult conversation to have and I think Elizabeth Warren helps us have that conversation by coming in with statistics and putting those shocking statistics front and forward, such as the horrible discrepancies of maternal health for black women. And that even includes black women regardless of socioeconomic background, the mortality rates and the risks that they face white women simply do not.

Sarah Kendzior: Basically the attraction to Warren is similar to kind of how we structure the show, where we're taking on a lot of issues that may seem separate: kleptocracy, white-collar crime, organized crime, racism, misogyny, white supremacist movements, terrorist violence, etc. They're all connected, and we see this more and more now, especially in the digital era, especially with these social media monopolies, which have exacerbated all these problems, which is another group that Warren is fine taking on.

Sarah Kendzior: She's fine battling Facebook. You cannot solve a problem that you won't admit exists. And when you play down the severity of any problem or you try to separate things that are historically intertwined. For example, you cannot separate race from class in America, in a country that is founded on slave labor. You simply can't. You need to view these issues holistically. You can't separate civil rights from corruption.

Sarah Kendzior: It's not a coincidence that Trump's Administration is made up of white supremacist mafia affiliates. That these are overlapping categories. And so, we need people, in whatever the next administration is, hopefully not Trump's, that are able to bring all these issues together and see how they intertwine and begin to gut out that corruption and that cruelty at its roots. And I do trust that she sees this.

Sarah Kendzior: I also trust that she will select other good people for a Warren Administration and it's going to be a very tough few years ahead. There's no way to sugarcoat that. I honestly, I probably did. I just called it tough. It's going to be grueling. It's going to be bad. But there is the possibility of having someone who is more than

merely competent or merely passionate. Someone who is truly the right person at the right time. So that's why we are endorsing her. We encourage you to read and think and make up your own mind, but that is our view.

Andrea Chalupa: I agree a lot with the New York Times endorsement and what they meant listed about Warren and I want to add to it also, her stamina. You cannot fake the stamina and enthusiasm that Elizabeth Warren shows with her selfie lines. She's taken thousands of selfies by now, like the amount of energy that she has. That's the enthusiasm and stamina that we're going to need to get through the next four and eight years.

Andrea Chalupa: You need someone with that level of just nerdy, unapologetic, "I'm your favorite professor from college" enthusiasm and passion that she has. Again, Bernie being a close second. I mean Bernie has done what he was born to do, inspiring countless people to take themselves seriously and fight for their dreams and join Congress, run for office. That's desperately what we needed Bernie to do. I would see Bernie as the stick to Elizabeth Warren's carrot. I feel like Elizabeth Warren has more of that goofy enthusiasm that we need as a leader, as an executive at the top to really set the culture to be more inclusive and she's also shown that she can evolve and listen.

Andrea Chalupa: Ta-Nehisi Coates, when he wrote a great piece on reparations for The Atlantic, Elizabeth Warren reached out to him to learn more, to understand how that worked. She's someone that used to be a Republican, which I think works very much for her because she knows how to speak to other Republicans, and she knows the culture that she comes from. And the fact that she is no longer a Republican shows that she can listen, she can learn, she could evolve, and I think more than anything is that we need a president that can do that. That can evolve. Trump can never be wrong. He refuses to be wrong. He's stuck in his ways.

Andrea Chalupa: Whereas, Elizabeth Warren can listen and she can learn and she can change and she can make amends and she can bring greater healing and inclusivity and I think that's something that is desperately needed to unite the country and heal the rifts. Sarah and I both slept better at night when Elizabeth Warren was one of the first big giants in American politics to come out in support of impeachment right away. Upon reading the Mueller Report, and one thing that Sarah and I have always felt very unmoored being on the Left, being progressive and yet feeling isolated because a lot of Progressives laughed at Russiagate. They didn't take it seriously. They attacked us.

Andrea Chalupa: Elizabeth Warren takes corruption seriously, whether it's here or it's in the Kremlin and she understands very well with all of her plans that kleptocracy anywhere is kleptocracy everywhere. Whoever is the nominee, all of us will unite around that person.

Andrea Chalupa: Our discussion continues, and you can get access to that by standing up on our Patreon at the Truth Teller level or higher.

Sarah Kendzior: We want to encourage our listeners to help the victims of the Australian fires by donating to the St. Vincent de Paul Society in Australia, working on the ground to help people in need. Donate at donate.vinnies.org.au. For help directed toward Australia's First Nations communities, check out the Fire Relief Fund for First Nations communities by Neal Morris. We've posted links to these groups and others on our Patreon page.

Andrea Chalupa: We also encourage you to donate to WIRES, a group that rescues native Australian wildlife and distress. Donate at wires.org.au. And if you want to help critically endangered orangutans, already under pressure from the palm oil industry, donate to The Orangutan Project at the orangutanproject.org.

Andrea Chalupa: Gaslit Nation is 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 helps keep 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 is produced by David Whitehead, Martin Disenbourg, Nick Farr, Daven Arriaga and Karlyn Daigle.

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