

Gaslit Nation Transcript
March 25 2020
The United States of Enron

Gov. Andrew Cuomo:

What we're looking at right now is this wave of increasing cases. I just got off the phone with a new projection model that New York City was seeing double the number of cases every two and a half days. That can take your breath away. That curve, they keep talking about that we have to flatten the curve, flatten the curve. That's not a curve, Christopher. That is a wave. That is a tsunami. That's the scene in *The Perfect Storm* where George Clooney is trying to go up the wave and he gives the boat all the gas he can, diesel he can, to try to get over the top of the wave and the wave crashes over him. This wave is going to crash over our healthcare system. It will crash anywhere from 10 days to three weeks.

Interviewer:

From now.

Gov. Andrew Cuomo:

It is going to overwhelm the healthcare system from now. It's going to overwhelm the healthcare system and where we're going to feel it most. We can scramble and create beds. We'll have a staff problem because staff are getting sick and we're doing everything we can to find reserve staff. We won't have the equipment and we won't have the ventilators. I have been saying for weeks we need 30,000 ventilators. I've been saying it publicly. I've been requesting from the federal agencies, HHS secretary Azar there, sent 500 ventilators. We need 30,000 ventilators. If you don't have the ventilator, a person who needs the ventilator will die without the ventilator. It's a respiratory disease. And we're not getting the ventilators. I've been saying institute the darn Federal Procurement Act.

Interviewer:

So why do you think he doesn't do it?

Gov. Andrew Cuomo:

Command companies to produce-

Interviewer:

Why wouldn't he do it?

Gov. Andrew Cuomo:

Because their theory is companies are voluntarily saying, "I want to help. I want to help. I want to increase production." General Motors is saying "I'll get into the ventilator business." That's all well and fine and it is a nice thing and the corporations are doing great things. But you can't manage an operation on this ad hoc basis of people saying, "Yeah, I'm really going to give it a go." Order the ventilators, pay for the ventilators. Say, "This is how many I need."

Interviewer:

Why wouldn't he do it?

Gov. Andrew Cuomo:

This is where they have to go. Because their theory of operation is public-private sector partnership. You've seen them at press conferences. I've been very clear. I have an immediate problem on the equipment for this wave that is happening. PPEs, gowns, masks, most important are the ventilators and there has been no response. There has been no response. And that's why I said right here looking at the camera on your show to secretary Azar, he has to be responsible here. Tell me where I get 30,000 ventilators because, Christopher, people will die.

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*, out on April 7th and available for pre-order now.

Andrea Chalupa:

I'm Andrea Chalupa, a filmmaker and journalist and the writer and producer of the upcoming journalistic thriller, *Mr. Jones*, which is available for streaming right now in the UK and eventually in North America.

Sarah Kendzior:

Woohoo. Yay. Finally, some good news. And this is Gaslit Nation, a podcast covering corruption in the Trump administration, rising autocracy around the world and the global pandemic that has crashed the world economy. So welcome to our show. I think this is our fourth straight episode on the coronavirus crisis. And so to start out, we want to thank those who have much harder jobs than what we have right now.

Sarah Kendzior:

We want to thank the doctors and nurses and medics and service workers and garbage men and postal workers and everybody who has to leave their house, who has to go out right now for the rest of us. Those who can stay home, please stay home. Please remember that even if you're not sick, if you're not showing symptoms, you're potentially a vector for this virus. You could potentially infect the most vulnerable people in your community. So please heed the advice offered by actual experts and not Trump. Stay six feet apart. Wash your hands. Stay home. A lot of us, both of us, Andrea and I are on mandatory city lockdown. She's in New York. And I'm in St. Louis. But do you want to talk about how things are in New York because you're the hardest hit spot right now, right, Andrea?

Andrea Chalupa:

Oh my gosh. It's like being in a horror movie where you know the worst is about to come. And also on essential workers—I have a dear friend who I talk to nearly every day. He's 65 years old. The NYPD showed up to a shop and said that his shop was an essential business because he repairs the bikes that a lot of delivery people use to get around the city to deliver food and other things.

Andrea Chalupa:

So the NYPD came into his shop and said, "You're staying open. You're staying open." Even though he's at risk for this. And so, yeah. And so it just, everybody's hit with stories like this. That's just one that's hitting us right now. And I could not make it through the show if I shared how I'm really doing, how I'm really feeling. And I think it's important for us to sort of make it through this show.

Sarah Kendzior:

I hear you. No, I think a lot of people are feeling like that right now. So yeah, one thing I want to add to that is that everyone in this country, we need to stand by New York and the other very infected areas, even if you don't live in them. And I say this in St. Louis where we don't know how many cases we have because they still haven't tested us and that's true of the majority of the country. But there's a narrative going out, especially as people debate whether to "open up the economy" again, about whether it's safe to do that, that likes to use states like mine, Missouri, estimated to have about 200 cases versus thousands. I personally don't believe that and doctors in St. Louis don't believe that either.

Sarah Kendzior:

They like to use that as an example of like, "This isn't so bad" or "it's just the coasts" or something like that—it is such bullshit. Like, if anything disproves this facetious red, blue narrative, it is this disease which does not honor state lines, city lines. It does not honor anything. It will take your life if. It hasn't hit you yet, it's going to. For example, Missouri is predicted to be hardest hit in the beginning of May. We may look like New York does right now, and so it's very important to show solidarity between all the cities, between urban and rural regions. Rural regions are going to have their own problems. They don't have hospitals. Hospitals have closed especially over the last five years. Everybody is going to be hit by this. Everybody is going to be devastated by this.

Sarah Kendzior:

So, none of this bullshit about how some people aren't worth it or some regions aren't worth it, or we'll just have to let people die. None of that's happening. None of that's certainly happening on this show, but some people are still trying to put this narrative out there. We know that the government is still not providing necessary equipment like ventilators and masks. We see billionaires not helping at all. You see people like Michael Bloomberg who just spent something \$100 million on his own campaign, his losing campaign, throwing chump change at the situation, not even helping very much in the US. Or you see people like Lloyd Blankfein, the billionaire who cried at the idea of Elizabeth Warren's 2% wealth tax proposal.

Sarah Kendzior:

And he's saying that everybody should just go back to work because they don't care. They don't care if people are sick and dying. These are soulless people who only care about their greed and their money. And so Andrea, you had some historical context to this, yeah?

Andrea Chalupa:

Oh yes. This has been blood money. It's something that we've been researching for several years now. When you study authoritarianism, those who were complicit and looked the other way in the West were helping further corruption abroad. We've been sending blood money for a while. So we're ready for this moment and to document it and name names. But first I want to just do some housekeeping. I think we do have to address the fact that there are some lifestyle changes for all of us now that we're stuck inside. And basically if you didn't like the theater before, well, you're basically stuck on a stage. You and your partner are living a Eugene O'Neill play from here on out until this is over.

Andrea Chalupa:

And so I just have to say, if you haven't had a quarantine Festivus with the people in your life that you're closest with, you may not really care about those people. So my husband and I had a major Festivus, which started off very dirty. We were like verbally putting each other in a chokehold. And then it became a thing of beauty. We both opened up and became very honest and vulnerable and my husband had all these beautiful phrases flowing out of his mouth and I was just sitting there like a screenwriter going, "wait, I need to write this all down and put in my next screenplay, it is fabulous."

Andrea Chalupa:

And then on to Sarah, my other husband, we had a major Festivus and the annoying thing about fighting with Sarah—we become like an idiot Internet meme. We're like those two Spidermen, exactly like those two Spiderman pointing at each other, or those two hipsters in that video flipping each other off. Fighting with Sarah is like fighting with a mirror. She uses all my best lines against me. I'm like, "You can't say that to me. I was going to say that to you!" And everyone I know is having a Festivus right now with the people in their lives because all of us are scared and we know that there's no end in sight and that this isn't over. This is not over until there's a vaccine that's circulating. That's it. And I knew that from the beginning and I kept raising that and respectable experts kept shrugging at me and saying, "Oh, it's just like the flu. Why aren't you concerned about all the many people that die every year because of the flu?"

Andrea Chalupa:

I heard that from respectable people for weeks and I kept thinking, no, no, no, there's a lot more unfolding. There's a lot more that we... First of all, we're relying on China, an authoritarian state that cracked down on the initial whistleblower doctor who warned us about this. Yes, there was an international delegation that went to China, but this is still an authoritarian state. Information is still controlled. There's massive distrust of those coming from the outside. That's just a fact and you can't be blinded to that. And on top of that, we've had all these respectful experts throughout this try to put things in "proper context." Well, one thing that Sarah and I learned from Russia and Trump is that trust those who are being hysterical, as long as they are experts, as long as they have that credibility, if they are being hysterical, listen to them, listen to them.

Andrea Chalupa:

Because Sarah and I studied authoritarian states, crime and aggression for many years. The writing was very clearly on the wall for us in 2016. We were hysterical, rightfully hysterical, and they tried to punish us for warning everybody. And then we were proven right. Unfortunately, it was far too late by then. So Sarah and I have been watching the situation unfold and listening to those who are hysterical and they're the ones who have been proven correct. There's still so much that we're learning about this. Okay. So please trust that this is the new normal and our lives cannot safely go back to normal until there is a vaccine in circulation and that could be 18 months to two years.

Andrea Chalupa:

So Sarah had her end of the world apocalypse playlist, which has a lot of great stuff on it, and she posted that in a link on Patreon and some of our community put that into a Spotify list so you can listen to Sarah's End of the World playlist along with some other songs contributed from the Gaslit Nation community. So if you need that to get you through Armageddon, it's available. We'll post it in the show notes of this episode.

Andrea Chalupa:

So I listen to baby music all day and night and I love it because I have a baby. I'm one giant baby myself. So the only thing I can offer in these dark times is a reading list. I have a book recommendation for the parents out there and also to read to their kids and also a book recommendation for the parents to read for themselves to help get through this. And let me just share that with you. So for the little ones, you can read *The Little Prince*. That is a classic French children's book that was written by Antoine de Saint-Exupéry when he was living in exile in New York in the US when his beloved native France was under occupation by the Nazis and the US was sitting on the sidelines debating whether or not it's okay to punch a Nazi.

Andrea Chalupa:

So this book is filled with all types of symbolism that would help explain to your children in a poetic, subtle way why we are in the situation we are today. The evil of indifference and greed and corruption. The story of *The Little Prince* is about a pilot who gets stranded in the desert and he meets a charming little boy, a little prince, who talks to him about his tales of adventure. And it's this gorgeous story of faith and love and believing in the unseen. And I'm going to read from an excerpt there where the little Prince shares the story of meeting this vile businessman alone on a planet thinking he has the right to own everything, including the stars. All existence can be commodified according to this vile businessman who is the worst person the little Prince said that he met on his adventures. And this businessman bears a striking resemblance to another certain businessman.

Andrea Chalupa:

So here's the quote, this is The Little Prince talking. "I know a planet where there's a certain red-faced gentleman, he has never smelled a flower. He has never looked at a star. He has never loved anyone. He's never done anything in his life but add up figures. All day he says over and over, just like you, 'I am busy with matters of consequence.' And that makes him swell with pride. But he is not a man. He is a mushroom." He is not a man. He's a fungus. Okay? So we have a fungus in the White House. So if you need help sort of soothing your children and planting seeds in their minds to help them understand, when they're old enough, the situation we're in, I highly recommend *The Little Prince*. It's gorgeous. So it will also instill in them the power of faith and love. And it's worth reading again, if you've already read it to them.

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Sarah Kendzior:

Hey everyone. Sarah here to tell you about the podcast, The Alarmist. Every Tuesday writer, performer, alarmist Rebecca Delgado Smith and her guests scrutinize history's greatest disasters to figure out what went wrong and most importantly, who's to blame. From the plague to the sinking of the Titanic and the breakup of the Beatles, The Alarmist and her guests laugh, debate and of course poke a bit of fun to get to the bottom of things. They say history repeats itself, but not on The Alarmists watch. And if you couldn't get enough every Thursday, The Alarmists extends Tuesday's conversation into a bonus episode where you'll hear extended guest expert interviews, listener feedback, and perhaps a new verdict. If you love history and have a tendency of transforming any situation into the worst-case scenario, like Rebecca, The Alarmist is for you. Listen to The Alarmist every Tuesday and Thursday on Apple, Acast or wherever you listen to podcasts

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Sarah Kendzior:

For older kids, I always recommend this—I've been recommending this for years—I recommend *A Wrinkle in Time* because of the message of fighting against fascist conformity, the power not just of love but of righteous anger. And it is older children who are the heroes of that book. It's a narrative that's empowering without lying. It doesn't play down the difficulty and it doesn't play down people's flaws, that everyone in humanity is flawed and that sometimes these flaws can be used for good. And so if your kids are just struggling with the horror of the moment politically and just everything economically, socially, I recommend that as well. But go on.

Andrea Chalupa:

Now for the adults. So if you need somebody to hold your hand right now, may I recommend *The Master and Margarita* by Mikhail Bulgakov. It is a dazzling... I feel like a tour guide. I'm like, it is a dazzling Alice in Wonderland-like adventure of the story of the devil and his entourage, including a human-sized, alcohol-drinking, homicidal black cat terrorizing Stalin's Moscow. There's a woman named Margarita who wants to be reunited with the Master, the writer she loves, who's been sent to an asylum, like so many independent thinkers during the time of Stalin and his Great Terror. So the devil and his entourage conspired to help reunite them. But first there's a big, fat party in hell with all these famous dead people who've been sent to hell. And throughout this incredible book, there are chapters woven throughout of Pontius Pilate deciding what to do about this hippie revolutionary Jesus of Nazareth.

Andrea Chalupa:

And those two stories are intertwined thematically about the fight of good versus evil and how ultimately good always wins. And this story is incredible just because of the fact that it even exists in the first place. Mikhail Bulgakov was a beloved Russian playwright, born and raised in Kyiv, where there's a wonderful must-see museum to him that's incredibly enchanting.

Andrea Chalupa:

So Bulgakov wrote this in secret during Stalin's purges when his artist friends were disappearing and being killed, some of the best and brightest of Russian society were killed, were liquidated, during Stalin's purges. And like so many of his age, he essentially went insane. He lost his mind, rightfully so, from all the paranoia and the pressure and the horror of living in these conditions. And at one point he burned the manuscript because he was so terrified that they were going to come and arrest him next and find the manuscript for *Master and Margarita*.

Andrea Chalupa:

And he couldn't allow that to go on. And so he ended up writing the book again from scratch from his heart because his soul needed to breathe free. And even though his health declined and his mental state declined and he died like that in that state, the book lived on and his beloved wife Yulaina, his muse, who he based Margarita on in the book, she goes on to save his book and gets it printed. And as the manuscript gets serialized in a Russian newspaper, miraculously, many years later, it was like a miracle in the hands of regular Russians reading this, that such a manuscript could even exist. And because of this incredible story, the novel itself holds one of the most immortal lines in literature. And that is

“manuscripts don't burn”. Manuscripts don't burn. And that's a reminder to all of us that ideas, arts—that's all far more powerful than these tiny little spineless businessmen that we're up against.

Sarah Kendzior:

Sorry. Yes, no, thank you. I'm sorry everybody.

Andrea Chalupa:

Moving on. Now, the weather.

Sarah Kendzior:

Now the weather, so yes. Take that one to heart, as Axl Rose would say. So moving along... We've been talking about corona as a public health crisis, as an economic crisis. But to Andrea's point, it is also a political crisis. It is a political attempt at state-sanctioned mass murder that is going to be successful unless measures are taken to stop this administration and its backers. And so last night, Monday night, Trump and members of the GOP proposed that they let millions of elderly and sick Americans die instead of putting in basic safety rules for a few weeks to a few months. And so the pretext that they gave, and this is a revolting statement even with the pretext, is that this is what's good for the economy.

Sarah Kendzior:

They are willing to kill you because of the economy. So that's the message they actually want out there. And what's horrifying here is that the other message, the real truth behind this is much worse. And that's that they are willing to kill you because they are willing to kill you. That has been the truth the entire time. These are fascists who want to depopulate the country and the planet because a depopulated earth is easier to manage when you are trying to build an authoritarian state in a time, in particular, of climate change.

Sarah Kendzior:

And we've done many episodes about this. In particular check out our episodes from the beginning of 2019 when we were in the government shutdown, which I see as a prelude to the kind of policies that they're enacting now. It goes back even further than that. They have been literally telling you their plans. But here are some primary sources. First here is Trump himself in 2014 saying that a collapsed economy and riots are what makes America great. This is from Fox News. We've played this before, but I could never play this enough.

Donald Trump:

You know what solves it? When the economy crashes, when the country goes to total hell and everything is a disaster, then you'll have riots to go back to where we used to be when we were great. But the fact is that it's not easy for Republicans, because you have a lot of people that like their lives right now without working.

Sarah Kendzior:

And complementing that, we have Steve Bannon in 2013 as relayed by Daily Beast writer Ronald Radosh. He says: “‘I'm a Leninist.’ Bannon proudly proclaimed. Shocked, I asked him what he meant, ‘Lenin.’ He answered, ‘Wanting to destroy the state. And that's my goal too. I want to bring everything crashing down and destroy all of today's establishment.’ Bannon was employing Lenin's strategy for Tea Party, populist goals. He included in that group the Republican and Democratic parties, as well as the

traditional conservative press." That's from the Daily Beast. And so yes, they have told you this plan the entire time. They are backed by a transnational mafia, by rapture fiends, by vicious plutocrats, by eugenicists, by white supremacists. They are backed by the most vicious and horrible people possible who are all using Trump as a vehicle for their own agendas. Bannon never went away. The goal of human destruction and their system of ranking people according to a hierarchy in which they are inherently on top, that never went away.

Sarah Kendzior:

This is a Neo-Nazi project. And so in addition to murder by intent and murder by negligence, we also have this phenomenon of Trump giving health advice that literally kills people. He has already directly killed somebody by tweeting that the drug chloroquine kills coronavirus. So he's like a digital Jim Jones telling his followers to drink the poison Kool-Aid. And so, tragically, a 68-year-old man died from doing what Trump tweeted him to do.

Sarah Kendzior:

His wife told NBC on Monday, "We saw Trump on TV, every channel, and all of his buddies and that this was safe. Trump kept saying it was pretty much a cure. Oh my God, don't take anything. Don't believe anything. Don't believe anything the President says and his people because they don't know what they're talking about and don't take anything. Be so careful and call your doctor. This is a heartache I will never get over." And so our condolences to that woman and to her family for losing her husband.

Sarah Kendzior:

I'm very frustrated by this because of just the sheer inhumanity of it, but also the preventability of it because this public health crisis is an extension of the broader political crisis that accelerated when Trump took office but also predates him in terms of things like economic exploitation and the emergence of the Republican Party as an apocalyptic death cult which has been progressing along basically since the Reagan Era.

Sarah Kendzior:

Right now there are things politically that can be done to curtail some of this damage. One thing is that these tweets need to be banned. Trump's tweets need to be banned, where he gives out medical advice that can kill you. Preferably at this time, his whole account should be banned, and I've kind of gone back and forth about this, but when it's a public health emergency and people need accurate information and they're literally getting poison sold to them over the Internet by the President, yes, you have to take that down.

Sarah Kendzior:

The media needs to stop airing his press conferences. They serve no value. Put scientists on instead. Put public health officials on instead, put governors on instead to inform local populations. Do not air those conferences, especially live. If something major happens, then tape it, edit it, play it later. If you do not do this, you are going to be an accomplice to murder.

Andrea Chalupa:

Yeah. There's no other way to say this, and forgive me if this is offensive to anybody listening, but it really strikes of political Darwinism. Like we talk about all the groups of people that are vulnerable, most vulnerable, to the coronavirus and added to those groups are anybody who's dumb enough to listen to

Trump. That is a subset of people that are highly vulnerable to the coronavirus. That's just a fact. We're seeing it play out with that man in Arizona.

Andrea Chalupa:

And all of this is part of this larger trend where you have white men in America who are dying at alarming rates generally before even Trump came to power. And there's this issue where they're dying of their own racism. There's a book by Jonathan Metzll called *Dying of Whiteness: How the Politics of Racial Resentment Is Killing America's Heartland*. And that's a book by a sociologist and a psychiatrist seeking to understand why are white men in America following politicians who pass policies that are literally killing them?

Andrea Chalupa:

And that's been a trend that's been going on for a very long time. And it's the grotesque face of it. Like that man in Arizona just full on taking a Trump tweet and committing suicide by it essentially. This is all an extension of that and it's been going on for a very long time.

Andrea Chalupa:

And so they are a death cult with a willing following and then a lot of us on the sidelines that are fighting against their brutality are collateral damage. Us in New York where we have a brilliant heroic governor right now, Andrew Cuomo-say what you will about him. He's certainly not perfect. There's a lot that you can call out with Andrew Cuomo, but right now he's certainly rising to the occasion and making a lot of us who are stuck here feel a lot better, really truly comforted. I watch his press briefings as a matter of self-care because he's so comforting. The fact that he has to beg, go on national television and beg for ventilators, basic stuff that the President of the United States should be willing to throw into action.

Andrea Chalupa:

That is the most depressing thing of all, to see that. That's easily avoidable. And so I want to run down a little bit about what's at stake here and how there's no other word like how evil this is of what's going on right now. All of this, Trump saying that he wants the economy back up and running, that this is going to take a matter of a week or two where he had that horrific press conference on Monday with William Barr standing there and Pence.

Andrea Chalupa:

It was just a Pravda press conference. They were feeding lies to the American people, lies that can get people killed, lies that could drive idiot Republican state governments inaction that would further the deaths of people and exposure by not shutting schools, not shutting businesses. As I said in the previous episode, we're the polar bears now. We're those starving polar bears that we saw in the Arctic, warning us about climate change.

Andrea Chalupa:

That's us now. We are victims of this unchecked greed, and the Republican Party for decades now has been the party of unchecked greed. And the ultimate result of that has been a Donald Trump White House that is now actively killing us. That's what Cuomo is up against. And here he called on Twitter, Cuomo wrote, "we need the federal government to use the Defense Production Act so that we can get the medical supplies we desperately need. We can't just wait for companies to come forward with offers and hope they will. This is a national emergency."

Andrea Chalupa:

And in a press conference, Cuomo also explained, "We're competing against other states. Price gouging is a tremendous problem and it's only getting worse. There are masks that we were paying 85 cents for. We're now paying \$7." At that press conference on Monday, Barr gaslit the nation, just like he did with the Mueller Report coverup that major American newspapers fell for by running on the front page of the New York Times and Washington Post that Mueller exonerated Trump.

Andrea Chalupa:

So Barr, the gaslighter of the DOJ, our chief criminal law enforcement officer, he's a gaslighter extraordinaire. He goes on to tell the American people at the sham press conference that they're fighting price gouging. So what does that tell you? That tells you they're absolutely not fighting price gouging. That's how you need to read that.

Andrea Chalupa:

Anybody who is price gouging, making money off of New York right now and in this moment of crisis where the hospitals 10 days from now, three weeks from now, are about to be absolutely overwhelmed, and doctors and nurses, they're already vulnerable, already getting sick themselves, have to choose who lives and who dies. And if you're trying to make money off that right now, that's blood money. And Governor Cuomo, he is in such a tough place. He would probably love to leak the names of the individuals who are price gouging him right now and name and shame them.

Andrea Chalupa:

But he can't because as we say here in New York, they have him by the balls. That's the situation that they're in. So with this whole price gouging, you know what it brings up? It brings up Enron. We all remember the energy crisis in the West that Enron fueled for greed where people were seriously hurt, where lives were seriously disrupted and chaos was created.

Andrea Chalupa:

So from Wired Magazine, "Enron bought—" just as a background of what Enron was, Enron was an energy trading firm. The CEO, Ken Lay, was very close with George W. Bush and Cheney. He was a major backer of George W. Bush. He considered himself "quite close" to Bush, surprise, surprise there. And his energy firm, all of the news articles speak for themselves to give you background on this. So from Wired: "Enron bought California power at cheap, capped prices, routed it outside the state and then sold it back in to California at vastly inflated prices". From the LA Times:

Andrea Chalupa:

"Enron's traders divide schemes with such names as 'Fatboy' and 'Death Star' to manipulate the energy marketplace in California and other Western States. Behavior captured in well publicized recordings of company employees gloating over the plight of 'grandma Millie' and other hapless ratepayers."

Andrea Chalupa:

So this is basically what's happening now. We're living Enron here in New York by Trump refusing to listen to Andrew Cuomo and call the Defense Production Act that would force businesses across America to produce the much needed supplies that we desperately need, where lives are on the line, and those supplies would then be sold to the states that need them at reasonable prices and there would be

plenty to go around and businesses would still make money. They just wouldn't be able to profit a fortune, blood money, off of people's lives. They wouldn't be able to have these desperate, sleepless governors by the balls.

Andrea Chalupa:

That's what's at stake here. So Trump is allowing an Enron to go on right now by not calling the Defense Production Act. And it's because Republicans do not want to stand in the way of blood money. That's it. That is it. They do not want the government to have any influence, even good governance, on business. They want business to run freely. They believe in the God of the free market, even if it kills people.

Andrea Chalupa:

They want people to get rich off of all of these lives on the line. They want people to get rich off of doctors and nurses having to choose who lives and who dies in these horrific weeks that are ahead of us here in New York. And this is Enron all over again. This is Trump's Enron. This is Barr's Enron. This is Pence's Enron. This is Ivanka's Enron. This is Jared Kushner's Enron, and we cannot forget this.

Andrea Chalupa:

It's all happening again. It's playing out right now in this moment of crisis. It all echoes what that Texas Lieutenant Governor said about how grandma needs to be sacrificed on the altar of Wall Street, essentially. So what we're going to do now is we're going to play a clip from Alex Gibney's excellent documentary, *Enron: The Smartest Guys in the Room*. We're going to play a clip of Enron energy traders laughing about the energy crisis that they created back in the early 2000s. We're going to play a clip of that, how they're laughing at grandma, and then we're going to contrast it with this clip that just came out the other day of the Texas Lieutenant Governor on Fox News talking about how grandma needs to die so the economy can move forward.

Enron Executive 1:

All that money you guys stole from those poor mothers of grandmothers in California.

Enron Executive 2:

Yeah, grandma Millie, man.

Enron Executive 1:

She's the one who couldn't figure out how to fucking vote on the butterfly ballot.

Enron Executive 2:

Now she wants her fucking money back for the power you charge right up her ass.

Texas Lieutenant Governor Dan Patrick:

And Tucker, no one reached out to me and said "as a senior citizen are you willing to take a chance on your survival in exchange for keeping the America that all America loves for your children and grandchildren?" And if that's the exchange, I'm all in. And that doesn't make me noble or brave or anything like that. I just think there are lots of grandparents out there in this country like me, I have six grandchildren, that's what we all care about and what we love more than anything are those children.

And I want to live smart and see through this, but I don't want the whole country to be sacrificed. And that's what I see.

Sarah Kendzior:

Everything you said is right. And it reflects a broader corporate culture, a culture of disaster capitalism that really came to prominence just as Trump did in the 1980s. And so all of this is making me think of Carl Icahn known somewhat euphemistically as a "corporate raider" and all of his proteges, among them Trump, Wilbur Ross who's the Secretary of Commerce, and Steve Mnuchin, the Treasurer who is right now the central figure in the negotiations over what kind of compensation, what kind of bailout, we're going to be getting.

Sarah Kendzior:

And it is very dangerous that it is Mnuchin in this position. We've discussed him on this show before. So I think back in December 2018, listen to those episodes. These are people who treat financial meltdowns as political opportunities and political meltdowns as financial opportunities. And that has been the story of Mnuchin's life.

Sarah Kendzior:

So yes, we are headed for Enron part two or something worse. And so, just a little bit of background on him. Mnuchin is one of the very few remaining members of the original Trump administration. We've noted many times that the corona crisis is being managed by Trump's inner cabal, which is Pence, Jared, Ivanka, Mnuchin, instead of by public health officials. And so why did they want Mnuchin? Why did he stick around when so many others in the administration that were there in 2017 are gone? It's because he will steal from you as you suffer. They loot and they redistribute to themselves like reverse Robinhoods. And so this is something you need to take to heart. These men have known each other for decades. Carl Icahn even was in the Trump administration until late 2017 when he was removed due to massive ethics violations back when people actually got removed for things like that.

Sarah Kendzior:

They are all part of one group. They have known each other for a long time. Mnuchin was one of very few people in America to profit off the Bernie Madoff Ponzi scheme, which decimated the country during the 2008 financial collapse. Mnuchin, however, made a killing and now he will literally make a killing off of millions of dead Americans. Mnuchin was the chairman of Trump's deeply corrupt presidential campaign, which was initially investigated for fraud and theft before rule of law disappeared in this country. As Treasury Secretary, Mnuchin's main job has been to ease sanctions for Kremlin oligarchs, despite the law or the will of Congress. He's been particularly keen to help Oleg Deripaska, the oligarch for whom Manafort worked. And then here is what you must remember, which is that the Treasury was hijacked by Russia in 2015. So yes, the treasury was hijacked by Russia during the Obama administration and no one has done a thing about it.

Sarah Kendzior:

The only publication that has investigated this with the depth and rigor it merits is BuzzFeed. Jason Leopold and Anthony Cormier in December 2018 did a long piece about this, which I think is honestly one of the most horrific pieces of journalism to come out in the last few years. And that is saying something, the heart of this crisis and of the US turning into essentially a Kremlin proxy state managed by Russian mafia asset, Donald Trump. The heart of that story is in the Treasury and it is still hijacked.

Sarah Kendzior:

Mnuchin is still working in service of the Russian mafia and any kind of financial dealing that relates to the Treasury is going to relate to this mafia, what we've been calling a transnational crime syndicate masquerading as a government. So every time you watch these negotiations and interactions with Mnuchin, please keep this background in mind, his personal background and also his role within this broader network which is indeed an international network because we're seeing the same patterns play out in response to this virus in a variety of countries. Now I don't know if you want to add anything here. We should go into Barr and his full authoritarianism pursuit.

Andrea Chalupa:

Let's talk about Senator Richard Barr committing insider trading while publicly, like Trump, downplaying the pandemic. This is from NBC News: "While Barr was telling us not to worry, the powerful chairman of the Senate Intelligence Committee told a very different story to a gathering of dues-paying members of the Tar Heel Circle, a private club of business leaders and organizations.

Andrea Chalupa:

The Tar Heel Circle sponsored a luncheon on February 27th with Barr as its keynote speaker. Unlike in his public appearances, Barr's message was dire. 15 days before the Trump administration restricted European travel, Barr warned the audience—"I'm going to add the very rich audience—"against European travel. 16 days before North Carolina closed its schools, Barr warned the group closures were likely. Barr said the military might get involved using military resources for hospitals.

Andrea Chalupa:

Barr reiterated that this was likely going to become a pandemic. Barr's warnings were reflected in his personal behavior as well. In a single day, on February 13, he dumped his stock portfolio in 33 separate transactions, unloading close to \$1.7 million of stock holdings in hotels and other industries a little more than a week before those same stock values collapsed. Turns out that Barr wasn't the only senator bailing out of the stock market just in the nick of time.

Andrea Chalupa:

Senator Kelly Loeffler, a Republican from Georgia, also sold off substantial stock holdings after a closed January 24th briefing with health and intelligence officials. Loeffler denies any wrongdoing. Senators James Inhofe, Republican of Oklahoma, and Diane Feinstein, Democrat of California, also traded in the stock market at this time. But there is no indication that they participated in confidential briefings on the COVID-19 pandemic." Holy smokes. Okay, so Senator Barr is just as sleazy as his ancestor that shot and killed Alexander Hamilton, one of the most progressive, probably one of the only progressive founding fathers. So the Barr Family gene of wrongdoing lives on. Barr needs to be shoved out of the Senate. This should have already happened already. He was the guy that, according to the Mueller Report, being the Republican head of the Intelligence Committee, was feeding information to the Trump White House as the Senate investigation was ongoing of Trump and Russia.

Andrea Chalupa:

He is a scoundrel through and through, and needs to be kicked out of the Senate immediately. He needs to be forced to resign. This guy is an absolute danger to society to begin with. And so no surprise that he would publicly put millions of lives, countless lives, in danger by saying everything's fine and towing the

party line with Trump and then privately warn all the wealthy people that, “oh no, no, no, this is what you need to do guys, all right.” This is just like those escape pods for the very rich, those bedazzled bunkers that the wealthy are flocking to right now.

Andrea Chalupa:

But it's being carried out with our tax dollars in public policy where the rich are getting told the truth and the poor are being fed all these lies that are literally putting their lives in danger.

Sarah Kendzior:

Yeah, absolutely. And he should be thrown out of the Senate. And this just brings to mind that among other things that this virus is doing is of course, it's freezing all of our governmental institutions and processes that should be going on and of course a lot of this had already stopped anyway. Well before the virus, this is what the Trump administration had done.

Sarah Kendzior:

And so yeah, nothing is being done about him. And the news broke today that the hearings that Congress and the house bafflingly decided to schedule for March 31st, where they were going to investigate Bill Barr and no one understood why this was going on because this was back in January, right after impeachment that they set this date. Those are all going to be canceled as well, because people can't do the most basic things now. They can't hold a primary for the Democratic presidential primaries. And so I find it interesting that they scheduled that when they did. It may just be bad luck. We'll see, but yes one of the consequences of this crisis is that criminality, which was already rampant within this administration and among backers, is just going to run full force.

Sarah Kendzior:

There was not accountability before, there were not checks and balances, but now this has just been decimated. And there have been representatives who have been trying to keep people in check. You certainly see Warren or AOC trying to ensure that people just don't get away with these crimes. But Congress needs to innovate on this immediately. They need to do telecommuting. They need to do things to protect members of Congress from catching this. But they also need to continue to do their governmental duty. And that means harsh punishments for people like Burr. And preferably for people like Barr. I do not think that these hearings should be postponed. I think that the depth of Bill Barr's involvement in decades of government crimes and cover ups and his actions regarding the Mueller Report and a number of other grotesque lies and offenses he's committed while Attorney General for Trump.

Sarah Kendzior:

That needs to be examined now. And the reason that needs to be examined now is because Bill Barr is preparing to move America to full fascism. And so this is from The Washington Post. It says: “Justice department officials have gamed out scenarios in which they would seek to extend statutes of limitations for investigation stalled by the corona epidemic, or to ask to hold inmates longer than normal because of delayed court hearings, sparking fears that the Trump administration is trying to use the global pandemic to erode traditional civil liberties protections. The Justice Department's thinking was revealed in proposals made to Congress in recent weeks that would seek to confer a new power on the Chief Justice of the United States and give other top judges across the country wider latitude to postpone hearings in the districts they oversee.” And so there are a lot of other things being proposed, a

possible suspension of habeas corpus, indefinite detention of Americans at the will of Barr or Trump or others without respecting their Constitutional rights, without giving them a day in court.

Sarah Kendzior:

All of this is made possible by the fact that the courts have been packed with Trump lackeys and that people like Barr never, even during their confirmation hearings, were investigated or vetted properly. And when he did things like audition for the AG position with a letter saying that he planned to prosecute people for fictitious crimes—which is what he wants to do to Hillary Clinton—and that he planned to preemptively exonerate Trump for real crimes—which is what he did. He wrote all this out, they all knew that this was what he was about. He was the Iran-Contra cleanup guy. He was the guy who was so vile that in 1992, even ultra conservative William Safire was repulsed by him, was basically saying like, "Whatever you do, keep this lunatic away from the federal government."

Sarah Kendzior:

And so now he is trying to do that. And it's very frightening because they can use this virus as a pretext to move people's most fundamental and basic rights and take us down a very dark road. And what I've been noticing is that this pattern is being replicated in a number of the countries that, as we've discussed many times in the show, were involved in the various hijackings of democracy that transpired over 2016, whether it was the election of Donald Trump or Brexit or other atrocities. You're seeing it in Russia, of course, where you see ordinary people dying, oligarchs buying up ventilators, according to the Moscow Times, so that they can have them and hospitals can't, Putin proclaiming himself President for life. You see in Israel where indicted President Netanyahu is using emergency powers to continue his brutal rule in total violation of Israeli law.

Sarah Kendzior:

Trying to use it to say, "Oh, well we have an age limit for who can participate in this government function" or that "because of the safety of the members." I mean it's all crap, Haaretz and other Israeli publications are covering this in great detail. You see it in Hungary where Viktor Orbán is rewriting laws to give himself almost unlimited power. You're seeing in Brazil. You are seeing it until very recently in the UK where their response to the coronavirus was quite similar to the one in the United States, which was basically like, "Yeah, let it spread, let them die, let us profit." And it's only on Monday that Boris Johnson, of course, a key player in all of this, in the Brexit criminality and other terrible events in the last few years, he finally decided to lock the UK down and we'll see what they do.

Sarah Kendzior:

I mean I kind of doubt that he has the best of intentions in mind. I doubt that this necessarily serves a humanitarian purpose, but at least it extensively might protect the public health of the country. But yeah, this is a very, very dangerous situation because we were always in danger of full fascism. We were always in danger of a severe form of authoritarianism being implemented.

Sarah Kendzior:

But now citizens have been put in just an impossible position because there is a genuine plague, there is a genuine public health threat. And can we go out and protest draconian measures? No, we'll get infected. Can we participate in society as a collective in person? No, we'll get infected. Do we need to obey the laws and maintain some sort of trust in local authority? Yes, unfortunately we do. And that

does not come easy to Americans. It sure as hell doesn't come easy to me. And I'm very glad, by the way, that my county executive got indicted for financial crimes before the coronavirus hit.

Sarah Kendzior:

This is what I'm thankful for these days. And because he was indicted early, he got replaced by a doctor who is now my county executive. And while the governor of Missouri is basically doing jack shit about all this, my county executive doctor has actually put in laws in place to try to protect people in St. Louis County. And so I'm grateful and I do have that trust in him, but I do not have that trust, obviously, in the federal government because it's utterly unearned. And so yes, this is just, it's an impossible position for American people who value both democracy and the wellbeing of themselves, their loved ones, and just humanity as a whole. And so, yeah.

Andrea Chalupa:

Yeah. I mean, everything that you said, it's no surprise that our Republican Party was targeted by oligarchs and their henchmen from Ukraine and Russia. It's the oligarchs of the world, the "globigarchy" as Malcolm Nance called it on the show, that they're all coming together to make money off of the rest of us.

Andrea Chalupa:

It's like a blood money consolidation of power that's going on right now across the globe that Sarah just described. But with that said, I think all of us need to have faith, have faith, have faith that the smart ones among us, the ones that are paying attention, that are staying vigilant, the Dr. Fauci's of the world, the people that refuse to abandon each other and know how important it is to come from a place of empathy, no matter how hard things get to support one another with grace, no matter how hard things get, and just to have full faith that if we do this work courageously, if we stand in our truth courageously, that overall in time we absolutely will win.

Andrea Chalupa:

And no matter what your faith is like, somebody that I turn to for a lot of guidance in dark times is Martin Luther King Jr. Remember he was a radical in his day and now he has a national holiday. Now, his story is taught to children in schools around the world. So please have faith in his words that the moral arc of the universe is long, but it bends towards justice. I truly do believe that. I truly, truly do believe that progress is inevitable and we will only get there if we fight for it, if we stay engaged. But we are on the winning side of history, I do believe that. And that is my faith and I stand by that faith. As maniacal, as evil, as reprehensible, as determined as these actual criminals are from Barr to the Trump Family, to the Kushners and so forth, as determined as they are,

Andrea Chalupa:

I do believe that the nature of evil is inherently stupid. Look at Trump. Look at Putin. Putin for instance, has bled Russia dry, the massive brain drain that's been going on in Russia. Children, brilliant, bright young children being arrested for blogs, for YouTube videos, demanding an end to corruption. So Putin is choking Russia to death and he's just made himself Czar until 2036. So what does that mean? Putin is going to be a king of a pile of bones.

Andrea Chalupa:

He's deprived the world of Russian greatness. That is the hallmark of stupidity. And when he dies, there will be celebrations and he cannot control, in people's hearts, how excited the world will be when he's finally gone. Dictators cannot control what's in people's hearts. They simply cannot. And so just know that as terrifying as these times are ultimately, if you think of history, not in decades, but in generations, we will have a generation coming to pass that will look back on all this and judge us for the choices we're making now.

Andrea Chalupa:

We do have the core of history and I do believe that there will be justice served there and that these names that are so in the news today, they're going to be judged heavily in that court. And I do believe that ultimately that good will prevail. I do believe that. And I've studied history for centuries, looking at Ukraine specifically. And so I trust in that and hold faith in that in these very dark times.

Andrea Chalupa:

And the other message I want to send out there, very loud and clear, is to all of us: We are at war with our habits. I know that was a viral message coming out of Italy, that ultimately you learn that you're at war with your habits. All of us have urges right now. We want to go outside, we want to go on vacation, we want to show up and see our family, but we can't right now.

Andrea Chalupa:

And that's very difficult to understand. And I want to just say it's sort of like a lot of this is bringing back flashes of 9/11 what that was like, flashes of the 2007-2008 economic collapse, what that was like. And it takes you a while, for you inside to accept the situation. And we're still in this phase where we're accepting this new reality. And as a result, we are vulnerable. We're dangerous to ourselves to make decisions that might put ourselves or others in harm's way. And for me, there's so much I would love to do right now and it's killing me that I simply cannot do it. And one person I do want to call out, lovingly of course, is my own father. He loves to play tennis with a group of friends. They go out eating afterwards. It's a big social valve that he depends on and the group disbanded because of the pandemic.

Andrea Chalupa:

But my dad, being stubborn, is trying to find a way to keep it going with one other guy in the group thinking that if it's just the two of them playing tennis, what's the harm? There's a massive amount of harm in that, including the fact that I don't know anybody who touches his face as much as my own father. He's always rubbing his nose, he's rubbing his eyebrows. The man cannot keep his hands off his face. He should be kept in a basement until the pandemic is over.

Andrea Chalupa:

And the fact that my mother has a preexisting condition, how dare he even think of trying to make tennis work right now? That's the last thing he should be doing, especially because his own wife, the matriarch of the family, is at high risk for this. So I'm just calling out my dad in front of this global audience of listeners because I don't know how else to get through to him because we're at war with our own instincts, our urges, our habits, and we are right now a danger to ourselves until this fully sets in that we cannot do the things that used to be so easy to do before, we simply cannot do it.

Andrea Chalupa:

You have to be overcautious. You have to listen to those who are being "hysterical." This is a matter of life and death. This virus is so contagious and we're still learning so much about it still, okay? So please, for the love of God, just address that our ancestors had to fight the Soviets and the Nazis. We just need to stay home and watch Netflix. It's that simple. That's how we can save lives.

Dr. Emily Landon:

These extreme restrictions may seem, in the end, a little anticlimactic, because it's really hard to feel like you're saving the world when you're watching Netflix from your couch. But if we do this right, nothing happens. Yeah. A successful shelter in place means that you're going to feel like it was all for nothing. And you'd be right, because nothing means that nothing happened to your family and that's what we're going for here.

Andrea Chalupa:

Our discussion continues and you can get access to that by signing up on our Patreon at the Truth Teller level or higher.

Sarah Kendzior:

We want to encourage our listeners to help the victims of the Australian fires by donating to the Australian Red Cross, working on the ground to help people in need. We also encourage you to donate to WIRES, a group that rescues native Australian wildlife in distress. Donate at wires.org.au. We've posted links to these groups and others on our Patreon page.

Andrea Chalupa:

We encourage you to donate to the International Rescue Committee, a humanitarian relief organization helping refugees from Syria, donate at rescue.org. 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 in iTunes. It helps us reach more listeners. And check at our Patreon it keeps us going.

Sarah Kendzior:

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

Andrea Chalupa:

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Andrea Chalupa:

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