

Gaslit Nation Transcript

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Shadow Network: The Anne Nelson Interview - Part II

<https://www.patreon.com/posts/shadow-network-63964826>

[intro theme music]

Sarah Kendzior:

I'm Sarah Kendzior, the author of the bestsellers, *The View From Flyover Country* and *Hiding in Plain Sight*, and of the upcoming book, *They Knew: How a Culture of Conspiracy Keeps America Complacent*, available for pre-order now.

Andrea Chalupa:

I am Andrea Chalupa, a journalist and filmmaker and the writer and producer of the journalistic thriller, *Mr. Jones*, about Stalin's genocide famine in Ukraine, a film the Kremlin doesn't want you to see so be sure to see it.

Sarah Kendzior:

And this is *Gaslit Nation*, a podcast covering corruption in the United States and rising autocracy around the world.

Andrea Chalupa (00:00:48):

Welcome to our special spring series, *Gaslit Nation Presents... Rising up from the Ashes: Cassandras and Other Experts on Rebuilding Democracy* [Twilight Zone SFX]. Our bonus episodes available to Patreon subscribers at the Truth-teller level and higher feature our esteemed guests taking the *Gaslit Nation Self Care Q&A*, so for fun ideas, sign up to hear that.

Sarah Kendzior:

Joining at this level also gives you access to hundreds of bonus episodes on topics in the news today. We'll be back with our regular episodes in July. If you're signed up any time between now and then at the Democracy Defender level or higher on Patreon—

Andrea Chalupa:

You'll get special access to watch a live taping of *Gaslit Nation* over the summer. More details to come. This interview was recorded December 14th, 2021.

Andrea Chalupa (01:45):

We are back with our discussion with Ann Nelson, the author of the must-read book, *Shadow Network: Media, Money and the Secret Hub of the Radical Right*. We are picking up on our conversation about the Council for National Policy, which is a key node in that shadow network. So, Anne, who are some major players today that are recognizable in terms of members, influential players in the Council for National Policy? Kellyanne Conway, where does she fit into all this?

Anne Nelson (02:20):

Well, Kellyanne Conway showed up in the 2014 membership listing. Sometimes when people like that go into a highly conspicuous public office, they don't show up on the roster anymore. But, for example, Mike Pence is a member. Rebecca Mercer has been a member. Jay Sekulow, who is Trump's lawyer, is another one. Steve Bannon showed up on the 2014 listing. What's most interesting to me are figures who have been really working, you know, pulling the strings, not always in the public eye. One of them is a lawyer named Cleta Mitchell, a fellow Oklahoman who was on the call with Brad Raffensperger when Trump was trying to produce illicit 11,000 votes out of Georgia. Cleta Mitchell was advising Trump. She was on the call. Another person who's been prominent is Ginni Thomas, the wife of justice Clarence Thomas. Apparently, there are no legal restrictions to what the spouse of a Supreme Court justice can do, but she is a board member of the CNP Action, which is the political arm of the CNP.

Anne Nelson (03:45):

She is on this board with someone who argues cases before the Supreme Court. To my mind, that suggests a certain conflict of interest that should be examined. I should add that the CNP itself is a 501(c)3 defined as a "nonprofit educational charity", but if you go and look at their meetings—the videos of their meetings that are now posted on the internet—you can see Ginni Thomas chairing a panel on how to win elections for Republicans in specific states, which is a violation of IRS regulations. The membership stays mostly steady and you have long-time members like the owners of the Salem Media Organization, Epperson and Atsinger, who have been in the highest ranks of leadership. They have over 3,000 radio stations that are available to promulgate the CNP line, and that's what they do.

Anne Nelson (04:50):

You also have the head of the Religious Broadcasters Association, where you've got the Christian Broadcasting Company and Trinity Broadcasting. So again, the idea is that you've got these swing voters in battleground states who are highly susceptible to this religious broadcasting, where when you watch it, you almost get the idea that that voting for a Democrat would be a sin, but without any actual reporting on policies or issues that concern the general public; maybe all abortion, maybe all what they call "religious freedom" which is exactly the opposite. It's restricting the religious freedom of non-Christian faiths. Again, I talk a lot about the power of radio and people in New York City don't know what I'm talking about. It makes me very frustrated but I say in places like Oklahoma and Missouri,

Sarah Kendzior:

Mmmhmm <affirmative>

Anne Nelson:

A lot of people spend time in cars with the radio on.

Sarah Kendzior (05:48):

Yep. Definitely. Rush Limbaugh of Southern Missouri, of Cape Girardeau, is a testament to that. I want to ask about the role of the Prince/DeVos family, the parents of Erik Prince, mercenary for hire and his sister, former Trump administration Secretary of Education Betsy DeVos—I believe I have this right—who are core kind of founding members of the Council for National Policy. Since then, Erik Prince in particular has been involved in all sorts of horrific, dirty dealings around the world, everything from Blackwater to dirty deals with the UAE, the Saudis, Libya, Russia, and the Trump campaign. But he's treated like he's untouchable. Is that due to his parents' positioning in this Republican network or is there more at play?

Anne Nelson (06:44):

Well, you're absolutely right. The Prince family and the DeVos family of Michigan are like CNP royalty. One of the founding members of the Council for National Policy was James Dobson. I don't know if your audience would know him or not, but he's a psychologist. He is a very conservative Christian. He's the kind of psychologist that tells you that you should beat your child with a stick, not with your hand because the child should associate the hand with tenderness, whereas the stick can leave bruises without touching them. That guy. And he has this massive publishing and radio and media empire that he founded called Focus on the Family. He's not running it anymore, but he was the one that went to the DeVos family and got them to contribute a massive amount of money to found the core group within the CNP.

Anne Nelson (07:45):

It is called the Family Research Council. It's headed by Tony Perkins, who was formerly the president of the CNP and they now have their own media empire. You can find them doing Facebook streaming and something called "American Voices", etc. So this is like this little lobbying power base. The DeVos and Prince family, just to clarify, Betsy Prince—Elizabeth Prince, Erik Prince's sister—married Richard DeVos from the same highly conservative Calvinist Dutch community in Michigan. So her family had millions and millions of dollars that came out of her father's kind of inventions and manufacturing for the auto industry. He invented the little flip visor that comes down in the car and lights up with the mirror. So he made a lot of money from that. And the DeVos family is the founder of the Amway multi-level marketing fortune.

Anne Nelson (08:56):

So the last time I looked, they were sitting on \$6 billion. That gives them a lot of clout, not just in terms of Michigan politics but in financing and driving this whole operation. So when I actually attended one of their events, Betsy DeVos's mother, Elsa, was being honored—as she often is. It's a dynasty. But it's really important to remember that there's all kinds of dark money going in all directions. Don't look at one single individual fortune. You've got the National Christian Foundation, otherwise known as The Gathering. You've got lots of Koch Organization money and dark money consortia that flow into this system. And you just have millions and millions of dollars pumped into these operations. In terms of tracking it, I mean, as you probably noticed, my book has a thousand footnotes with many links to federal documents, but they can't track all the dark money and they don't very quickly. Sometimes there's a year or two lag time before you can get into the records, so we don't even know how big this thing is. We just know that it's very, very big.

Andrea Chalupa (10:15):

So one thing you touched on when we were ending the last discussion, the last episode with you, is the decline of local news. Could you give our listeners an overview of what's been happening with the state of journalism over the last couple decades and the rise in consolidation of far-right media?

Anne Nelson (10:40):

Sure. Even in the 1960s and '70s, there was a system of information in the United States. It was far from perfect, but it was functional. And you had professional journalists in places like the *Associated Press* and *Reuters* and the *New York Times News Service* who would follow stories that involved the national and international agenda and then they'd filter out across the hometown newspapers in communities. And when you looked at the *Stillwater News Press* in my hometown of Stillwater, Oklahoma, a lot of the front

page would be the national news, professionally reported. Some international news, not a lot, but a lot of people got the paper because they wanted to see their kids' basketball scores. They wanted the supermarket coupons and they did get a common base of information that at least gave a factual standard for them to have conversations with other people in their community and in the nation.

Anne Nelson (11:44):

And the news network—ABC, CBS, NBC, PBS—were also part of what they call this news ecosystem. So you may have disagreement in terms of editorials, you did. But at least if somebody said, “There was a battle in Vietnam,” you could pretty much trust that there was indeed a battle in Vietnam. So what happens? Well, first of all, the internet and the advertising gravitated from the newspapers. The coupons went away from the newspapers and went online. And so that happened more or less around 2000. Then in 2008, you had an economic profound slump and that hurt the newspapers. They began hemorrhaging reporters and staff and newspapers began to close. So you have this massive die off of small town newspapers in the United States. You also have a huge attrition in terms of the staff. So 57% of reporters and editors have been lost in American newspaper journalism since 2008. Pew just has released a series of studies on this.

Anne Nelson (13:04):

In some cases, like Edmond, Oklahoma, the local newspaper was closed this year. Closed altogether. Edmond's a major community in Oklahoma. In other cases, like my town in Stillwater, you've got a skeleton staff doing valiant work, where everybody has to wear four hats and work 24/7 to keep it going. And you have over a thousand counties in the United States that have no newspaper at all. This is another point of frustration I have with some of my colleagues. I was at a dinner with a *New York Times* reporter and I threw this out and he said, “Oh, well, they can just read the *New York Times*.”

Sarah Kendzior (13:46):

Oh, my God.

Anne Nelson (13:47):

That's the solution. And I was like, “Well, you know what? The people in Stillwater, Oklahoma want to start with their local baseball scores.” You know? They'll move on to the news from there, but by the way, you don't really know what they're worried about. They deserve to have their opinions and their concerns known and reflected. They're citizens too. And this creeping elitism that we have, a lot of people shrug it off but I think it's actually a problem

Andrea Chalupa (14:18):

It's without a doubt, a problem. You mentioned 2008 I was laid off suddenly from a magazine in 2008 and had to take whatever job offered itself up. I left corporate media shortly after that because there was just no future in it anymore. When I first started out, the old timers were telling me, they were like, “Get a new profession.” And these were veterans of all the major newspapers you could imagine; *LA Times*, *New York Times*, *Washington Post*, and the person that kept warning me of this the most, he's now working in PR (public relations). There's nothing wrong with that, but you need watchdogs. You need those local beat reporters, especially to confront and fight and track corruption. And since then, since going through the layoff and just realizing that there wasn't a future in this anymore and that I had to find something else, I turned to filmmaking, which is of course perilous in its own right.

Andrea (15:16):

But one thing I kept hearing from friends who survived, who were the lucky ones that were able to navigate the post-Great Recession world... There's a horrible disconnect between journalists that have been laid off and are struggling—which are many, many, many of them—and journalists that are entrenched in some cozy, cloistered media job at some elite publication. It's like night and day, just the tone deafness. It's like, you are a journalist. It's your job to cover the earthquakes going on around you and be sensitive to all the tremors. And here in your own profession, you don't even realize what's happening and what an earth shattering impact that's happening on our democracy. So that's a big part of it. I absolutely agree with you with the elite tone deafness of many in New York City and Washington DC media.

Andrea Chalupa (16:13):

It's because they have a seat on the Titanic lifeboat that they think everything's fine. And there's also a lot of shame among journalists to talk about this, how precarious financially their profession has become, how horrible all the day jobs are that you have to work and juggle—the consulting work and the freelance gigs and all the things you have to juggle—just to practice the profession that you love because of the public good that you want your work to have because you're so deeply concerned about what's happening where you live and in the broader world. So I just wanted to call everybody out on that because it's so bizarre talking to somebody who is doing great in journalism, in media, and they don't realize they're actually that meme on Twitter of that little cartoon dog sitting in a house on fire.

Anne Nelson (17:08):

Absolutely. And one place where we've all gotten totally hammered by this is with state House reporting. And again, this is something that my *New York Times* guy did not remotely understand. We've lost one third of our full time state House reporters. And that's, you know, that's where the sausage gets made. That's where the deals are cut. That's where you're gonna find corrupt politicians and shady deals and corporate featherbedding. So if you lose those state House reporters, the state loses a lot of its structural integrity, right? And that will affect elections. That will affect taxation. That affects every aspect of life. The *New York Times* and the *Washington Post* are not gonna put 50 state House reporters in to check on garbage collection in South Dakota, you know? That is local. And so when people talk about the populations of what they dismissively call the “flyover population”, I don't think they adequately understand how unrepresented these people feel and how they don't feel respected.

Anne Nelson (18:21):

Another aspect of the reporting that I find fault with is exactly this diner reporting, right? You're gonna have a primary in Iowa. You parachute a network correspondent or a big newspaper correspondent in and they sit in the diner with farmers for an hour and come back and know everything. That's just not how communities work. Even though there are admirable projects that place graduates of prominent journalism schools in communities for a year, it's like, well, you know, after a year, they may *just start* to recognize and trust you. It's these deep relationships and communities where your kids go to school together, where you trust, you know, like you, you know, the same person that died in the traffic accident. You've got a shared experience. That's why the polls, time after time, show that people have greater trust in their local news media and growing distrust of the national news media. And I'm absolutely convinced this is a major part of our national problem.

Sarah Kendzior(19:25):

It has played a huge role with COVID, I think, because I think if people had seen obituaries in a local newspaper, if they'd seen stories about people they know and how they're handling the coronavirus and all of these things in the beginning, there would've been trust and there would've been less susceptibility to the kind of rumors and disinformation that were put on social media. One of the things that's so frustrating to me is that this is a problem with a pretty easy solution, because there are a ton of great reporters living in these states. This is not a wasteland of reporting. What you have are reporters who can't afford the pay-to-play system. They cannot afford to go get some fancy graduate school, J-School degree, which is now a requirement even though it wasn't 20 years ago. They can't afford to go do an unpaid internship.

Sarah Kendzior (20:15):

They can't afford to go live in New York or DC and, you know, kiss all these people's asses, but they're good writers. They're good researchers. And they could just stay where they are. And ostensibly, all these incredibly wealthy corporate media outlets could just hire the local people who actually know the community and are good writers to do this work instead of parachuting some asshole into a diner. It's just so weird to me that the solution is right there. It feels very deliberate. It feels like part of a greater narrative enterprise to divide us into red and blue, and rural and urban, and all these very neat categories, which are not neat. You know, they bleed into each other. We're all Americans. We're all facing this in different ways. There's no stereotype that defines any of these regions, including New York City and places of power. And I don't know... sorry, that was more of just a rant.

Andrea Chalupa (21:10):

[laughs] Sarah and I are just now venting. We should get back to your book.

Anne Nelson:

[laughs]

Sarah Kendzior (21:14):

No, but I'm listening to Anne talk and I'm thinking about how, you know, she came outta Oklahoma. And sometimes it takes not being in the power centers to see the power centers very clearly. It's like Katniss in the *Hunger Games*. But anyway, go on. [laughs]

Anne Nelson (21:29):

That's a first. I've never been compared to that before.

Sarah Kendzior:

[laughs]

Anne Nelson:

My parents are still in Oklahoma and I've been going back several times a year ever since I left when I was 17 and I left to go to college. I've always gone back, sometimes for a big chunk of the summers. And I really try to keep my ear to the ground. The other part of it is just, you know, I am as worried about climate as anybody. I'm really worried about climate, and I try to do everything I can think of in defense of the environment. But what I see happening is the national news media taking these environmental

positions. Well, you go to Oklahoma or Texas or Louisiana, and a quarter to a third of people make their living working for the fossil fuels industry. So, the way it plays there is, “Oh, we're just gonna close it down and you can go starve.” Right? Well, they're not gonna vote for that. Where are the reporters and the editorial presences that say, “Okay, we're worried about you. We understand that these massive social changes may be necessary, but somebody's gonna be looking out for you too.” Right? That's what they're not hearing.

Sarah Kendzior (22:47):

Yeah. No, absolutely. And it's a frustrating thing too because that's another area where the Democratic Party has come up short. And there's that there's an opening, I mean, I don't even wanna call it strategy because it's just basic empathy. It's just looking at people's lives and the opportunities in front of them and the struggle to survive in a very cruel and dangerous world and thinking, Well, what do they need? What will happen? It's very disheartening. It's a terrible thing to be treated like this type of pawn, or just treated incidentally. If there's an election, if there's a tornado, if there's a riot, they'll maybe give you the time of day—briefly—but they'll never consider you as a full human being. Especially if you're not white. you know, I,

Sarah Kendzior (23:37):

I saw this, especially during Ferguson. If you're a Black person from this region, from the Midwest, from the South, it's even worse. But just generally speaking, I don't know... It's a disheartening phenomenon. And I think it has to do in part with the selection of who *can* stay in these big media outlets. The Andreas of the world had to leave, the people with empathy had to leave because they couldn't afford to be there throughout this time.

Anne Nelson (24:08):

Somebody that I admire, there's an academic named Victor Pickard who's written a book called *Democracy Without Journalism?* He comes up with all of these European models of supporting local journalism as a foundation of democracy. And I think some of the things in the spending bill were looking to direct some money towards local journalism, but basically over the last 20 years, the system we had was blown up. And it's gonna take some really good minds and a considerable amount of money to say, We have to have something. It doesn't have to look exactly like the old days, but people with this passion not just for fact-based reporting, certainly that, but also the quality you're talking about of empathy, right? Don't walk into a situation and immediately be antagonistic towards one group or another. This is something that pains me a lot in the talk I hear about evangelicals. “Oh, they're just a bunch of ignorant rednecks.” Well, no. No. They're fellow citizens who have their own interests and in some cases, you know, may need a lot more engagement and communication.

Andrea Chalupa (25:19):

So let's talk about that because I agree with you on the messaging and being grounded in empathy and connecting with people based on where they live and based on their concerns and, obviously, the whole sea change of climate change disrupting industries and reassuring them, “We're not taking away your jobs. We're not gonna leave you behind.” Obviously those fears are being played upon by the CNP and Exxon's communications and so forth. So even if Democrats do get the messaging right on that fundamental local level and talk to people where their pain is, won't they be ultimately drowned out by the extraordinarily impressive, far-reaching propaganda ecosystem that the Far Right has created over time? Not just Fox News and all the Fox News spinoffs, like One American Network and so on, but also

radio, as you mentioned. Now you have Sinclair buying up local TV networks. So could you talk about that, as you do in your book *Shadow Network*, the rise of this far-right propaganda network? How did that happen? What's the state of it now and how is there any overlap with the people behind the CNP?

Anne Nelson (26:42):

Well, yeah. Starting with groups like Salem Broadcasting Network, which is now Salem Media, there was this determined effort to take over media properties. I just came across a fascinating bit from *ProPublica* this week which talked about south Florida. And it said that the right-wing forces in south Florida purchased a radio station for \$350,000, which, you know, won't give you a studio apartment in New York City. Whereas in the same district, the Democrats spent \$14 million in paid advertising. So this is the different approach. That example sums it up. What they do is acquire properties, media properties, where they can broadcast their unidirectional advertising messages in the guise of news. The Democrats have been traditionally relying on the national news media at the same time that it's been withering away in the swing states that they would need to win.

Anne Nelson (27:51):

So, what could the Democrats do? This is kind of getting into the realm of game theory. A lot of these local stations and media properties sell very cheaply, but apparently nobody who is in support of the Democrats has been very serious about acquiring them and just allowing them to function as services to the community. That could change. You could get more government money into the picture. The government supports public libraries to provide information to the public, free of charge, because they think it's important. I don't see that journalism is any less important and I would argue it's more important. So if there could be a clamor in support of accurate information in these communities, there certainly are the means. And I know there are a lot of very bright people who care deeply about this issue and that some really good approaches could appear very quickly. But again, it's also getting people with the ability and the means to focus on the states where they do not tend to live and taking the concerns of their fellow citizens in these areas as serious problems of their own.

Andrea Chalupa (29:15):

How does the repeal of the fairness doctrine play into it? What is the fairness doctrine? What did it do and how was it taken away?

Anne Nelson (29:25):

The fairness doctrine was developed when radio stations and then television stations were mushrooming across the country in the early 20th century. The idea was that there was a scarcity in the bandwidth. So a town might only have one broadcast station. And the Federal Communications Commission had a ruling that said two things. One was that if you gave time to one political candidate, you'd have to give equal time to the other political candidate. So, you'd have to allow representation from both sides. And the other was that if somebody made a charge, you could have the right of reply. So it went along pretty much unchallenged until the Reagan administration. And a couple of things happened. First of all, the commissioners on the FCC tilted towards the Republicans. They were anti fairness doctrine. The Democrats were pro fairness doctrine, but the Democrats lost.

Anne Nelson (30:30):

There was another argument that said, "We're entering into the era of cable television" and that means that you won't have a community restricted to a single NBC station, etc. You'll have hundreds of cable

stations where people can get any information they want and they can balance their own diet of different positions. Well, it just didn't play out that way. It turned out that when you had cable news—and this certainly was true for Fox, but you can also see it with MSNBC—that they can build their audiences, first of all, by being more alarmist, and second of all, by building a kind of editorial base that is not centrist. So you started having the siphoning off of these audiences and rather than having this kind of, you know, mainstream news diet that kind of replicated what I was talking about with the newspapers, you had this cable news environment that was more polarizing and polarized.

Anne Nelson (31:44):

If you want a kind of chapter and verse, a filmmaker named Jen Senko has done a very interesting documentary on the effect of Fox News on her father and radicalizing him as a conservative. And she also has a companion book on it. And you see this all over the country so you have a very uneven playing field here because the right-wing media ecosystem makes no pretense of even handed coverage. None whatsoever. I've watched many hours of their coverage and you just do not find a kind word for any Democrat and you find only kind of blind support for their Republican favorites. Whereas on the other hand, the Democrats can expect a critical grilling from the standard news media. Hillary's email problem is gonna be all over the front page of the *New York Times*, not necessarily contextualized with what's going on among the Republicans, because you have the news media feeling they're accused of being liberal so then they bend over backwards to show that they're not. So here you have a highly critical news system for Democrats and cheerleaders for the Republicans in the same market.

Andrea Chalupa (33:09):

Do you think we need to bring back the fairness doctrine and apply it this time to cable news? Maybe even.... I don't even know, like social media-based media companies that exist solely on social media and online?

Anne Nelson (33:24):

Well, the fairness doctrine was developed in a context of some very smart people getting together and doing deep thinking about what regulatory environment they wanted. Broadcasting had this huge impact in the early 20th century on American culture. And they said, "Okay, this is really powerful. We need to make sure it doesn't get outta control" and they came up with the fairness doctrine and some other regulations that were meant to protect the public from excesses, including requiring networks to have a certain amount of public interest broadcasting, like news and documentaries. You know, back in the day when networks had to run a lot of long documentaries, believe it or not. And so those values eroded over the decades. I would say that right now, you can't just plug and play the regulations that were developed for a broadcasting environment.

Anne Nelson (34:29):

You have several issues that are of urgent interest. For example, the way Facebook has been proven to use its algorithms to heighten conflict because that drives its profit model. That's a problem. We want less conflict in our society, not more. And Facebook, in order to survive in a democracy, needs to subscribe to the public interest as well as its own profit model. Extend that to cable news. How do you define what a news organization is? I'm against licensing of journalists, but I'm also against clearly partisan organizations that describe themselves as nonprofits serving as vehicles for political propaganda. So whatever new regulatory environment we need, it has to be created with a full awareness of our current media ecosystem, which is profoundly different than it was even 30 years ago.

Andrea Chalupa (35:34):

Okay. Final two questions. With Kellyanne Conway—back to her—in the CNP... We get this question a lot, especially on our Patreon bonus episode Q&As: Do you think George Conway was really the resistance fighter that he came out to be under Trump? Or do you think he is very much part of that CNP way of thinking?

Anne Nelson (36:01):

Well, now I'm back in the realm of opinion because I have no exclusive reporting on what George Conway was thinking, but I don't want your audience to underestimate the role of opportunists. There are certainly people involved in the Council for National Policy and its many, many affiliates. You mentioned ALEC (The American Legislative Exchange Council), which drafts bills that are then leveraged across state lines in the same form to create their policies. Some of them are for their social hot button issues to get out their evangelical vote. A lot of them are just to save corporations from paying taxes and sticking the whole tax burden on the small taxpayer. It's what I would consider to be economic opportunism. Kellyanne Conway was a pollster before she showed up on the Council for National Policy roster. She was regarded as very competent in Washington.

Anne Nelson (37:07):

At a certain point, there are people who just see who's writing the checks and they show up. Is this a matter of deep religious conviction? Not in every case, no. That is why people like Jane Mayer and myself and others just keep following the money because there's an enormous amount of greed in this. Now, could people like George Conway say, "Wait a minute, this has gone too far. I can't stomach this."? We do see Republicans of conviction, who are moderates, who are stepping away from this radical right wing new turn and they're not being forced into the fold. They're basically choosing to be marginalized and to say, "This is not my Republican Party. It's been hijacked. We need to restore the actual Republican Party." and they're right. We need a two-party system. We need a legitimate Republican Party. This ain't it. I hope George Conway and various others do what they can to defend their traditional party. We'll see who can do what. It must be a little terrifying to be Liz Cheney right now. There are people like Adam Kinzinger and others who are taking a stand as Republicans. Bill Kristol. And I do think that their efforts are very important because ultimately what this whole question's about is not about saving the Democratic Party, it's about saving democracy.

Andrea Chalupa (38:51):

Who do you see as top contenders for the Republican candidate for president in 2024?

Anne Nelson (39:04):

Yeah... Well, I spend a lot of time trying to read the Council for National Policy tea leaves. They are a highly influential group within the current radicalized Republican Party. What I am seeing right now is uncertainty. I think that they want to take advantage of the energy and the base that Trump has brought to their movement. They also realize that he can be erratic and difficult to corral. Mike Pence has been their man for many years. He's been a member, he's been a regular at their meetings and he is of their tribe. He is himself an evangelical and I think he would be a hundred percent on board for all of their policies. So, my guess is that they would prefer Pence. They wouldn't mind Ted Cruz, but Ted Cruz has a massive charisma deficit.

Sarah Kendzior (40:10):

[laughs]

Andrea Chalupa:

That's putting it politely. [laughs]

Anne Nelson (40:12):

I try to be polite. I'm not saying that Mike Pence is a matinée idol.

Sarah Kendzior:

[laughs] Really?

Anne Nelson:

[laughs] Yeah, I would not say that. They have flirted with Nikki Haley, but I don't see her getting traction at the moment. I think that rather than being so focused on individual candidates, everybody needs to look deep into these mechanics because they are capable of riding the electoral wave into December of 2024. And if they have their people in place in the state legislatures and in the Congress, along with the people that Trump appointed to the federal courts, then at the last minute they could find a compromised candidate as Speaker of the House who would be in line to the presidency. And very quickly, they would have solidified control of all three branches of government. Once that happens, it's hard to see how it's undone certainly in my lifetime.

Anne Nelson (41:25):

So it's less a matter of individuals. And they would probably... I think it would be very likely that they'd try to find... I call Mike Pence Trump Lite, right? Because he doesn't have a lot of the personality characteristics and other unsavory aspects of Trump. It's harder for him to fire people up, but it's also harder for people to object to him because he's so anodyne, but he would carry out their wishes to the letter. I really worry when people point to January 6th with triumph because what I think it was was a dress rehearsal.

Sarah Kendzior:

Mmmhmm <affirmative>

Anne Nelson:

I think we can see them go through every stage of Plan A, Plan B, Plan C, Plan B for that entire year leading up to the paramilitary assault and that dress rehearsal allowed them out where the bugs were. They're gonna have everything in place to a far higher degree the next time around

[outro theme music]

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 you to donate to your local food bank, which is experiencing a spike in demand. We also encourage you to donate to Oil Change International, an advocacy group supported with the generous donation from the Greta Thunberg Foundation that exposes the true costs of fossil fuels and facilitates the ongoing transition to clean energy.

Andrea Chalupa:

We encourage you to help support Ukraine by donating to Razom for Ukraine at razomforukraine.org. We also encourage you to donate to the International Rescue Committee, a humanitarian relief organization helping refugees from Ukraine, Syria and Afghanistan. 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 theorangutangproject.org. 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 keeps us going.

Sarah Kendzior:

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

Andrea Chalupa:

Original music in Gaslit Nation is produced by David Whitehead, Martin Vissenberg, Nik Farr, Demien Arriaga, and Karlyn Daigle.

Sarah Kendzior:

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

Andrea Chalupa:

Gaslit Nation would like to thank our supporters at the Producer level on Patreon and higher—oh, and by the way, if you don't hear your name on this list and you've signed up, we're going to say your name starting in July and it keep it going for how long you've donated, FYI. So, we'd like to thank... [Patreon supporter list]