

Gaslit Nation Transcript
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"The Reality TV Congress"
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[intro clip of Katie Porter's 2024 US Senate campaign ad]

Rep. Katie Porter (00:01):

We're living through a time of extraordinary change. I'm Katie Porter. Change can be electrifying and exhilarating but change can also be disruptive, like the constant assault in our democracy and the dangerous imbalance in our economy. The threat from so-called leaders like Mitch McConnell has too often made the United States Senate the place where rights get revoked, special interests get rewarded, and our democracy gets rigged. Especially in times like these, California needs a warrior in Washington. That's exactly why I'm announcing my candidacy for the United States Senate in 2024. I don't do Congress the way others often do; I use whatever power I have to speak hard truths to the powers that be; to not just challenge the status quo but call it out, name names, and demand justice. That goes for taking on Wall Street and the big banks, Big Oil and Big Pharma. It's why I refuse to accept corporate PAC and lobbyist campaign money. I don't want it. And I'm leading the fight to ban Congressional stock trading because it's just wrong. To win these fights, it's time for new leadership in the US Senate. If you agree, please go to katieporter.com and join my campaign for the US Senate today. Thank you for caring about the California we can build together.

[intro theme music]

Sarah Kendzior (01:37):

I'm Sarah Kendzior, the author of the bestsellers *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 (01:50):

I'm Andrea Chalupa, a journalist and filmmaker and the writer and producer of the journalistic thriller, *Mr. Jones*, the film the Kremlin does not want you to see, so go see it.

Sarah Kendzior (02:00):

And this is *Gaslit Nation*, a podcast covering corruption in the United States and rising autocracy around the world. We've got plenty about the intersection of those two themes today, but first an announcement: On Tuesday, January 24th, we are going to do a live taping of the show at 12:00 PM Eastern Time/11:00 PM Central time. This is for our Patreon subscribers at the Democracy Defender level or higher. We're gonna do our regular taping of the show and discussion, but we're also going to be taking your questions. And then anybody who listens to the show will be able to hear that result in all its tech era glory. So please go to our patreon at patreon.com/gaslit and go sign up for that. And now I'll turn it over to Andrea.

Andrea Chalupa (02:50):

Yes. I look forward to the live taping. Little apprehensive 'cause I'm a bit of a bobblehead on camera when I do this show. [laughs] I really do. Even when I announce myself, I'm just like, arms up in the air,

big smile and you're gonna see sort of like the weirdness that goes into making this. One thing I propose doing, Sarah, if you're up for it—and I really do mean this—I want, when we do that Zoom event, that we all come on Zoom at the exact same time. Of course, everyone else will be muted, but it'll be you and I doing what we do every week when we record, which is figure out the show in real time, what we're talking about. I think people should really see that.

Sarah Kendzior (03:28):

[laughs] I'm not sure everyone needs to witness that. Yeah, the five minute, like, "What the fuck are we talkin' about today?" Okay. That conversation? [laughs]

Andrea Chalupa (03:38):

Yes!

Sarah Kendzior:

That needs to be immortalized clearly.

Andrea Chalupa:

Yes.

Sarah Kendzior (03:39):

Speaking of, what the fuck are we talking about today, Andrea?

Andrea Chalupa (03:42):

Well, as you heard, the opening clip was our very own Katie Porter, a representative of California, who announced that she's running against—

Sarah Kendzior (03:54):

Against who?

Andrea Chalupa (03:56):

I just short circuited over all the ways to describe this.

Sarah Kendzior (03:58):

Well that's a good question. Who is she running against? This is the only thing that—

Andrea Chalupa (04:01):

A non-person. A non-entity. Basically a giant receptacle for military contracts, insider trading, stolen wealth corruption, overstaying-her-welcome gerontocracy symbol of how democracies die, Dianne Feinstein.

Sarah Kendzior (04:18):

Ah, yes. It's one of these things where you could describe that and I don't know whether you're building to the Republican candidate or the Democratic candidate. I was saying to Andrea before we started recording that I am so sick of elections. I'm sick of the last election. I am sick of these entities—the DCCC and the other PACs that throw elections, that brow beat the voters, that build personality cults—and so, generally speaking, I'm not particularly interested in any of these developments with the exception, in this case, of Katie Porter because she is anti-corruption. She does actually understand structural crises that we're facing. And she is the antithesis of Dianne Feinstein, who is one of those senators that would've had Manchin and Sinema not already volunteered this position, you know, filled the role of rotating villain in nixing the progressive ideas of the Democratic party, which managed to accomplish very little for the time that it had the House, Senate and the presidency.

Sarah Kendzior (05:26):

So it would be genuinely interesting to have her in the Senate. But geez, man, I'm already watching this and it reminds me of when Warren kicked off her campaign. I think it was at the end of 2018, the very end of 2018. At the same time, you know, I'm watching all the little bots and bot-brained people with their bot-brained reactions of, you know, “Whoa, what about Adam Schiff?” Or, “We can't give up the seat.” And I'm like, Jesus Christ. It's gonna be two years of this because it's just dark money running against Katie Porter. Dark money has declared its candidacy and so we're gonna get to watch all of these... I mean, I really don't know. I don't know if they're human beings or paid operatives or bots because they're utterly indistinguishable in the predictability of what they say and in the fact that they would immediately move to attack her. So I hope they all get outed. There's been more of that; people outing the bot farms and the propagandists. I wish the folks behind the “Twitter Files” would do something with the actual public domain information here showing state influence, which is real, unlike what they seem to be looking at. But that's another story. Anyway, your thoughts on it?

Andrea Chalupa (06:40):

Well, I just wanna go back to Dianne Feinstein and just make the point that Sarah and I are not being ageist, as we sometimes do get accused. We welcome people from all backgrounds. We too will be the old ladies, not just emotionally feeling old ourselves from all that we've been through—all of us collectively over these Trump decades—but we're not being ageist. Dianne Feinstein is really deadweight and there have been troubling reports, credible reports, that Dianne Feinstein isn't in the best place to be in a position of power, that she has shown signs—very clear signs, from multiple credible reports—of what appeared to be dementia. Katie Porter, being a congressional insider, clearly must have heard her own credible reports if she would even launch such a campaign. And also, she, you know, Katie Porter is in Orange County, which is historically Reagan country. McCarthy's right there.

Andrea Chalupa (07:44):

And the Republicans are going after her. Her election in these midterms was close. Obviously, it was the Republicans' midterm election to lose. They were the favored ones. But *Roe v. Wade* and this being the big first election since the terrorist attack by the Republican Party on January 6th changed all that. But it was still a close race and unfortunately, Katie Porter and her whiteboard aren't front and center as much as they used to be in her first term in Congress, I think because she upset too many of the big corporate donors to the Democratic Party establishment. So she's kind of been sidelined a bit.

Sarah Kendzior (08:27):

She was blocked by Pelosi from being on committees because she was so effective and Pelosi didn't want an effective advocate for the American people, at least the American people who aren't her donors.

Andrea Chalupa (08:40):

Right. And so Katie Porter running, driven by a grassroots engine, driven by people who are tired of giving their blood, sweat, and tears and countless volunteer hours away to a Democratic Party that's not willing to fight tooth and nail for them in securing our voting rights and securing abortion rights and so on and so on. And just really doing more; being more imaginative, more creative, more clever, more tenacious, more unifying across the spectrum of this resistance movement. People expect more and Katie Porter is one of those public servants who delivers what we sacrifice for in terms of all the work we put into electing people like her. She walks the walk. That will be an extraordinary Senate race. I hope it drives Dianne Feinstein to finally retire. It would be ridiculous if Feinstein stayed in a primary against Katie Porter. That primary debate would be, probably, difficult to watch considering Feinstein's reported condition. So that's where things are with that.

Sarah Kendzior (09:46):

I keep thinking about that, about her age and about that young group of environmentalists that showed up in Feinstein's office and she completely blew them off, used such degrading language against them. I keep thinking of this because they will never reach the age, very likely, of Dianne Feinstein—who's gonna be 90 in this next election—and we won't either because we're living in a time where life expectancy is plummeting. You know, I always, being in my early forties, I would think to myself, "Am I middle-aged? Have I hit that ground that's middle-aged?" and suddenly, in the last two years, I'm cruising right past middle-aged. I'm definitely more than halfway done because of life expectancy dropping so, so rapidly right now that, you know, we're not gonna be around for this. And it's fascinating to me that it's because of people like Dianne Feinstein that we will not be able to, you know, live that long, that as we live we're going to watch the earth die.

Sarah Kendzior (10:51):

And I hope people go back and I hope Katie Porter, if it really does come down to some kind of primary against Feinstein, I hope she uses that video of Feinstein being so horrible to these young environmental activists who simply wanted to breathe clean air, simply wanted to fend off a climate crisis that had been there for their whole lives. It's just... It's shameful. People normalize it. They normalize this disgrace. They've come to expect it from both sides of the aisle. But as I've always said, there's a big difference between expecting it and accepting it. And we don't accept it and, you know, I am out of fucks to give to today [laughs]. But anyway, should we talk about Brazil? Should we talk about their coups?

Andrea Chalupa (11:33):

We'll talk about Brazil because Brazil points to the larger problem that America's driving, currently, and the lack of accountability here is driving, which is the threat of fascism. But that still hangs on to the conversation we're just having, which is a generational shift in politics, a generational shift in how we see our institutions and how we fight for institutions. Everything that's playing out now with the Republican party, for instance, in the House, the global coups, January 6th, the attempted far-right coup in Germany that was stopped before it could kill people, the violent coup attempt in Brazil (the fallout is still continuing there) and all of these factors, driven by the threat of fascism here at home in America that hasn't been contained yet meaningfully at all. The coup plotters are still waltzing around doing their podcasts, podcasting at home just like Sarah and I do, when they should be in prison.

Andrea Chalupa (12:37):

All of this has been decades in the making. Sarah and I, as you will recall if you listen to the show, we recorded five months in advance a big old deep dive into American fascism, the roots of it, how it works, and what to do about it. And then we laid out those episodes over the spring of last year. And as our

episodes came out, they kept hitting the news cycle. Why? Because all of these events have been decades in the making. And now it's harvest time for the fascists in America. And one of the reasons why we wanna see a change of guard in congressional leadership, and it's nothing.... You know, Obama, Pelosi, you did your part, you broke your barriers, you opened the doors for others, and you showed the way, which is extraordinarily important and nothing anyone should ever dismiss because they would just be wrong.

Andrea Chalupa (13:27):

But one thing that those that generation has sort of lived through is sort of a resting on its laurels, sort of co coasting on the coattails of the great sacrifices that came before them in the authoritarian battleground of the Jim Crow South, the civil rights movement. All those big gains were made. It was historic. It was earth shattering and inspired the world. And then along comes new generations of democratic leaders who took all of those sacrifices for granted and thought that they could basically build on them through the bare minimum of being the first woman, the first Black president, and so on, and sort of maintaining a delicate status quo. You know, Obama coming in... Obviously, he had a pile of ashes to deal with when Bush left office with, you know, Bush with his invasions, his Putin-like invasions in Iraq and Afghanistan, and then all his deregulation, which led to the tanking of the global economy.

Andrea Chalupa (14:28):

But Obama really sort of was status quo, protecting the status quo, trying really hard to be friends with everybody. And he left with our systems being so vulnerable across the board domestically and our foreign policy that the Kremlin was able to rush in and help bring the worst of the worst, the man that spent years building a racist groundswell of America First movement called "Birtherism" to replace him. You know, I'm not blaming Obama for that, but I'm saying the head in the sand of the generations of Democratic leaders—the Pelosis and Obamas that have got us to this point—really took for granted the sacrifice, the imagination, the organizing, the coalitions required that brought them the victories of the civil rights movement that allowed them to be in power in the first place. And now we need to usher new generations that live the stakes, understand the stakes, and can organize all of us through the power of coalition building, the power of imagination, the power of being strategic to get us through these extraordinarily crucial years ahead.

Andrea Chalupa (15:41):

Because I don't know about you, Sarah, or any of you listening, but I always wonder—and I think this is a debate that all of us sort of have—where are we right now in terms of things? If history is repeating, are we in the early 1930s? Are we in the late 1930s on the cusp of another world war? I would say we're more at the beer hall scene where Hitler tries to take over the Weimar Republic through a big old beer hall violent coup. I think we're still early days yet. I think we're still early days, because what's going to happen—[as we learned from that big old series we did on fascism in the spring](#)—it's cult weather. It's cult time. We're living in an age where, with all the scary stuff happening in the world, how do you think people respond to that?

Andrea Chalupa (16:24):

A lot of people respond to that by joining cults, cults of all kinds. That's how they cope through this. And as things become more and more destabilized through the weather trying to kill us because of climate change and so on (we see all the rivers being dumped from the sky on Santa Barbara right now in Southern California and so on), people are going to turn to extreme measures to cope and that could chip away and break down society and tribalize and so on and so on. So I still think, as scariest things are at this moment, I still think we're at the beginning rather than entering some sort of denouement.

Sarah Kendzior (16:56):

Yeah, I mean, I think it's hard to say. because I don't think we're nearly in repeat. I think digital media and the launch of the internet is one of these shifts in human civilization—one of the biggest shifts in a millennium—because of the way that it changed memory, because of the way it changed the flow of information, the ability of people to organize, the ability of people to connect, and the ability of people to be exploited. So what we're seeing here in the United States, where we had our own attempted coup and then the coup plotter did not go to prison (Nazi Germany bested us on that one) but remains running for office again, much in the way that Hitler ran for office again after his failed attempt, we're seeing the same things all over the world.

Sarah Kendzior (17:47):

Most recently in Brazil but also recently in Germany, there was an attempt. The differences there, of course, is that in Germany, they stopped the coup before it happened. They had plenty of advanced notice. The United States also, of course, had plenty of advanced notice and *chose* not to stop a violent attack on the Capitol. In Brazil, the attack happened but within a day over 1,500 people were arrested. This is an ongoing crisis. I don't know what will have happened by the time you hear this but, you know, the coup plotters and participants right now are currently leaving the capital city to spread out throughout the country. So Lula, the president of Brazil, has a crisis on his hands, which you're going to get into. But I think that we've relived not just the worst of the '20s and '30s in terms of the buildup to World War II, but also the era of the Spanish flu.

Sarah Kendzior (18:49):

Also the greatest eras of corruption in US history, whether the white mob violence that followed reconstruction or government crises like Watergate or Iran Contra, or the 9/11 aftermath, I wrote about this in *They Knew*, that it's like we're reliving all of America's sins at once. And it leads to this feeling like America is on its deathbed and watching its life flash before its eyes. But I do think that digital media and the ticking clock of climate change make it different to even assess time; to assess time in the present day and to assess time in a comparative sense as to how far along are we? But I guess the flip side to that is that I think things are more unpredictable in terms of the end result.

Sarah Kendzior (19:44):

We have more information at our fingertips. We have a lot of operations taking place in plain sight which, if we had agencies and officials who were dedicated to accountability, who were dedicated to actually protecting us, they would have all the advanced notice that they need to stop it. And the same goes, of course, for other crises—like climate change, like the pandemic—where we know what the problem is, we know some of the things we can do to mitigate the damage, but the most powerful people—these plutocrats and oligarchs and officials—simply are refusing to do it because they don't care if humanity survives. It's that cruel and that basic of a conclusion. And so, yeah, you know, just to get back to Brazil to kind of give people the heads up on what's going on, we're recording this on Tuesday at 11:30 Central Time. Biden and Lula have had a phone call about the attempted coup.

Sarah Kendzior (20:49):

Lula allegedly is going to be visiting the United States next month. The White House issued a statement saying, "President Biden conveyed the unwavering support of the United States for Brazil's democracy and for the free will of the Brazilian people, as expressed in Brazil's recent presidential election, which President Lula won." Yeah. So, really. I mean, that's the right thing to say. That's absolutely what they should say. But, you know, action speaks louder than words and there's quite a few things that the Biden administration could be doing and should have done, one of which (we discussed yesterday on our bonus episode) is to indict Steve Bannon, who has committed a multitude of felonies over the past seven

years (one of which he was pardoned for), has confessed to helping plot the January 6th attack, spoke about it before it happened. This was ignored in large part by the January 6th Committee.

Sarah Kendzior (21:48):

It was, of course, ignored by the DOJ because Bannon is an insider. Bannon is one of them. Bannon came from the world of Goldman Sachs and Hollywood and the US military, and then the US government under Trump and GOP politics. He is a multimillionaire who is protected. He's protected by Trump's goon squad and he is also being protected by the Biden administration, which has allowed him to roam the world plotting insurrections. He tried it in Italy and he tried it in Brazil. And in Brazil, it's working. So as I was saying yesterday, if I were Lula or if I were a Brazilian citizen, I would be absolutely furious at the United States right now, just as we in the United States are furious when other countries—Russia, Israel, Saudi Arabia, etc.—interfere with our politics, when they interfere in our elections and when they lend monetary or on-the-ground support to violent insurrections. Lula should be very angry that Bannon and others in Bannon's fold were allowed to travel to Brazil and meet with domestic Insurrectionists and so forth to begin with when there is ample grounds for locking him up.

Sarah Kendzior (23:11):

So there's that. Then there's also the fact that Florida is where global tyrants launch their coups. You know, it's the place where they rally and meet up and find mercenaries and operatives. And right now it's where Bolsonaro, the ousted Tropical Trump, is allegedly in a hospital according to his wife. And there's a lot of calls for him to be extradited and brought back to Brazil to face trial, or at least to, you know, be dealt with there, to not be offered the protection of the United States. So far, I haven't seen anything about that. And of course it's not just Biden and his administrations. The GOP has been silent. They haven't even condemned the coup. They haven't even condemned the violent attacks on Lula's administration. And, of course, they're not going to because they're in favor of it.

Sarah Kendzior (24:07):

This is like the chickens coming home to roost, but it's our chickens. It's our... I mean, that's putting it too lightly. I don't wanna sound like I'm making light of this because they will do this again and again and again. They will do this all over the world. It is the same people over and over involved in multiple state crimes, whether it's the 2016 election or Brexit or what Netanyahu has been doing in Israel, or, you know, Kushner's machinations—the Abraham Accords and dealings with Gulf States—this is a intertwined group of criminal elites that move from country to country and find dictators and oligarchs to prop up and fund and destroy democracy. And we've known about this for a long time. We've been discussing this very topic since our first episode of the show, and we've been discussing it individually for long before it.

Sarah Kendzior (25:05):

So there's no naivete here on the part of the Biden administration. And we've now seen concrete examples from multiple countries about what to do if another country attacks you or if you have a violent domestic insurgency; you can shut it down in advance like Germany did; you can arrest people quickly and move to contain it as Brazil did; you can continue to fight back, even though the odds are very long, as Ukraine has been doing. But instead, the United States, which has so much money, so much power, and a political system I wouldn't say of transparency, but, you know, with freedom of speech, with the ability to convey information to the public usually without fear of reprisals and so forth, they're simply refusing to act. And that's because they are in on it. The DOJ, the FBI, the other agencies that are paid to protect the American people have no interest in doing that.

Sarah Kendzior (26:06):

And for all of you saying, “Oh, just give it time.”, this has been abundantly clear since the spring of 2021, and every day that goes past it becomes more so. And so I hope now that the lil’ midterm elections are over—the ones that the Democrats threw, allowing the Republicans to take the House as Andrea has explained many times how that happened in New York as the basis for that—now that that is done, maybe people will feel freer to speak out and criticize those who are not doing their jobs, because that is, that is our job as citizens. It's to hold our officials accountable. It's to push for what we want. And it's to use our freedom of speech because that free speech, that free media, may not last forever. It's already under attack through social media monopolies, through billionaires, through manipulative algorithms.

Sarah Kendzior (27:05):

But it's something to be cherished. So when we're on here warning you and saying, “We are running out of time. Every day that goes by is one where they solidify their hold not just on the present, but on a future that is already very fragile.”, we're serious. We're not kidding and this call should be heeded. And I hope that the scholars of fascism, who've been holding their fire for about a year/year and a half because they wanted to see how the January 6th Committee played out, or because they're nervous that they're gonna upset Biden and that he'll withdraw, you know, money in support for Ukraine—which by the way, if that's the way that you're viewing Biden, then Biden is not your friend. This should not be some sort of quid pro quo where you shut up about your frustration with corruption in return for things. You know, that's a sign that this administration itself is deeply corrupt. Anyway, I hope y'all get back on board here because we need all the support we can. We need to work together as much as we can. And that means being very, very honest with the American public about the extent of the crises that we're facing.

Andrea Chalupa (28:16):

What's really funny is that Sarah's like, “I don't know what I'm going to talk about at all this episode” and then that was like 40 minutes of her winging it [laughs]. What was that last point? I just wanna make sure I understood it. So you were saying that, if I understood correctly, that if you support Biden—

Sarah Kendzior (28:30):

I'm saying folks that assume that Biden will withdraw the humanitarian and military support for a good cause, like, say, for Ukraine, if you piss him off, you know, that he is that tempestuous, that he's that vengeful at heart, then that's not someone who truly supports democracy. Somebody who truly supports democracy would be able to accept criticisms of his own administration and would not use this carrot and stick approach on pro-democracy scholars and activists. People shouldn't feel afraid of the president. They shouldn't feel afraid of any official and they definitely shouldn't be like, “Uh oh, if I critique this or that, then he's gonna act like Trump,” which I think is the fear that a lot of people have, that the progress that has been made, you know, one of the few things that Biden has been doing right will be taken away and will be back at square one again on that. I understand that fear because of what we lived through with Trump.

Andrea Chalupa (29:30):

Let me just tell you, it happens. Governor Kathy Hochul here in New York State, she put forward the most conservative option for a Supreme Court justice to oversee the highest court in New York state, which has national implications because the courts in New York state voted in favor of Republicans, which took away an advantage Democrats would've had in redistricting, which would've given us an edge in holding onto the house. So New York state courts matter for the rest of the country in who controls Congress. And Kathy Hochul, the governor here, put forward the most conservative option for the Supreme Court

chief and she faced a massive amount of criticism, including from a union leader who she had invited to her State of the Union. And when this union leader put out an impassioned protest saying, "Please don't appoint this horrific anti-union, anti-abortion judge with a long list of shocking rulings to oversee the highest quarter state, please don't do this."

Andrea Chalupa (30:31):

"Especially when you just ran on a platform that was pro-abortion, protecting abortion rights, and you were saved in the final stretch of your miserable election by the progressive movement here in New York State. And now you're gonna betray everyone with this pick?" And what did Kathy Hochul do? She disinvited this union rep to her State of the Union address because of the protest, their plea to her. That's Trumpian. And I wanna say, you know, I've been going on and on on this show trying to explain to our listeners, you all understand the national stakes here in New York State. We have the leaders of both parties. Who is that Trumpian lap dog? Stefanik, right? That woman out in Long Island.

Sarah Kendzior:

Elise Stafanik.

Andrea Chalupa:

Yeah. So she's one of the leaders of the Republican Party. And then you have our party; Chuck Schumer, majority leader in the Senate, and then Hakeem Jeffries, now the minority leader in the House.

When you have the national leaders of both parties, especially the Democratic Party, you have to have a national conversation about what the hell is going on in New York State, why are they doing so badly there? And when I've been having this conversation on this show, people have reached out to me and said, "Well, aren't you concerned about the progressives, like some of the members of the Squad, who've been voting against aid packages for Ukraine, who have been voting against seizing Russian oligarch billionaire money to pay for rebuilding Ukraine? Keeping in mind that the Russian oligarchs got their money from stealing from the people, aren't you troubled by a lot of the reports that there's been Kremlin propaganda spread on the far left and so on?" And I have to tell you, this isn't my first rodeo.

Andrea Chalupa (32:09):

I've been around. I've gone to various progressive meetings in New York over the years and I always brace myself anytime I am talking to progressives whether they're going to say things to me, as they have over the years, that, "Oh, Maidan was a CIA coup. Oh, the poor Russian speakers in Ukraine, are they safe?" I cannot even tell you... When I meet progressives, I do prepare myself. Is this somebody who has gotten their news from RT? Is this somebody who, you know, anytime in their life, is this somebody that follows useful idiots on Twitter and so on? So it is a space where you do, in my lived experience and all the reporting out there, you do have to be careful whether these people are entrapped in that disinformation. But my whole goal—just so people are clear because I did get people tweeting me about this—my whole goal is, for the love of God, you need to have a unified, well-oiled opposition.

Andrea Chalupa (33:01):

How did Euromaidan, a popular uprising, topple the Trumpian Yanukovich in the first place? They had a very diverse, unified coalition that pushed that through. It was a popular uprising. That was a revolution that was successful. Very few revolutions are actually successful. I just wanna see unity and the reason why I'm calling out the establishment is because they've been stabbing the progressives in the front and that allowed the fascists to come to power. So if the progressives do that on a very large scale, surely I'll call them out. And I do wanna say to the progressives, I'm with you when it comes, clearly, to all of the

domestic policy that we need. I think politically I would be seen as a European Union moderate, which makes me an American radical. But we need to have clean drinking water. We need to have a strong social safety net.

Andrea Chalupa (33:47):

We need to have a balanced economy that works for everyone and that's sustainable for the planet. We need to build that. If you look at the happiest countries on the planet, of course, the Scandinavian countries like Denmark, they also rank among the happiest countries in the world. When you don't have to stay up at night worrying about your children's future, worrying about whether your career, your livelihood, your social media accounts will be shut down or impacted in any way by oligarch corruption, whether you're drinking water or whatever will be poisoned by oligarch corruption, you lead a pretty peaceful life. I'm telling you again, the people over in the Scandinavian countries can sleep peacefully at night because they can trust their governments. They can trust their governments are working for the people. We don't have that here.

Andrea Chalupa (34:36):

And so to the progressives who want to build that here, also study not just the good practices of the Scandinavian countries in terms of their domestic policies, but also their foreign policies because the Scandinavian countries like Finland, like Sweden, like Norway and Denmark—I just basically listed all of them [laughs]—they are badass when it comes to foreign policy, when it comes to the military, when it comes to leading NATO. Denmark was a historical driver of NATO expansion, by the way. You have the head of NATO right now, who comes from Norway. You have a badass leader of Finland, a woman who was saying, “Wanna know how the war in Russia ends? The war in Russia ends when Russia loses, that's when it ends.” Mic drop. That's what you need to... If the progressives in America can get on that level, I am like your best friend in the whole wide world.

Andrea Chalupa (35:22):

I'll be completely safe. I can let my guard down, go into all of your events and organizing things not cringing and waiting for that moment when someone dehumanizes my family and friends over in Ukraine because of some bullshit you heard from some Kremlin mouthpiece and some podcast somewhere amplified and supported by Peter Thiel and the other horrific fascist South African oligarchs who wanna bring apartheid back and the Soviet Union back and so on and imprison us all and kill trans children. Alright? So that's where I am with that. Just so you know, my North Star is trying to get us all to the Scandinavian promised land. I know it's not perfect. I've spent time in Denmark. I have Danish friends. I've had frustrations with these individuals on a personal level. I know it's not paradise by any means, but it's a very good North Star to model because let me tell you, people on the right, people who are libertarians, people who hate taxes and people who wanna protect their wealth and hoard their wealth, there are very wealthy billionaires in some of these so-called socialist countries. There's a lot of wealth and security in Mercedes-Benz and BMWs over there. You'll be just fine. You'll be just fine if we ever reach that. Alright? So don't worry about a thing.

Sarah Kendzior (36:25):

Yeah, I mean, one of the things that's been frustrating, and we've discussed this for a long time, is that oligarchs and plutocrats are the same in how they operate and they're working directly with each other. So if you oppose American autocracy, if you oppose American plutocracy and dark money and dirty money and all these things that you should oppose here, then you should also oppose it in Russia and see it clearly in Russia, and see Putin, you know, one of the richest men in the world, not as somebody to be admired or emulated but as a tyrant who invades sovereign nations who should be defeated. And it is his oligarchs, it's his lackeys who have been invading our political system. And no, not just his, because

there's people that, you know, they love to throw out Russiagate, which is an annoying term for two reasons.

Sarah Kendzior (37:12):

One is that it misrepresents, I think, what the crisis is, which is transnational organized crime. And instead—and this is the Democrat's fault—it emphasizes things like bot farms or online propaganda. And I'm kinda like, Okay, yeah, those are there, but that's really not the crisis. The crisis is money. It is election tampering. It is mafia threats and violence and it's been brewing for multiple decades and didn't just emerge outta nowhere when Hillary Clinton declared her candidacy. And the Democrats don't wanna deal with this either because it is a transnational crisis. It is not just Russia. It is Russia working with nefarious actors from Israel, Saudi Arabia, UAE, Qatar, China, the UK and their Brexiteers, rightwing networks there. And they don't wanna talk about this because as Andrea was describing before with Obama and with other leaders who stuck their heads in the sand, the failure to stop this transnational alliance is on those who were in charge when it was building and they failed us and they put us in danger.

Sarah Kendzior (38:21):

And they do not want to take responsibility for that. The other reason I don't like the Russiagate term is because I think it's trivializing something that's very serious and it's making people dismiss the parts of this that do matter, which again, are values that progressives should share. It should be pretty easy for all of us to get on the same page here. And there are progressives who are all on the same page and see this. The other thing though is the progressives in Congress have so little power, and the progressives in society have so little power, because we live in a country that is an oligarchy; a country dominated by a wealthy elite and corporations and representatives who have no interest in the public good and who bow down to a donor class.

Sarah Kendzior (39:11):

And that is the biggest threat right now. Jeffries is a representative of that nature. So is Schumer. So is Biden. So was Pelosi. Folks like AOC taking small donations, or Rashida Tlaib, or whoever it is you're mad at now for some vote, they have very little structural power. They have the power of having an actual, kind of fan base. And I don't encourage fan bases for politicians but, you know, the kind of appeal that I think a lot of other representatives would like to cultivate for themselves and they're failing miserably. I think that some progressive representatives have actually managed to get this in a more organic way. And so there's just resentments and stuff, but I just do not see this as a threat, even when it's people I strongly dislike. And I don't think this applies to the representatives I named.

Sarah Kendzior (40:03):

This is more like as Andrea was saying, the sort of podcaster crowd, the hipster nihilists, you know, the people reciting RT talking points. Are they incredibly annoying? I mean, yeah. They're annoying, but that's basically it. When you compare that against a mafia syndicate or against a corporate donor class suppressing the public will, blocking policies that are desperately needed from being passed, hijacking the Democratic Party, pumping it with dark money, that's the bigger problem than some, you know, assholes just being irritating or being ignorant online or wherever. We are so far past that now. I think a lot of folks went through harassment—I know I certainly did—around the time of the 2016 election and have taken the feelings that they had from being harassed—which of course is unacceptable and of course should not happen—and managed to build in their mind some sort of giant progressive threat.

Sarah Kendzior (41:11):

But progressives in the United States are faltering. The one sort of really great development in the last 10 years has been the reemergence of unions, where we see unions coming out all over the place. We saw

for a while wages rising in a very meaningful way before inflation began to rise as well and cancel out those gains. And that was very powerful. That's the kind of progressive politics we should get behind. Who is stomping that out? It's not just the Republicans. It's people like Biden and what he did to the railroad strikers. They are working together in this regard. The Democratic... The corporate wing which is most of the Democratic Party and all of the GOP are working together in this way. And that's something that the vast majority of Americans don't want because it makes our lives harder.

Sarah Kendzior (42:00):

And so we should be working to counteract that in any way we can, whether it's through community organization or mutual aid and through calling them out and calling it like it is. Please, for the love of God, it's a new year. If you want a resolution, get rid of these personality cults. Get rid of this sort of, you know, I'm eating popcorn and watching the House play manipulative political games like it's some sort of reality TV show because the thing is, these Congress people, they get off on it. That's what they want. They want to be reality TV stars. They want some sort of cult of celebrity. And since the US has lost its pop monoculture in the last five years because of streaming, because of, you know, well we lost like FM radio and things like that a long time ago. We're in our little silos. We're not united. The one area that unfortunately unites us is politics, where we have to pay attention to this because the country's crumbling and these guys get off on it. They get off on being Twitter celebrities. They're obsessed with their follower accounts. They're not really into creating policies or fulfilling promises and that's what they're supposed to be doing. So never let them forget they are public servants. They are there to serve you, not the other way around.

Andrea Chalupa (43:22):

I would love to end there [laughs].

Sarah Kendzior (43:24):

We could talk about other shit. We could talk about what happened with Biden in—

Andrea Chalupa (43:27):

I have a whole section on Florida.

Sarah Kendzior (43:30):

Do your section on Florida.

Andrea Chalupa (43:31):

A whole running section on Florida we need to call, "We Need to Talk About Florida". "We Need to Talk About Florida: The *Gaslit Nation Lifetime* Movie." So let's save it for next week's bonus episode, which we'll play as the excerpt if it's any good for all you to listen to. So don't worry, we're gonna do our big, "We Need to Talk About Florida" dun, dun dun segment for you all because there's a lot there that we need to be paying attention to because Florida is, as we all know from good old Florida Man, Florida is quite scary. And Florida is going to likely play a very big deal in the upcoming 2024 election. Of course DeSantis, but everything that's going to try to propel DeSantis into power. We're talking Russiagate [laughs] which we're not allowed to say anymore, you know, because it is cheesy, I know. But the whole Russia apparatus, whatever, the whole Russia operation, that'll be back in full effect.

Andrea Chalupa (44:21):

And obviously their best friends at Mar-a-Lago and Bannon, who will likely still be free, walking around couping in 2024, and maybe even Bolsonaro and his son Eduardo will still be in Florida to help with the Elect DeSantis campaign in 2024.

Sarah Kendzior:

[sigh]

Andrea Chalupa:

So we will save our big Florida segment, our big deep dive, for next week. And you can catch it then. So to close out this week, you know, we cover a lot of heavy topics on the show because we are just built that way. That is how we were as little girls, I think, from all the conversations Sarah and I've had over the years. We just thought about these things, these very big heavy things, and then we luckily found each other and then we found you. And now here we are with our community, refusing to look away. And that's what we need right now.

Andrea Chalupa (45:01):

And we wanna thank everyone who is joining us in that, especially the tremendously wonderful folks at the Media and Democracy Project. They are a group of citizens who got together to fight back and they're doing that through media accountability and media literacy. They are a group of people like you, people like us, who provided this great overview of their work and how you can get involved to take back power. Give it a listen and join their events to see how you could expose gaslighting in the media. Thank you to everyone who organizes with your friends and your communities because, as we always say on the show, grassroots power is the most reliable power we have left.

Brian from the Media and Democracy Project (45:42):

Hi, I'm Brian with the Media and Democracy Project, an all-volunteer grassroots group building a people-powered movement for a better informed America. Journalism is one of the only means the public has to hold elected officials and the powerful to account. High quality news is required for democracy to flourish. But as newspapers disappear and TV and radio are taken over by corporations, it's become harder to get credible and comprehensive information about our politics. With fewer journalists putting public officials under the microscope, corruption and extremism flourish. We're systemically under informed by the national media outlets that now dominate our public debate. Every day, their corporate agendas feed our friends and neighbors a dangerous false equivalence between an anti-democracy political party based on lies and hate and a pro-democracy party trying to cap insulin costs. Our democracy crisis is a direct result of our journalism crisis. If you want to save democracy, you have to save local news.

(46:46):

At the Media and Democracy Project, we organize concerned citizens like all of you amazing *Gaslit Nation* listeners, to work on media issues. We advocate for newsrooms to assume a pro-democracy stance and we work on ways to strengthen and rebuild local news. Help us write letters to editors and engage with the people who make our news. Help us take on corporate media's normalization of extremism and their failure to protect Americans from strategic disinformation, like the Big Lie. Help us demand that our elected officials get the FCC working for the people again. Help us fix media now. Check us out at mediaanddemocracyproject.org. Come to a meeting and follow us on Twitter and Mastodon

using the handle @FixMediaNow. We're grateful for this podcast and we know that one of the best ways to fight being gaslit is to demand and support quality information.

[outro theme music - roll credits]

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 cost 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 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:

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...