

Gaslit Nation Transcript

26 October 2022

“Something Wicked This Way Comes”

<https://www.patreon.com/posts/something-wicked-73784172>

[opening clip]

Fox News Host (00:00:00):

The US midterm elections cavalry arrived early in London. What do I mean by that? Well, the new British Prime Minister, Liz Truss, has laid out a terrific supply side economic growth plan, which looks a lot like the basic thrust of Kevin McCarthy's “Commitment to America” plan. Let's start with Truss: She is slashing tax rates and deregulating energy. I just love it. That's the liberal business media. This is wonderful. The liberal business media—you know who I'm talking about—is now trashing her plan. That tells me Truss has it exactly right.

[intro theme]

Sarah Kendzior (00:00:43):

I'm Sarah Kendzior, the author of the best sellers, *The View from Flyover Country* and *Hiding in Plain Sight* and of the book, *They Knew: How a Culture of Conspiracy Keeps America Complacent*, out now.

Andrea Chalupa (00:00:56):

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 does not want you to see.

Sarah Kendzior (00:01:09):

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

Andrea Chalupa (00:01:16):

And our opening clip was the idiot brigade at Fox News praising Liz Truss's economic plan which is, as they say, Kevin McCarthy's economic plan. Remember, that economic plan tanked the British pound, caused chaos for the British economy, and ended Liz Truss's time in office. Now there's a new prime minister, Rishi Sunak, who also happens to be apparently the wealthiest member of Parliament with a fortune twice that of the king. So that should be interesting. Our thoughts and prayers to the people of the United Kingdom.

Sarah Kendzior (00:01:59):

[laughs] Yeah, I don't think this is gonna end well for them. I mean, I keep coming back to our old episodes from a few years ago where we said Brexit and Trump are the same crime, which of course they were. And then look at where we are now. You know, all of the participants, all the perpetrators of that crime, both here and in the UK, remain unpunished, often remain within the halls of power. There was rumors about Boris Johnson coming back before this new PM was let in. There's widespread global instability. And then the folks who covered a lot of this the best in the UK, like Carole Cadwalladr, were harassed nearly to bankruptcy, hooked into horrible libel suits. So I feel like there's a culture of refusal to

tell the truth. People aren't stepping up to fill in where Carole left off. They aren't stepping up to fill in where a lot of exhausted Americans who've been studying, corruption and transnational organized crime, where they've had to exit the arena for a variety of reasons. Sad state of affairs. So yeah, my sympathies to our British audience. We are all in this together, unfortunately weaker, I think, than we were four years ago, but refusing to bow down nonetheless.

Andrea Chalupa (00:03:16):

As long as you guys keep Ben Wallace as Minister of Defense, we're all good. He's doing an amazing job in standing up to Russian fascism, being very supportive of Ukraine, getting Ukraine everything it needs to fight off a genocide. So, yay, Ben Wallace. Please stay in there no matter what. Even if there's a general election and labor comes to power, keep Ben Wallace. He's a good guy, a good chap, as you might say. Ukraine loves him. I'm a huge fan, so at least you got that right [laughs] for now

Sarah Kendzior (00:03:48):

In the midst of the shambles. And what else do they call it? There's so many great little British insults I should really master in case they need to flee. Anyway, do we have anything else to say about the UK? Andrea and I are very exhausted, by the way. So this is a very special, ultra exhausted episode of *Gaslit Nation*.

Andrea Chalupa (00:04:06):

Why are we so exhausted? Because there's a lot going on. There's a countdown to what may be our first of our last free and fair midterm elections, depending on how things go.

Sarah Kendzior (00:04:17):

I'm not sure it's all that free and fair already, but go on.

Andrea Chalupa (00:04:20):

Well, it's voting time on November 8th. A lot of states have early voting and so far the early vote has been off the charts, historic levels, far greater than the big blue wave in 2018. Of course, no one knows what that early vote means yet because Republicans tend to vote on election day. Young voters tend to vote on election day, but the early vote so far coming out a lot of these key states is historic levels, way surpassing 2018's blue wave. So hopefully that's a good sign. Make sure that you know where you're voting. You could start by getting your own voting plan by going to [gaslitnationpod.com](http://gaslitnationpod.com) and clicking on the homepage, "2022 Survival Guide". Make sure you're voting, make sure you're voting early if you can. Talk to your friends, family, neighbors around you about voting. This election is going to be so close because of the extreme polarization in our country.

Andrea Chalupa (00:05:15):

Both sides are energized and that's why we're seeing just this historic wave of voters, Republicans, Democrats. So every vote matters. A lot of these races you're going to see is gonna be... There are gonna be some nail biters, and that's why, you know, as busy as we are, as stressed as we are, I've even lost my voice. I have some cold that my preschooler brought home. Despite that, we're gonna keep pushing on. And so I hope you'll join me because it's so urgent to try to reach a thousand voters by election day on November 8th. I know that's a big goal, a thousand phone calls and add into that a thousand door knocks. So a thousand voters total. So far, I'm at a hundred [laughs]. But if you aim for a thousand, you'll push yourself to do more than you even thought you're capable of.

Andrea Chalupa (00:06:01):

So shoot for the moon and reach the stars. That's what this is all about. And if you're doing the 1000 voter challenge with me in *Gaslit Nation*, tweet at us at @GaslitNation on Twitter for your chance to come on the show. Out of all the tweets we receive, we're gonna select five people to come on the show and chat with us as we do every year when there's a big election. And we'll be extremely grateful for all the work that you're doing, and it'll be a great chance for you to meet us. As part of our Get Out the Vote Fun Times, we have a big event this Friday, October 28th at 4:00 PM Eastern. We're doing a phone bank for John Fetterman, who's up against that doctor from *The Simpsons*, Oz, Dr. Oz...

Sarah Kendzior (00:06:46):

Dr. Nick Riviera [laughs]

Andrea Chalupa (00:06:48):

Yeah, thank you for that one, Oprah, for inventing that guy. So we're gonna be doing a big old phone bank for John Fetterman in Pennsylvania, 4:00 PM. And guess what? Everyone who shows up to this phone bank this Friday, October 28th at 4:00 PM, your presence there at the end of the phone bank, we're gonna select one winner to receive a signed copy of Sarah's new book, *They Knew*, and also a signed *Mr. Jones* poster made by a famous Polish graphic designer. That is amazing. I'm so excited about that. So we've got three events, so if you don't win the book and the poster at the John Fetterman phone bank on Friday, you have another chance to win on Sunday, October 30th at 2:00 PM Eastern when we do a phone bank for Christy Smith, a Democrat running for a US House seat in California against Mike Garcia. This is a rematch. Last time around, Christy Smith lost by only 333 votes.

Andrea Chalupa (00:07:48):

So Mike Garcia, who's as Trumpian as they come, he's vulnerable here so we can make a difference. We could expand our majority in the US Senate with our Fetterman phone calls on Friday, and then expand our majority in the US House with our phone calls for Christy Smith on Sunday. At that phone bank on Sunday for Christy Smith, we're doing it with our friends at Swing Left and a friend of *Gaslit Nation*, Olga Lautman, one of the world's most renowned Russian mafia experts. She's gonna drop in to say hello. So if you're a big fan of Olga, as I am, you wanna come to this. And again, you have a chance of winning a signed copy of Sarah's new book, *They Knew*, and a signed *Mr. Jones* poster just by showing up to the *Gaslit Nation* phone banking events, right? So if you show up to all three of them, that increases your chances of winning. And the final phone bank is going to be Monday, November 7th, 4:00 PM Eastern. It's a phone bank with Indivisible for US Senate candidate Mandela Barnes in Wisconsin, who's running against that Kremlin propaganda agent Ron Johnson, and also for US Rep. Lauren Underwood in Illinois. To RSVP to all these events, go to our website, [gaslitnationpod.com](http://gaslitnationpod.com) and click on the 2022 Survival Guide on our homepage. Remember, every vote counts and every single phone call we make to help get out the boat together counts. So please join us.

Sarah Kendzior (00:09:06):

Yeah, I just have some things to say about this. You know, as you were talking, I keep thinking about a book that I read every October, and I actually quoted it previously on the show in October, which is *Something Wicked This Way Comes*, which is about an evil carnival that arrives in the Midwest. The carnival is led by a man named Mr. Dark who promises to grant everyone's desires while actually enslaving them and manipulating their perceptions of life and death. And that's what I basically feel like we are up against with our political system. And there are two protagonists of this book. There is William

who is more upbeat, more of willing to think that, you know, the forces of darkness are are not gonna triumph. And then there's his buddy Jim Nightshade.

Sarah Kendzior (00:09:56):

And that's basically the dynamic I think that we have created on the show where, you know, Will and Jim are good friends and they're very loyal to each other. But Jim is not quite tempted by the darkness, although that does happen in the book, but intrigued by the darkness and basically is quite wary of the whole situation. And that's where I'm feeling now. And honestly, I cannot wait for this election to be over, in part because I feel like I want people to have honest conversations about the structural threats that we are facing. You should absolutely go out and vote, and I do think people will vote. I think that the high early voting numbers are a good sign because I think people are truly concerned. So my concern is not with the voter, it is with a system that will not protect the voter, which includes not protecting poll workers who are facing threats of violence, who are being spied on by armed vigilantes in parking lot. This has been building for years.

Sarah Kendzior (00:10:57):

This was simmering in 2016. This boiled over in 2020. There was not punishment from the DOJ for the attack on the Capitol and the attempt to overturn a legitimate election, so of course they're trying it again. We're already seeing a number of GOP candidates saying that regardless of the results, they are not going to concede. And I think we should expect to see a lot of mini versions of January 6th. We had Ari Berman, an election specialist, especially a specialist on voter suppression and how it works, on the show several times to warn people about the fact that Steve Bannon and other right-wing extremists are basically stocking the vote counting apparatus with insurrectionists, with hardcore Trump supporters, because, you know, that is how they manipulate the system. They basically operate under twin maxims.

Sarah Kendzior (00:11:55):

The infamous statement from Roy Cohn of "Don't tell me what the law is, tell me who the judge is", this is the method they use when they go to court to try to get whatever they want. You know, Clarence Thomas is doing it right now on behalf of Trump. And then also, you know, the old aphorism, "It's not the votes that count, it's who counts the votes", allegedly attributed to Stalin. It's not quite clear whether that is his, but certainly in the Stalinist spirit. That's the spirit that the GOP have been in for a long time. And so there was a lot of time for the Democrats to prepare for this, to do all the things that they actually were pretty good about doing in 2020; to fight to secure voting by mail, for example, despite Louis DeJoy. Where are we now?

Sarah Kendzior (00:12:41):

Well, Louis DeJoy is still there, and yes, that is out of Biden's personal preference. He did get rid of two people on the USPS Board of Governors and replaced them with Republicans, with Mitch McConnell acolytes and hardcore Louis DeJoy supporters who are making it very difficult for folks to get their voting information in the mail and to vote by mail. We have an attack on voting rights that really accelerated in 2013 with the partial repeal of the VRA and caused a lot of new laws, the most alarming of which, as Ari Berman noted about a year and a half ago, are these laws in state legislatures that allow them (GOP extremist state legislatures) to simply overturn the vote. And so I'm very concerned about that because I look at folks in Georgia, for example, where turnout has been very high and they're organized and they're getting out, they're doing everything a citizen should do, and they're up against this horrific legislature that wants to overturn their will.

Sarah Kendzior (00:13:40):

We've already seen this happen. It's happened in my state of Missouri on ballot initiatives. It's happened in Texas, it's happened in Ohio, it's happened in all sorts of places. So again, there needed to be a plan in place. And what saddens me so much, and I do want everybody to take this to heart, is that if the Democrats either actually lose—which may well happen, especially in the House—or if they don't actually lose, but they don't stand up to Republicans who are baselessly saying that they lost—and I wanna stress baselessly, with no evidence, kind of in the manner that Trump did—I don't expect them to take responsibility, blame their own lack of vigilance, or even acknowledge corrupt laws. The strategy of the Democratic Party at this point, at least at the leadership level, seems to be to blame ordinary people who have had their rights stripped away and to scapegoat them.

Sarah Kendzior (00:14:41):

We've already seen this where any kind of criticism of Biden or Merrick Garland or other prominent Democratic figures is labeled “voter suppression”. That's not voter suppression. Voter suppression is having your vote thrown out by an extremist legislature. Voter suppression is needing forms of ID that are often difficult for some citizens to procure. Voter suppression is having your ballot not arrive to you in the mail, or not being able to get back in time to be counted. Voter suppression is Louis DeJoy staying in there. Voter suppression is poll workers being threatened with death, being intimidated to the point that they resign and are replaced by insurrectionists. All of that is actual voter suppression. Those are structural conditions that disenfranchise the voters. But what I'm watching is a narrative being placed where the blame is going to be on the voters themselves, the voters who have endured a global plague, a tanking economy, unbridled fascism that is not held in check by the DOJ, and just incredible psychological abuse and physical exhaustion for just years on end.

Sarah Kendzior (00:15:54):

So I personally do not blame the voters. I don't even blame the voters who stay home. I want the voters who are thinking about staying home to go out and vote anyway because it is a statement of refusal, that you refuse to accept the autocratic maneuvers of the GOP and that you also refuse to accept a system that wants you to bow down to a corrupt Democratic regime. I think the best way of changing this, of getting rid of some of the bad Democratic leadership that we have is by voting, especially by voting in primaries but mostly getting in a position where you're able to get these people out because they are clearly enablers. They're not there to protect us. Dropping out of the system entirely is not going to solve anything. They won't care about your silent protest.

Sarah Kendzior (00:16:43):

They won't care about your refusal. They're going to see it as acquiescence and they're going to enjoy it. Personally, I don't care at all how these people feel inside. I just know that I'm going to assert my right both to vote, but also to critique the people for whom I'm voting and just be wary of this. When they are blaming people abused by a system, they're doing it so that their own failures to protect people and to protect their rights are ignored. And we need to have a big conversation, probably ideally after the midterms, about that failure and about who needs to go across the board because we don't deserve this. I want you to take that to heart. Absolutely no one deserves what we've dealt with for the last six years, for the last 40 years, but particularly since Garland and other people who are supposed to enforce accountability for attacks in our elections have been put in and have done nothing. You deserve to vote in peace. You deserve to have attacks against our country thoroughly and relentlessly investigated. And

you deserve a government that gives a shit if our country dies. I don't care who you vote for; nobody deserves mafia state rule and I think we need to respect ourselves, to have some dignity in this process, to not accept this narrative of abuse if we're truly going to protect our democracy in the years to come.

Andrea Chalupa (00:18:11):

Very well said. And for more of that, come to our phone bank for John Fetterman this Friday, October 28th, 4:00 PM Eastern. The whole point is there's a massive amount of work that needs to be done. It's not being done. And we're taking, as we have from the very start of this show, a Ukrainian approach of self-reliance. The millennials that drove Euromaidan, the Revolution for Dignity Ukraine, some of those organizers, the earliest activists that put their bodies on the line in that revolution, went on to found a party called Self-Reliance. And that's why you're seeing Ukrainians who've had a trickling in, a trickling in of the defensive aid they need. They even had the most powerful military in the world, the US government, trying to talk them into getting ready for surrender, getting ready to be an exiled government, getting ready for gorilla warfare.

Andrea Chalupa (00:19:10):

And the Ukrainians were like, I don't need... I don't need, I need an ammo. Right? I fucked up that line, but you know what I'm saying. The Ukrainians went full self-reliance when Russia's full blown invasion started in February this year. They went self-reliance. They hammered the world for the support they needed, but they fought like how in the face of abject evil. And so we've always, from the start of the show, took a self-reliance stance of own your power. Don't give your power away. Be defiant no matter what the Russian opposition, do not fall into the nihilism that the Russian opposition was in for too long, where they waited too long to realize, "Oh wait, we could locally organize. We could run for office. We could organize all of these regional protests." You could read reports. So the Russian opposition could not figure all that out until it was too late.

Andrea Chalupa (00:20:04):

They had windows of opportunity, but they were just too stuck in this nihilistic, "Oh, there's nothing we can do. It's a dictatorship. We're stuck. That's it. Let's just go on with our lives, or let's flee abroad and be apolitical. I'm shocked." As I've said before in the show, a friend who got political asylum from Russia, who's now just living his life, I push him like, "What are you doing against the war? What are you doing for a free Russia?" He's like, "Ah, what's the point? What does it all matter?" Don't fall into that nihilism. Sarah and I stand firmly against that trap of nihilism. It's not what this is about. It's about owning your power, showing up for yourself and your community, and demanding better, demanding accountability. Are we angry as hell because Merrick Garland is a threat to our democracy as much as Russia and the Russian backed GOP? Yes.

Andrea Chalupa (00:20:51):

We should feel safe in our own country. We should be able to feel like we could vote or volunteer to be a poll watcher safely. Is it an outrage that, for instance, Amanda Lipman's group Run For Something doesn't have the war chest of the National Democratic Committees in Washington, DC and all of their bank rolled consultants? Amanda Litman is doing God's work. And all the interviews I've been doing for the Get Out the Vote programming, all the important conversations that we're bringing to you during this critical time, experts keep bringing up Amanda Litman and Run For Something. She took matters into her own hands. She worked on Hillary Clinton's campaign when the Russians hijacked that and helped bring Trump to power in an illegitimate election, as we've documented many times on the show and as

documented in the 400-page Mueller Report, Amanda Litman obviously felt the despair and shock that we all did in that moment, but she didn't stay in that despair.

Andrea Chalupa (00:21:45):

She rolled up her sleeves and she got busy and she's helping people run for office and she's making a critical difference. And she keeps looking at all of these headlines of all of these war chests of these bigger, more corporate Democratic players and she's like, "If I had that budget, if I had that money... " and it's true. Give her all the money. So if you went to live in a safe democracy, if you wanna stand up to organized crime here at home, if you wanna stand up to corporate greed that has no problem backing the Republican insurrectionists and the Do Nothing Democrats who are holding back reform that we desperately need and profiting off of it, if you wanna fight back against that, set up an automatic donation every month to Amanda Lipman's group, run for something, whether it's a dollar, \$5, whatever you can afford. There's a lot that we can still do.

Andrea Chalupa (00:22:33):

We resist nihilism at all costs. We know how powerful we are. We know how powerful you are, and it's going to be dark days ahead no matter who wins on November 8th because our problems are not gonna go away overnight. Even if our best dreams come true with holding on to Congress and expanding our majorities there and making Manchin and Sinema irrelevant, our problems do not go away overnight. This is a long road ahead. We're looking at at least a decade of this political instability because James Comey and the rest of American intelligence failed to do their job from stopping a known Russian asset whose family of grifters depended on dirty Russian oligarch money just to stay afloat, just to expand their corrupt empire, right? So we're still living with the repercussions of that, just like our British friends across the pond are living with the same repercussions of that, with that disastrous Brexit vote, so close and tilted with the help of, again, Russian dirty money.

Sarah Kendzior (00:23:28):

One thing to say about, you know, what's so great about Amanda Litman's approach is that it's the 50 state strategy, which is the strategy that the Democrats have abandoned and that the Republicans have not abandoned. They've created their own autocratic, manipulative version of it. I wrote about this in my book, *They Knew*, I've spoken about this on the show: I am very concerned that the autocracy that is being implemented now—you certainly see this in Supreme Court rulings—is a stepping stone to partition, you know, to a series of violent civil wars not based along North/South lines as it was in the 19th century, not between two sides, but kind of a number of battles between states and a lot of secessionist movements, which of course are backed by the most corrupt plutocrats and oligarchs in the world backed by foreign powers and backed by some of the most disloyal Americans.

Sarah Kendzior (00:24:26):

I'm worried that that is the grand plan, you know, possibly carried out more in the next 5 to 10 years than immediately because a depopulated country broken up into smaller regions is easier for people to rule. It is easier for them to extract resources as climate change worsens. It's easier for them to control the population. So I wanna emphasize very much that we, Americans, are all in this together, you know, all 50 states. Anyone who wants in is in. We have an enemy and the enemy are these plutocrats and corrupt evil politicians and oligarchs and mafiosos and others who want to strip this country down and sell it for parts. And I've been saying that for six years and it just gets more true every day, but in order to not fall prey for their tactics, this red state, blue state bullshit has to stop.

Sarah Kendzior (00:25:24):

As I've said many, many times, America is purple. It is purple like a bruise. This idea that there are "two Americas" is an illusion and it's one that makes for an excellent propaganda tactic for the people who want to preserve all the worst aspects of life in America and get rid of the best. And I see people on multiple sides of these issues falling for it. I see Democrats falling for it. And we have differences in approaches to various disasters, like Covid, for example, that I think give people the stereotype or the generalization in their mind that they need to dehumanize people in other states. And so please hold on to your own humanity. You do not deserve this. Nobody deserves this. Everybody deserves freedom. Everybody deserves justice, and we are more likely to get it.

Sarha Kendzior (00:26:20):

I mean, if we stick together as a nation and don't fall prey to this sort of propaganda, that's the only way that we will get it. So I hope that folks remember this because in the months to come, that sort of rhetoric, the secessionist rhetoric, the Civil War rhetoric, the "National divorce" rhetoric, by the way, you know, I mean this is total bullshit. Do not fall for any conservative who tells you that, you know, if you're a "blue state", which is not actually a blue state, if it leaves that they're just gonna peacefully leave you to your own devices. These are people who freak out when like, you know, a liberal arts college has pronouns in the classroom. They freak out over the most minute things and target everybody.

Sarah Kendzior (00:27:08):

They're not gonna let an entire state go. They're gonna attack the people in that state. They're gonna try to rearrange the populations. They will invade you and they will possibly win because they have so much of the military and the police on their side. And I'm sorry if I'm scaring the hell outta you, but I live at the edge of this landscape. I live in St. Louis, Missouri, which means I live in a Democratic city for the most part in a Republican hostage state that is full of, you know, there are a number of militias and extremist organizations here, right-wing extremists. So, you know, that is real. And I think it's a likely place for actual violence to break out. But that's true. There are other versions of this all over the country and real people will get hurt.

Sarah Kendzior (00:27:52):

Real people are so overwhelmed with worry about all the things we've already endured that I'm not sure they're even able to process that this is very likely the plan. So please just stand up for each other, extend some grace to each other. I see folks lashing out at each other all the time and what I really see is a nation in pain, a nation full of grief that has not collectively grieved. The motto has always been to move on, move on from covid, from January 6th, move on from decades of entrenched corruption, move on from poverty. And we here at *Gaslit Nation* are refusing to move on and we want you to join us in this refusal. And there are a lot of ways to express that. But just know we are not buckling down and we are not abandoning the United States of America. We're not gonna leave anybody by the wayside no matter, where you live or who you are. We just refuse. That's being a good citizen. That's being a good American, I think, is refusing to bow down to a culture of abandonment and corruption.

Andrea Chalupa (00:29:03):

Absolutely. And the way back to that, the way to being the United States of America, is the 50 state strategy. And within the 50 state strategy, an every district strategy. So as we move forward from this election, one of the most important areas that we have to rebuild is rural America. Building progressive



infrastructure in rural America. We have today on the show guests that have done that, that ran successfully in a rural district in Maine that was very Republican, and they were able to flip it Democrat and represent it for the State of Maine. And they share how they did it and how what they did can be replicated across the board, because we are one America. We are the United States of America. We're all in this time of mass trauma together. And so we need to learn to have conversations that cut through the noise of all that. So this discussion you're going to hear explains all of that beautifully.

Andrea Chalupa (00:30:05):

And there's a book as part of this that they wrote to share their lessons. And so this has to be the larger conversation moving forward. And I wanna just end this episode before we move on to our interview. I wanna do an urgent call to New York. Don't be complacent, New York. The polling is very scary for where we live here in our local races, including the race for governor. The polls are tightening there. You have a loyal Trumpist bootlicker, Lee Zeldin, who was an insurrectionist who voted against certifying the election results on January 6th. He's a Trump loyalist through and through. Not only that, Lee Zeldin is backed by the NRA. If he becomes governor, which could happen because the polls are tightening, if he becomes governor, he is going to push back a lot of these gun safety laws that Governor Hochul has been pushing through, even against the Supreme Court, trying to remove guns off of our streets and keep us safe, right?

Andrea Chalupa (00:31:08):

Mass shootings happen every day in America. It is an epidemic. It is terrifying. No country on earth should live with this daily terrorism, but we uniquely as Americans do. And I believe that this is part of not just the blood money greed of the gun lobby. I believe there's something deeper here. It's all connected. When you look at the Republicans, including Republican women like Lauren Boebert saying, "Women must submit. Women are the lesser vessel", and this is what she's running on because this is the Republican Party Christofascists thinking that. They're deeply proud of women being sent back into the home. And I believe that as part of allowing all of these mass shootings, including at schools, what do you think that's doing? That's forcing women back into the home to basically homeschool their kids. Look at the homeschool movement that these candidates, these Republicans, are also pushing.

Andrea Chalupa (00:32:03):

Even a guy like that Gen Z fascist, Crawford, what was his name?

Sarah Kendzior:

Oh, Madison.

Andrea Chalupa:

Madison. He was pushing homeschooling, you know what I mean? He's like in frat parties getting caught at all these weird parties and he's pushing homeschooling. Because it's part of a larger movement. When Margaret Atwood wrote *The Handmaid's Tale*, everything that she used for that novel for inspiration came from real life. And a lot of it came from our staunch conservatives right here at home. And her big question in writing that book was, "How do you get women back into the home? How do you force them to stay in the home and be limited to just being wives and mothers? How do you do that?" And I think this is part of that movement, is forcing women to submit by terrorizing your kids at school.

(00:32:48):

And then what's the next logical conclusion of that? Oh, there's all these mass shootings at schools. They're not stopping? No one's stopping them? So I'm gonna take my kid outta school, I'm gonna give up my career and I'm gonna homeschool them for 18 years or so? Think about it. This is a deeper crisis that we're up against. So Lee Zeldin stands for all that. It's just a very scary time. Hochul's been a great governor. She's passed innovative policy for green energy, investing massively into green industries, creating quality green jobs. She is going to make.... She *is* making New York a leader in the whole climate revolution that we desperately need in order to face off with the big bang that's coming when climate change just gets worse and worse. So it's Hochul who's going to lead us into the future. We desperately need her.

Andrea Chalupa (00:33:36):

So please, if you are a New Yorker, make sure you have a plan to vote. Do not sit this one out. Make sure you get five friends and neighbors to vote with you. Make sure, call people, just call people. Catch up with them, check in on them. Get people to the polls. We cannot sleep on this. We cannot be complacent. Another troubling sign is that Sean Patrick Maloney, who is the head of the DCCC, which is the Democrats' arm for overseeing the House races, he in New York state might lose his house race to a Republican. So this is how scary things are in New York state. It's not a safe blue state. We had a ballot measure in 2021 which would've expanded voting rights in New York state, which would've given Democrats an edge in redistricting. And the Democratic Party was complacent and did nothing in ensuring that this ballot measure would pass.

Andrea Chalupa (00:34:30):

And so what happened? Republicans ensured that it wouldn't. They made the investment, they beat the pavement, they went knocking on doors. They did launch events against this ballot initiative while Democrats in the state slept. So our biggest enemy here in big blue New York state is Democratic complacency. All right? So everyone needs to wake up, get to the polls, get your friends and neighbors to the polls, because with everything that we're up against here in New York, we cannot survive a Lee Zeldin administration. He'll let Trump back in. He'll let the Trump family back in. This will be a safe place for the Trumps again, and we all know how that goes. So please fight like hell. Protect abortion rights here at home. Stand up to the NRA. Protect green energy and climate policy. Vote for Kathy Hochul. We need her as our governor.

Now, without further ado, here is our interview on how to build progressive infrastructure, to build relationships with rural communities, to help protect our democracy going forward.

[transition music, begin interview]

Andrea Chalupa (00:35:35):

Hello everyone. Welcome to this special episode of *Gaslit Nation*. I am your co-host, Andrea Chalupa, talking with you today about a very important issue that will define our political landscape for the years to come, and that is how to reach the all important rural voter. What are rural voters? What do they want? How do we get through to them and and so on. And I'm, of course, saying all this from Brooklyn, New York. You know, I'm in the bubble, as they say. I'm in the progressive bubble. So to help walk us through this issue, we have on the show, Senator Chloe Maxmin. Senator Maxmin grew up on her

family's farm in Maine and has been a community organizer for more than 16 years. She's worked on numerous political campaigns and initiatives focusing on combating climate change and ensuring a resilient Maine.

Andrea Chalupa (00:36:24):

In her undergrad at Harvard, she co-founded Divest Harvard, a group of 10 participants, which soon grew to 70,000 focused on getting the university to divest from fossil fuels. Shortly thereafter, in 2018, Chloe became the first Democrat to ever win a House seat in Maine's District 88, while the oldest district in the oldest state in the country, and as House representative and now senator, Chloe's work is focused on effective, bipartisan, community-based leadership for Maine. And with her is Canyon Woodward, a political strategist, climate activist, and author born and raised in Southern Appalachia and the North Cascades. He earned an honors degree in social studies from Harvard. And in 2018, he set out on a journey with Chloe to explore what might be done to rebuild rural politics. And they are together the authors of *Dirt Road Revival*, an important book giving a deep dive on rural voters today and how to reach them. All right, so Chloe and Canyon, thank you so much for being here. Could you walk us through what is the rural voter? Why does it feel like Democrats have fallen short in reaching them? And what are the most important things to know about how to reach rural voters today?

Canyon Woodward (00:37:41):

Thanks a ton for having us. We're stoked to be here talking about this. It's such an important issue. I think not enough folks realize the outsized influence that the rural vote has on our elections from the local and state level all the way up to the federal level, the rural vote really has an outsized influence on our elections. And you look at that in states like my home state of North Carolina, where we can elect the Democratic governor statewide like we have, but then we end up with Republican majorities and super majorities in the state legislature, partially because of gerrymandering but overwhelmingly because we are, as a party, just running up the score in the most populous areas and winning by huge margins in districts in the cities and sometimes in the suburbs, and really neglecting organizing and going out into the rural areas and telling a story that resonates with rural voters and investing and organizing there. And that's really shooting us in the foot because we, you know, as Chloe's Chloe's runs have shown me, we can win in rural America, but we have to invest the resources.

Chloe Maxmin (00:39:05):

Yeah, I think everything that Canyon said was perfect and spot on. And I think it's something that, you know, we kind of understood intellectually as we were going into our campaigns and part of why we went into our campaigns trying to do things differently because we understood that rural America has a lot of power and it's been tilting to the right. From 2009 to 2019, rural America went from basically no partisan lean to voting 16 points Republican, which is just a huge shift in a short amount of time. But it really hit home for us when we were out canvassing. We created our own universe of folks to go talk to kind of outside of the party structure. And every day we were talking to people who had never been contacted by a Democratic candidate or canvasser in their entire voting history. There were also so many people who had never been contacted since 2008 when Obama was running for president. And it really just hit home how there's so many folks that, you know, as Democrats we just haven't talked to and actually there's a lot of common ground there. There's a lot of space to build relationships and respect and to try and bridge some of these huge divides that are tearing the country apart.

Andrea Chalupa (00:40:23):

Is it a simple matter of like lack of funds? Is it because Republicans, thanks to Citizens United, have so much more dark money their campaign war chests can allow them to go out there and do the work to

reach rural voters? What advantage do the Republicans have and what has sort of been holding back the Democrats from making those investments in rural voters?

Canyon Woodward (00:40:44):

There's a lot of things. I think over the past decade a lot of Democratic leaders have stopped trying to persuade folks who we see as disagreeing with us and have counted instead on demographic shifts to carry the party to victory, if only we can just squeeze enough votes out of our base in the most populous areas. And I think the choice to prioritize turnout in Democratic strongholds over persuasion of moderate and especially rural voters has cost us a lot. In the party, there's just an ingrained sense that it's not worth the resources to go out and go door to door in rural America. You know, the Chair of the DNC in 2018 said, "You can't knock doors in rural America" which is bonkers to me.

Andrea Chalupa (00:41:38):

Wait, wait, which chair was this? Which chair?

Canyon Woodward (00:41:41):

That was Tom Perez.

Andrea Chalupa:

Wow.

Canyon Woodward:

You know, he walked it back as he should but I think that that was really revealing of the party mindset and that has cost us so, so much over the past decade. And that was the heart of our campaigns in 2018 and 2020 in the most rural county and the most rural state in the country. Chloe overcame a 16 point Republican advantage by building a grassroots campaign to go door to door. That's how we reach people.

Andrea Chalupa (00:42:14):

That's extraordinary. So Chloe, what did you find? What are your three top points of advice for how to connect with people? And this is extremely important advice for us now as we're making phone calls and knocking on doors to get out the vote. And we have listeners at *Gaslit Nation* who are considering running for office. They've run for office because we've begged them to on this show. So what are some of the big three takeaways that you have from your experiences from how to connect with voters, how to approach a stranger and connect with them to make your cause known and help sort of share in this struggle together? How do you sort of humanize people when it can be really scary to approach a stranger?

Chloe Maxmin (00:43:02):

Yeah, it definitely is really scary, you know, especially when you might see a Trump sign on the lawn or when there's these that really challenge your honor maybe and for so many of us make us feel unsafe, so it's definitely very complicated territory. But for the most part what we found was that really centering listening and respect was so huge. When you're talking with folks who have different political views than you do, you don't walk up to their home where they're probably making dinner for their family and say, "Hey, I'm Chloe. We're strangers. Let's argue about abortion." What we did was we said, you know, "Hi, I'm Chloe. I'm running for state senate. I'm just stopping by to see what's on your mind and hear what

you're thinking." And having just really open ended conversations, which are actually how we begin to form relationships.

Chloe Maxmin (00:43:53):

We tend to, like you said, dehumanize politics and I think what Canyon and I have tried to do is make it more human and really just say, "How do we build a relationship with someone that we disagree with? What does that look like in our everyday lives?" and translate that to politics. And I think once you're listening and having the ability to kind of respect what you hear, I think it's about searching for that common ground. I was surprised in myself as someone who identifies as very strongly progressive that I did find a lot of common ground with people, even if it was as simple as, "Wow, we really love our community" or "Wow, we need more access to healthcare in rural America" or "Wow, it would be great if there were better transportation options for seniors in rural America."

Chloe Maxmin (00:44:41):

There are things that we can really connect on when we're centering our relationships around values of respect. And I think the third thing is that none of this can happen alone. It can't happen just by one candidate. It can't happen with just one campaign staff. It really takes a movement. I mean, we were so blessed and honored to have so many volunteers join our campaign in whatever way they felt was best for them. And that sense that the campaign wasn't just about getting one person elected, but it was really about our community and fighting for the better side of our community, not letting these dark divisive forces tear us down. None of it can be done alone.

Andrea Chalupa (00:45:25):

So I wanna just ask, what is the psychology of the rural voter? I'm bringing this up because someone very smart who I consider to be media literate was taken in by a thread—I believe he found it on Reddit—saying that the big difference between urban voters and rural voters is that urban voters tend to like people more because they're living surrounded by people in urban settings. They see government more active in their lives because they have more dependence on government, like public transportation. And rural voters don't see government as much in their lives. And I'm just raising this to share, like, this is a thread out there on the internet that somebody made with these points. I don't even know if they're true or not, but other people who consider themselves very sophisticated thinkers are repeating them, these points. And so I wanted to raise this to you. How do we think of the urban versus rural voter divide? Why is it that urban voters tend to be liberal, progressive, openly so, and rural ones tend to be conservative? What do you think it comes down to?

Chloe Maxmin (00:46:34):

There's so much. I mean, I think that there's like a very, very strong history about why progressive values have centered in the cities that goes all the way back to industrialization and folks leaving rural areas to move to the cities. And the formation of unions and labor rights and academic institutions really being concentrated in urban areas. There's a whole long history that we touch on in the book that has contributed to this pattern and I think there's been reinforcing elements too, especially with Democrats and a lot of the Democratic leaders coming from more urban spaces. And a lot of the leaders are absolutely incredible. You know, I admire AOC. She's one of the people that I look up to and she's from a city. But I think that rural culture is just different and every rural state is different and the way that these communities talk and interact and the way that community feels, it's just different, as it should be. We all deserve our own unique identities. And I think there's been kind of a lack of flexibility and interest in

really kind of reaching out to rural folks and centering that experience as well. And it's been to detriment of our country and our national politics.

Canyon Woodward (00:47:51):

All of that's spot on. I think the only thing I'd add is economically, in the Obama years post as we recovered from the Great Recession, rural America lagged behind on almost every economic measure. So I think there was a sense of resentment there from the government propping up Wall Street and this recovery not really including rural America. I think there's also been a really, really destructive narrative that has emerged in the past decade or so of just this idea that rural voters are ignorant and voting against their own self-interest because they're so ignorant. And it's just such a condescending, counterproductive narrative that really demonstrates how out of touch a lot of the establishment is with rural people. And I think that's one of the key things that we need to turn around.

Chloe Maxmin (00:48:53):

There was an article in the New York Post this summer about one of their writers who had come to Maine to vacation and this writer wrote this piece about how Maine is so backwoods and there's no public transportation and no one has any sense of style, and the writer was so grateful to get back to civilization in the city. And I remember reading the article and being like, "Oh, this is an *Onion*-type article about these themes about how progressives look at rural America. This is so funny and spot on." But it turned out that the article was very serious and it was that classic narrative about how rural states and rural spaces just don't live up to the civilized qualities of the city. And it made so many Mainers, so many of my friends, very resentful of that city perspective. And I just always felt like that was a good little anecdote of how these narratives just kind of get repeated in small ways and end up having a really big impact.

Andrea Chalupa (00:49:51):

And the New York Post is conservative [laughs].

Chloe Maxmin:

Yeah.

Andrea Chalupa:

So that's, you know, I guess they're basically telling on themselves, the Republican elite, and how they really see the people that vote for them. From a progressive perspective, I think a lot of frustrated progressives feel that they're also dealing, when it comes to rural voters, they tend to be conservative, and being conservative, they tend to get their news from Fox News. And there's this feeling that it's like a low information voter. That's one thing I've heard to describe rural voters, as low information voters. Is that what's going on as well? Is that playing into this?

Canyon Woodward (00:50:32):

Yeah, I mean, right-wing news, you know, Fox News and conservative talk radio, as well as Facebook and really insidious destructive disinformation campaigns have been a huge part of this story. There's no doubt about that. And at the same time, I think that we have to take responsibility for our own part that we've played in that, of not investing as progressives, as Democrats, not investing in campaigns in rural areas. We have not been in those communities showing up and combating those narratives and building relationships of trust with those folks. Democratic leaders have been pretty much nowhere to be seen in

rural America and there's just been this huge void that's opened up that's been filled with right-wing extremism, totally uncontested by Democrats.

Andrea Chalupa (00:51:32):

Wow, okay. Has this led to rural voters increasing their loyalty to Republicans and their hostility towards Democrats? Is it very foregone at this point? Is it gonna take years and years of investment to pull it back?

Canyon Woodward (00:51:48):

Well, I mean, I think the good news is that this isn't a story that goes back as far as we might think. Like Chloe mentioned earlier, as recently as 2009 the partisan lean was dead even in rural America. So it's not a completely lost cause, I think. I find so much hope in Chloe being able to win in a district that had a 16 point Republican advantage. But it's not going to be won through TV ad buys and Facebook ads. It's gonna take the party being willing to really, really seriously take several chapters out of the Bernie book, the AOC book, the Stacey Abrams book, and go back to the basics of face to face conversations, which are super time consuming, super resource intensive, but are what really are necessary to move the needle in rural America.

Andrea Chalupa (00:52:45):

And when we talk about rural voters, we don't just mean white because there's a lot of non-white people that live in a lot of rural areas as well. Could you talk a little bit about that, how it's not just a big white monolith. It actually can be quite diverse in rural areas across America increasingly so.

Canyon Woodward (00:53:02):

Totally. I mean Maine is overwhelmingly white, but then you have the rural organizing that Stacey Abrams has done in Georgia to register Black voters, rural voters in particular. So key to flipping those US Senate seats. Similar in our ability to win Arizona in 2020. So much of that was tremendous organizing in Navajo Nation and turning out the rural indigenous vote. About about a fifth or a quarter of rural America is people of color.

Andrea Chalupa (00:53:39):

If you two were elected as co-leaders of the Democratic National Committee, could that be a possibility? And if so, what would be sort of your main focus in creating the kind of central Democratic organizing force that could help Democrats increase their votes in all of these districts which would give us a greater margin, especially in a lot of these really close states and especially given Republican gerrymandering?

Chloe Maxmin (00:54:14):

I think for us it's all about grassroots organizing and really viewing campaigns as an opportunity to dig deep into a community and have the tough conversations that create relationships strong enough to withstand an election season. We are by far not the only people doing this work. There are incredible organizers and candidates on the ground who have been pounding the dirt roads for so long and really holding important ground in rural America. It's so important that instead of all of the resources disproportionately going to urban spaces, that there is ample support for rural candidates in tricky districts, who need more resources because it takes longer to knock doors. You need more volunteers to do all of the work. I think one of the blessings that we had in our race as well was a very strong Democratic county committee.

Chloe Maxmin (00:55:10):

The Lincoln County Democrats are doing incredible work, really organizing and holding onto a pretty strong Democratic base in a rural conservative purple county. And that kind of infrastructure is so important when we're talking about what it looks like for someone to win in rural America because, you know, the candidate and the campaign needs to go have those difficult conversations with Republicans and independents and so we need that strong county backbone infrastructure to be able to really make sure that Democrats don't lose faith that we're getting out to vote. And I think the last thing is that running for office is not always accessible to everybody. There's a reason why it's older, rich, white folks in office because you don't get paid to run for office and in a lot of state legislatures, you barely get paid to be in office.

Chloe Maxmin (00:56:04):

It's something we talk about in the book is just how we're young, we don't have any kids, our work is flexible. We could manage it. But if we want truly representative democracy, we need to ensure that folks from all backgrounds have the resources and capacity to run for office, whether that's adjusting legislative pay or making sure that candidates get all the resources and volunteer support that they need so that they can run and really represent their community, we need to focus on having a more representative elected body. And one of the things that gives me hope is swiping through Run For Something's Instagram account. They're an awesome organization that train and recruit young progressives to run for office and, oh my gosh, they just have so many amazing people running for office at all levels, all across the country. And that makes me really hopeful.

Andrea Chalupa (00:56:58):

That's wonderful. And how do you feel Jamie Harrison is doing as the DNC chair. He ran for that position as bringing back the dirt road politics, as he called it, from when he was running for Senate in South Carolina about, you know, people seeing that in rural America, in rural South Carolina, they weren't seeing their dirt roads being taken care of by government, so why should they care about government? So Jamie Harrison really cited that bringing back the connection showing rural America that government works as a reason why he wanted to run the DNC. Have you seen Jamie Harrison live up to those promises? Do you see him bringing back any element of reaching those voters?

Canyon Woodward (00:57:39):

Yes. He's definitely demonstrated a commitment to that, that is needed. I think it's a huge ship to turn, the DNC and the party at large. I think still with a little bit more focus on the rural, it's still a little bit too focused on, you know, "What can we do with consultants and big media buys?", those strategies as opposed to "let's really, really make a huge investment in hiring grassroots organizers in these communities on the ground to do the more grassroots movement work that we need to build over the long term." It's not a matter of an election cycle or a couple of election cycles. It's about building really long term rural infrastructure over the course of five years, 10 years that we really need to shift a lot of these districts.

Andrea Chalupa (00:58:41):

It's about investing in the ground on organizers who are part of their community, represent their community, and ensuring that these are leaders of tomorrow.



Canyon Woodward:

Yeah.

Andrea Chalupa:

So nothing replaces community.

Canyon Woodward (00:58:54):

Yeah, absolutely. It's the face to face conversations and those authentic interactions. So much more so in this digital age, those conversations are what move the voters in the middle that we can reach.

Andrea Chalupa (00:59:11):

Thank you both so much for your time on the show. You're always welcome back and we appreciate so much the work you're doing, so please stay in touch with us and come back anytime you're working on something that you think could help energize our listeners and move people to action because it's gonna be an all hands on deck time in America for many years to come.

Canyon Woodward (00:59:30):

Yeah. Enjoyed this conversation so much. If folks wanna get more involved wit this, [dirtroadorganizing.org](http://dirtroadorganizing.org) is our organization and we'd love to be in touch.

Chloe Maxmin:

Thank you so much.

Andrea Chalupa (00:59:51):

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 (00:59:57):

Pakistan has been decimated by record floods and people need help. To help victims of the floods, donate to Pakistan Emergency Flood Aid at [www.launchgood.com/campaign/pakistan\\_emergency\\_flood\\_aid](http://www.launchgood.com/campaign/pakistan_emergency_flood_aid). Climate and economic crises are everywhere. So continue supporting your local food bank as well.

Andrea Chalupa (01:00:21):

We encourage you to help support Ukraine by donating to Razom For Ukraine at [razomforukraine.org](http://razomforukraine.org). We also encourage you to donate to the International Rescue Committee, a humanitarian relief organization helping refugees from Syria, Ukraine, and Afghanistan. Donate at [rescue.org](http://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 [theorangutanproject.org](http://theorangutanproject.org). *Gaslit Nation* is produced by Sarah Kendzior and Andrea Chalupa. If you like what we do, leave us a review and iTunes. It helps us reach more listeners. And check out our Patreon. It keeps us going.

Sarah Kendzior (01:01:00):

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

Andrea Chalupa (01:01:12):

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

Sarah Kendzior (01:01:19):

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

Andrea Chalupa (01:01:26):

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