

Rep. Elissa Slotkin on Governing in an Era of Extremes  
EP 210 Final Transcript

Jon: I've written a song about it. It goes like this, “But you're not supposed to be working. If you don't turn on the lights, Jesus won't recognize you. Although he won't anyway, because you're a Jew.”

Jay: Yeah. Jesus is celebrating Yum Kippur too. He's busy. [JON LAUGHS]

[INTRO MUSIC]

Jon: Hey everybody, welcome to the podcast. Uh. It's “The Problem” with me, Jon Stewart. And it's Premier Week. This is the week, October 7th is the day the, the season two premieres. Were talking with Kasaun Wilson and Jay Jurden they're writers on the program. And Premier Week is always for the two of these guys truly a special event. They cook for the whole staff [LAUGHS] and they come in and they do these beautiful, I don't know, the wood, I guess wood carvings would be the way to describe it, generally have...

Jay: Oh, yeah, Yeah. You're talking about the cheese boards we made?

Jon: The work they do is exquisite.

Kasaun: We do a custom charcuterie board for the entire staff.

Jon: That's exactly right. And are very particular about the — where the Genoa salami comes from.

Jay: Oh, yes, yes, yes.

Jon: And we're also gonna be talking to Congresswoman Elissa Slotkin from Michigan's eighth Congressional District. I dunno if you saw last week, she helped pass what's called the Solid Start Act. It helps vets transitioning to, uh, civilian life. It had passed with unanimous consent in the Senate. And then I believe some

house Republicans tried to f\*\*\* with it because they tried to make it about abortion and, uh,—

Jay: Would they?

Jon: Congresswoman Slotkin wasn't having it. So I wanted to talk to her cause I've known her for years for all the work on the PACT Act. It's not in her character to get down on the floor. and just start whacking people. [JAY LAUGHS] And boy was it fun to watch, but I imagine very, very frustrating. So that's the general outlay of what we're doing here today. But Kay and Jay, it's Premier Week!

Jay: Yeah.

Jon: And you've gotta be excited. What's up for you guys? What's going on?

Jay: Well you—

Jon: Talk to me.

Jay: —brought up a Congressperson.

Jon: I did.

Jay: So let's bring up another Congressperson.

Kasaun: Oh boy.

Jon: Come on, Jay.

Kasaun: Here we go.

Jay: Matt Gaetz.

Jon: Oh, I don't—

Jay: Matt Gaetz. Don't frown.

Jon: No.

Jay: This is a friend of the pod. [KASAUN LAUGHS]

Jon: I don't know who you're talking about. I've not heard of Matt Gaetz. Do you remember- you remember Bob's Big Boy, right? Do —

Jay: Yes. Yeah.

Jon: -you remember Bob's Big Boy's caricature?

Jay: The burger! The burger.

Jon: Yeah, I still can't see that dude whenever he talks. I always want to think to himself, "Where is his platter?"

Jay: Where is his overalls?

Jon: Where is his overalls and his platter?

Jay: Well, on Sunday, he wasn't serving up burgers. He was serving up tweets —

Kasaun: Yeah

Jon: Yeah

Jay: -and he was begging for federal funding for Florida. After he and a bunch of other Florida lawmakers voted no on passing federal funding coming to Florida.

Jon: He wanted federal funding for the disaster, for Ian?

Jay: Yes. Hurricane Ian.

Jon: Right. Who's also the name of another, uh, young man who I believe he adopted.

[LAUGHTER]

Jon: No, that's a terrible joke. [KASAUN LAUGHS]

Jay: No, you keep that s\*\*\* in. That's a category five joke.

Jon: It's stupid.

Jon: But this is, this is a constant within the Republican party, they have — I remember the Republican party voted when Sandy happened. They all voted down Sandy relief. But when the s\*\*\* hits their beaches, all of a sudden, “Hey man, where's the money?” So why did they vote it down?

Jay: They crunched the numbers already. They knew it was gonna pass. So this is the way that they can have their cake and eat it too. They get to say, “We voted no for excessive spending and these pork filled bills.”

Jon: That's— Oh my God.

Jay: And then on Sunday you get to go, “Please help us.” And he didn't even say it on congressional letterhead. He just tweeted it. [KASAUN LAUGHS] He tweeted it.

Jon: Do you, do you think he doesn't realize that that's not legal tender? [JAY LAUGHS] Do you think he believes that?

Jay: Listen, if we talk about legal tender and that man, I don't wanna [JON LAUGHS] say legal or tender in the same sentence as Matt Gaetz at all.

Jon: But that hypocrisy drives me mad. I rem— Rand Paul was like that. Like I always say, like a democrat is just a libertarian whose house got hit by a tornado. You know, Rand Paul votes down any kind of FEMA relief for any other place.

Soon as Kentucky gets hit, “Well, I think it's imperative that the United States government and the federal funding and, you know, we're all, we're all in this together.”

Jay: Yeah. He's like, “Kentucky? That tornado hit me in my ribs. [KASAUN LAUGHS] What am I supposed to do?

Jon: That's right. But so now it did pass. They are gonna get the money.

Jay: Yes, of course it passed. They had, it's that, it's that weird Republican calculus that they're able to do, where they go, “What can I get away with? Versus what will make me look cool.”

Jon: How can the people of Florida, even in that district, how can that can be seen as a win that you voted for fiscal responsibility when your neighbors houses got flattened. And my guess is in Fort Myers and Naples and the other areas that really got wailed on those representatives couldn't have voted no.

Kasaun: Yeah

Jay: Rubio wasn't there. Rick Scott voted no. Like—

Jon: Rubio wasn't there? What do you mean?

Jay: They did a roll call. Rubio wasn't there. That's what I mean.

Jon: Now I'm gonna, I'm gonna give benefit of the doubt here. Was he pumping water out of somebody's basement? [LAUGHTER] Was he on the ground lifting driftwood above his head while clearing sand out of an old woman's ranch house? If that's the case, f\*\*\*ing-a, but if not —

You know what it is? It's—

Jon: Come on!

Kasaun: everything that happens in our country, it's like because of politics, it's just turned into like WWE like—

Jon: Yeah.

Kasaun: It's like this whole thing where it's like no matter what happens, even if it's people losing their lives, we get back to a point where we're like, “What, what can I do with this?” It's like ESPN is what Skip Bayless does is what Stephen A. Smith does. I was watching Sunday Night Football, and Mike Tirico comes on. He goes, “Obviously our thoughts and prayers are with all the people in Florida dealing with the devastation of Hurricane Ian.”

Jon: A lot of thoughts and prayers.

Kasaun: “But for what this means for the on-field conditions. Let's go down to Michele, who's on the field.” [LAUGHTER] It's like, who cares what this means for time? It's like the spin of it is incredible. I know you lost your home, but we got Pat Mahomes down on the field with Michele. [LAUGHTER]

Jon: You know what it is? I have to say, I think what Americans excel at almost more than any other country are segues, uncomfortable, segues. [JAY LAUGHS] Because we have such tragedy here at all times, but it doesn't stop our foolishness. So it's a constant, you know, “Seventeen children killed on the thing. And it's, uh, we send our, our thoughts and prayers and, you know, as this school year starts, as we're talking about, covid masks [LAUGHTER] are back in the —,” you know, and all we do is, is segue from these terrible tragedies. We don't ever look at what happens, why they happen. We just segue 'em into. “And let's go down to Michele Tafoya [JON LAUGHS] on the field.”

Kasaun: Hey Jon, can we tell you, we set the two best segue entities in the country are politicians and black preachers. [LAUGHTER] Because they, listen—

Jon: Now gimme a good black preachers segue. This I gotta hear.

Jay: OK.

Kasaun: If you- listen, Jon, if anybody watching, if you've never been to a good black church, anytime something happens in pop culture, it finds a way to get back to Jesus. When the Queen died, I went to church and then they were like, “Listen, the queen is dead,”

Jay: “Mm-hmm.”

Kasaun: “but I know a King who [JON LAUGHS] died—”

Jay: Say that!

[JON CLAPPING HIS HANDS]

Kasaun: “-on cavalry’s cross. And in three days he got up. The queen ain't getting up, but the king got up [LAUGHTER] with all power in his hands.” And that, it is {KASAUN LAUGHS}—

Jay: But Jon, It happens all the time. We were talking about football. It's the same thing as when they go, “Listen. Now, a woman in Texas only has six weeks to decide what to do with her body. But according to this injury report, Dak Prescott [JON LAUGHS] is out for eight weeks and you know what? It's Jerry Jones' choice whether or not he wants to —” That's all we do.

Jon: And you know, and by the way, and you know, they're writing him down the night before. [JAY LAUGHS]

Kasaun: A hundred percent.

Jon: Every single one of those segues. It's boy what a premier week spin for you guys. Jay and Kay, tremendous. I'm gonna go, I'm gonna bring on the guest. We're gonna talk to her a little bit and then we're gonna come back and, if you can, I just want to hear more from the preacher from the black church.

Jay: Oh.

Kasaun: Jon.

Jon: Thanks guys.

[TRANSITION MUSIC]

Jon: Okay, Well, here's what we're gonna do. We're gonna introduce our guest Representative Slotkin, Eighth District of Michigan, Elissa Slotkin. Congresswoman, thank you for joining me.

Elissa: Thanks for having me, Jon.

Jon: You are a very even-keeled presence on the Hill. You're not a provocateur. You are not a bomb thrower. You generally, you do your business. You go about this — Oh, what is that thing you guys — governance! [ELISSA LAUGHS] Was it governance?

Elissa: Yes. That's the one.

Jon: OK, so you're the one that does the governance. So I'm watching CSPAN the other night as I tend to do [ELISSA LAUGHS] when I haven't tortured myself enough.

Elissa: Right.

Jon: It's either that or 'Bachelor in Paradise' And I—

Elissa: Oof.

Jon: I've been going CSPAN recently. And to my surprise, because you're not a headline-maker I see you on CSPAN just dropping bombs. Let's take a listen to that. This is Congresswoman Slotkin on the floor.

[CSPAN SOT]

Elissa: “You want to ban all abortions. That is your goal. Many of you had been open about that. And if you flip the house, we know that you will put forward a full ban on all abortion for all states. You've been clear about it. You wanna turn a veteran's bill into an abortion bill let's do it. Who do you think you are?!”

[CSPAN SOT ENDS]

Jon: So let's set the stage a little bit. And it's similar to what happened, I think with the PACT Act. You had a veteran's bill on the floor. Tell us just very briefly, what's that veteran's bill cause it's a good one.

Elissa: Sure. Announced it two years ago. It's called the Solid Start Bill, and it is literally, quite simply, requiring that the VA reach out to newly separated veterans, veterans who just leave the military at least three times in their first year out of service and give them a full preview of everything that they qualify for. All the services, all the healthcare, all the job assistance, like basically informing them of the services they have earned. Doesn't give them any new services. It's just largely marketing and promoting of the services that we can provide. And we purposely brought it to a vote this month because it's Veterans Suicide Awareness Month. And the rates of suicide for veterans are absolutely at their highest in their first year of separation.

Jon: Right.

Elissa: And if you have no connection to the VA, you're much more likely to commit suicide.

Jon: And because the VA provides a specialized care. The other thing to remember about the VA, there are always complaints, many of them legitimate, but the veterans community does require a more specialized level of care for these very reasons.

Elissa: Yep.

Jon: The incredibly astronomical rates of suicide. The types of injuries, the types of things. So, this is a bill to say, "Here's what's there for you," because as you know, when you're in the military, boy, they let you know what's required of you.

Elissa: Right.

Jon: Mostly on a daily basis. But then when you leave, nobody says boo.

Elissa: Well, it's actually even more sort of complicated than that. My husband was in the army for 30 years.

Jon: Mm-hmm.

Elissa: My stepdaughter is in the army now. But when I watched my husband in 2014 retire, and they do give you a lot of papers and packets, you know, before you actually retire, but your head is so all over the place when you're leaving the career that you've had.

Jon: Mm-hmm.

Elissa: Are you gonna move somewhere else? What's your next job? How do you write a resume that reflects your experience? It is really a time of tumultuous change. So you're just not researching those things when you're going through all that. So this just says, let's spread it out. Let's try and try again to reach out to them three times.

Jon: Right.

Elissa: So that maybe when they've settled and they're in a place where they can really look at all those benefits and apply and use them.

Jon: Mm-hmm.

Elissa: We might have a better shot at them. So that is what it was done. And it was built to be bipartisan from the very beginning on purpose.

Jon: And was.

Elissa: It was.

Jon: And was bipartisan. It was passed with unanimous consent, which means nobody objected to it. And it seems to be a law that has looked at a problem and seeks to — I'm gonna use the word— fix this problem through legislation. It appears to be a good faith bill. Now it goes through and it has unanimous consent. Yes? And this is in the Senate?

Elissa: In the Senate. In the Senate.

Jon: OK. So now it comes back to the House, or—

Elissa: Yeah.

Jon: I don't know if it originated in the Senate, originated in the House. And you guys are gonna, it's gonna be a pro forma vote. You guys are just gonna rubber stamp it. Similarly to what happened with the PACT Act. What happens? When it comes back to the house after unanimous consent in the Senate, which for people at home who may not know, never f\*\*\*ing happens.

Elissa: Mm-hmm.

Jon: Like, it's very hard for that. Never.

Elissa: Right. The idea that you got unanimous consent, you couldn't pass ice cream is delicious with unanimous [ELISSA LAUGHS] consent in this Senate.

Elissa: Yeah.

Jon: So then what happens?

Elissa: It came back to the House. We thought we were in for an easy vote and it was actually teed up to be what's called a suspension vote. So just like you said, pro forma, not even complicated.

Jon: Mm-hmm.

Elissa: And in the meantime a number of my Republican colleagues had seized upon 16 words in this four page bill, and the 16 words read quote, “Providing women veterans with information that is tailored to their specific healthcare and benefit needs.”

Jon: How could you—

Elissa: Right.

Jon: Representative Slotkin, how could you sneak into that bill, that 16 word, what I believe is a communist credo?

Elissa: Right. [ELISSA LAUGHS]

Jon: I, if that is not what Mao [ELISSA LAUGHS] woke up to every morning and spoke.

Elissa: Right.

Jon: And by the way, these 16 words, this was not inserted by the House —

Elissa: No.

Jon: This was a 16 word phrase that was in the bill when the Senate passed it through unanimous consent.

Elissa: Right. It's about reaching out to women on things like mammograms and prenatal care and ovarian cysts. You know, stuff—

Jon: At long last repre— have you no decency? [ELISSA LAUGHS]

Elissa: So it was meant, and of course we drafted it two years ago. Um, so it was meant to just say women might need some additional information specific to women.

Jon: Mm. Mm.

Elissa: And what changed was the overturning of Roe.

Jon: Mm-hmm.

Elissa: And then in the meantime the VA's decision to pass an interim rule on what veterans could get what kind of abortion care—

Jon: Mm-hmm.

Elissa: — at a VA hospital. And—

Jon: Which by the way is not, the VA didn't say at will, didn't say—

Elissa: No.

Jon: — you know, women veterans could come in and say “Give me.” It was for rape, incest, and the life of the mother.

Elissa: Right. And so very sort of the basic exceptions that I think tend to be the minimal; not in my state. We're a full ban state here in Michigan, but we're fighting that and we're fighting on that very basis that there has to be at least some exceptions, especially for a veteran who's served her country who has fought for her country.

Jon: And, and by the way is at risk, higher risk of sexual assault.

Elissa: Yeah.

Jon: The military sexual assault situation is a terrible problem.

Elissa: Right. So they objected to those words because they were saying, “Well, wait a minute, now the VA's gonna be communicating to women about what kind of abortion they can get if they're raped?” You know, this is “We object.” And the people who were original co-sponsors of my bill were arguing against me.

Jon: With those words in it.

Elissa: Yeah.

Jon: The co-sponsors of the bill, Again, I cannot stress this enough.

Elissa: Yeah.

Jon: It's the exact same 16 words that have been in it the whole time.

Elissa: Right. So they objected and brought and turned a veteran's bill into an abortion bill. And you know, maybe it was because it was a very long day. Maybe it's because this exact issue has become one of the top issues in my own race, you know, in my own swing district.

Jon: Right.

Elissa: But I just you know, I think there just comes a point where you have to call BS on something when you've done everything in your power to make it bipartisan and they are politicizing it for their own culture war means. And so that, that is what resulted in me as you say getting loud on the house floor, which is not traditionally how I operate.

Jon: Not, not at all. And I, and this is to say too that you know, you are in a swing district. It's Michigan, it's and you comport yourself with great dignity at all times, which also belies the fact that you're also a badass.[ELISSA LAUGHS] You were in the CIA you, you deployed for, what is it? Three tour? Two tours? Three tours?

Elissa: Three.

Jon: Three tours!

Elissa: Mm-hmm.

Jon: But you carry yourself with a certain way down there. You're not looking for attention. When, did it in any way, because it was you, startled them to a certain extent because you know, it's one thing for the more attention seeking members of the house to jump in like that, but for you to jump in. Was there a moment where they went, "Oh, we perhaps we've gone a bit too far."

Elissa: Well, that is exactly what happened the next day. You know we had three, Republican members arguing, you know, the other side of the debate on the house floor I think by the end of that night or the next morning.

Jon: Mm-hmm.

Elissa: The leadership of the Republican side said, "No, no, no, no. We don't wanna have this fight. We don't wanna be talking about what happens to raped veterans and whether they get services. We don't wanna be talking about health of the mother as a reason. [JON GRUNTS] We don't wanna be having this damn fight." And—

Jon: But the crazy thing is, Representative, it's what they're saying is we don't wanna have a fight about the repercussions of the bills that we passed.

Elissa: Right.

Jon: And the culture wars. We don't want to have the discussion about what are the ramifications of these hard line positions.

Elissa: Right.

Jon: And the effects they have on real people.

Elissa: Right. And they wanna hide it. I think that's—

Jon: Yes.

Elissa: I think they, they want the policy, but they wanna hide that they want the policy because they know it's bad politics.

Jon: Yes.

Elissa: So when the powers that be, and look, I was arguing with three of my Republican colleagues who are very safe Republican districts, who have not, I think, fully processed how these issues are actually affecting people and how they're landing. Whereas I'm in one of the top toughest races in the country. My, my sword is sharp right now on these issues.

Jon: Right.

Elissa: I am like, had just done a live TV debate. I have another one. I mean, this is something that I've been processing and they changed their position. The Speaker, I'm sorry, the minority leader, Mr. McCarthy, the next day, came to our side and said, "We don't wanna, we don't wanna single that bill out."

Jon: "We don't want no smoke. No smoke. We don't want no smoke."

Elissa: And ironically, they wanted to put it in with a bunch of other bills—

Jon: Aaah, I'm sure.

Elissa: —into what's like a big mega bill so they didn't have to vote on it individually.

Jon: Is that for the CR? Is that where they wanted to put it?

Elissa: No, it's called an onblock. We already voted on it and two of the three Republicans who were arguing against me that night voted for it. So like, they just —

Jon: Mm...delicious!

Elissa: They got spooked, I think a bit. And now the Solid Start Bill is on its way to the president's desk. It will be signed into law.

Jon: Well done.

Elissa: The gamesmanship, I think on a veteran's bill, which should be literally an apolitical topic.

Jon: Yes.

Elissa: It should be.

Jon: It should be. It's as though the exact same thing happened not two months ago.

[LAUGHTER]

Elissa: I know.

Jon: And there's no learning curve —

Elissa: Yeah.

Jon: — down there in terms of politicizing. And this is the lowest hanging fruit. But it brings up, I think, a really interesting point and you mentioned it earlier, safe districts versus competitive districts.

Elissa: Yeah.

Jon: So your district, the eighth district in Michigan, it was held by a Republican for decades.

Elissa: Mm-hmm.

Jon: Until you, you won that seat. So in a district like that and those districts are rare. I mean, they, and becoming increasingly more rare with gerrymandering and with the way that primary voting works.

Elissa: Yep.

Jon: So now you have this district. How, how big is the Eighth District in Michigan? How many, how many people would you say it's —

Elissa: Well, every district is about, at this point 780,000 people.

Jon: Ok. 780,000 people. and how much money is having to be spent in this — I think, what did they say? It was \$25 million.

Elissa: Yeah. Unfortunately I have right now the most expensive House race in the country.

Jon: The most expensive. Wow.

Elissa: Yeah. Yeah. It's with the Super PACs coming in, I mean, you should see my dad, he basically watches his evening shows with like a shotgun on his lap [JON LAUGHS] and he, cuz there's so many attack ads against his kid. And you know, when you have a competitive race like this, like you said, there's really only about 35 or 40 out of 435 seats. So control of the House is gonna come down to that group and really to about 10 of us. And so the Republicans feel like they smell blood and so they're dumping millions and millions of dollars. I think it was almost five million just in September on attack ads. So —

Jon: How much money comes into the Eighth District that is not generated from the Eighth District?

Elissa: Well, the Super PACs are by far the biggest folks. And I don't—

Jon: [INAUDIBLE]

Elissa: -to be honest, we don't know. Super PAC donations are anonymous.

Jon: I'm aware.

Elissa: You can be anonymous. So I have no idea what billionaires or millionaires or whoever are putting in all this money.

Jon: Right.

Elissa: We're being outspent almost two to one on Super PAC money. But so I don't know, but I can safely say the vast majority of Super PAC money is not coming from individual donors in the district.

Jon: So this sort of gets to the point, which is, so the more moderate districts, the ones that are a little bit more up for grabs, are oftentimes those that are most focused on sort of governance and not necessarily branding, right?

Elissa: Yep. Yes.

Jon: But those are the districts where you have to spend so much more time either fundraising or battling these things. And that necessarily takes away from your time being able to govern. Now when you're in really safe districts, you get to just throw bombs and do whatever you want and you don't have to govern at all.

Elissa: Yeah.

Jon: So in your mind, how much of a detriment is that to citizens who are just trying to, they're trying to live their lives and have their leaders get things done that are meaningful and not purely culture war political stunt stuff?

Elissa: Yeah, I mean, I think it's a huge problem and it's the reason why the extremes we see in our politics, I do not believe they represent the average citizen. I think that there may be people who feel extreme right or extreme left, but the average person just wants their government to function. They want forward progress. They want someone who talks about their pocketbooks and their kids, right? And I think what ends up happening is our politicians, like, if you're wondering why, you know, on certain issues, 80% of Americans agree that we should have some sort of common sense gun safety legislation but legislators don't seem to get that polling.

Jon: Right.

Elissa: It's because they don't have to care about the mass of people. They care about their primary. They care about the slim group of people who vote, who have this sort of extreme political interest.

Jon: Right.

Elissa: And I see it on both sides of the aisle. And what I would say is, as someone who's from one of those swing districts, sometimes I feel like we're from a different planet than those who are in safe districts. I mean, our lives are different, the workload is different. The requirements to be visible, to be engaging with the public, town halls, spent like — I feel like I have to like — I get upset if I don't have a full weekend that I can be everywhere in my district, like working the entire district.

Jon: It's, rigorous in the way that the others —

Elissa: Oh my gosh.

Jon: — don't have to be rigorous. I'm going through the college process with my kids right now. There're some districts that are safety schools, that are the ones that you put down there. It's like, “I'm gonna be able to go there. It's a party school.”

Elissa: Right, right [ELISSA LAUGHS].

Jon: And then there are some that are like, you're in that Ivy League. I mean, you, you're looking at people like Marjorie Taylor Green, you know, she's so out there. They stripped her of all her committee assignments.

Elissa: Yeah.

Jon: I mean, this is a person that she has no real function in the government, in governance. And yet, man, is she the voice of the Republican — man, there's not a Trump rally that goes on where she's not the opener. I mean, he takes her around. You know, this is whoever's opening for Harry Styles, that's who Marjorie Taylor Green is right now. Like she's just front and center. And this is a person who is so out there, her own party stays away from her for the most part.

Elissa: Mm-hmm. Yeah, she was, she was just here with Trump two nights ago, here in Michigan. They had a big rally and she definitely, after Trump, she got the most applause. Forget about our gubernatorial candidate and our AG candidate. It was really her.

Jon: She's a superstar.

Elissa: Right. And you know, I think it's — look, you would know more about this than I would just coming from, you know, show business world. But there are legions of members of Congress who, they're just there for their own branding, their own fame, their own Twitter universe, their own fundraising, whatever it is. And it's amazing. They just don't legislate or they don't show up. I mean, I see it every single day. The number of people who actually read bills that they're voting on.

Jon: Shockingly low.

Elissa: I, we begged, a few of us begged frankly, the Speaker of the House and we said, “Can we have 72 hours with any bill that you're gonna ask us to vote on?” And they said, “No.” [ELISSA LAUGHS] They said, “No.” So you get a thousand page bill.

Jon: You don't need time. Come on! I remember coming down. Do you remember this? This was maybe four years ago when we came in. I think you were part of that legislative group that we met with back pre-pandemic, where you could still do this.

Elissa: Mm-hmm. Yep.

Jon: Where we came in, where we were first trying to introduce to you guys that overarching toxic exposure bill that we wanted to do. And we had, it was bipartisan. It was a veteran's caucus. It was yourself and Mikie Sherrill was there and there were, I think Liz Cheney might have been there, there were veterans from both sides of the aisle in that room. And we sort of laid it out and I thought you guys were very responsive. But the thing that really struck me was we sort of laid it out and then we waited, you know, for you guys. And then finally somebody said, "I just wanna let you guys know, like it's overwhelming down here and really busy. So if you really want to get this done, my guess is you're gonna have to go back and write something up." And I was like, "Oh okay—

Elissa: Yeah

Jon: That's, I did not realize that." And that's when we sort of went back up to the office and began writing. What became this bill?

Elissa: Yeah. And I think — I was in that meeting.

Jon: Yes.

Elissa: And you know, and, and had someone, had someone who had served in Iraq, I lived near a burn pit, you know, for those three tours so at least had some basis of understanding.

Jon: Sure, yeah.

Elissa: But you were also in a room of some of the busiest swing district members of Congress. Right?

Jon: Right.

Elissa: And so I think people were being honest, like, “Look, we have a million things coming at us, so could you like help us out here, Do a draft, do something.” And that happens more often than you'd think. Now, that's in some ways very empowering if you're a good hearted veteran's organization.

Jon: Right, that's what I was about to get to, which is now, in our case, it was very empowering and we tried to write it to the need. But boy, can you see how bad actors would exploit that loophole?

Elissa: Right. And so, you know, that first six months I must say, my first six months in Congress, after coming from the Pentagon and the CIA and sort of a clear chain of command organizations was the biggest cultural clash I've ever had in my life. I just didn't, from everything from like people showing up late and not saying sorry [JON LAUGHS] to just not people being there and not working. And I had never been in an institution that wasn't mission focused. And I thought this was a mission focused place. We can have different views on what the mission is across the aisle. But I think, you know what I thought about even this week when we made a lot of news, because I got upset on the town, on the House floor. I'm like, you know, it's the perfect example. When I've been plugging away and have passed lots of important veterans bills and this only time that I've gotten coverage for it, because it's something to see, it's something angry, whatever it is. And, I'm not sure how to fix that. If someone knew the formula to that, then we'd have a whole different group of well-known Congress people and they wouldn't be Marjorie Taylor Green.

Jon: No question about that. And fixing it also then has to fix what you have to look at then, is the overarching incentive of the system and you know, unfortunately social media and the, generally the cable media outlets, are drawn to conflict because if it's not conflict, then it's not urgency who's gonna watch it? They're not interested in governance, they're interested in the yelling. And so that incentive — and I imagine you also feel the seduction of it. Because all of a sudden your fundraising pops, all of a sudden more people come out and they say, “Yeah,

representative Slotkin, she's kicking a\*\*. She's doing it.” Whereas you've been kicking a\*\* behind the scenes, but that's not the thing that's covered.

Elissa: Right.

Jon: They're not covering that pragmatic policy making. They're covering the push of those thing. They're covering moments. And listen after the PACT Act you know, there's a reason we went out there and cursed our heads off. Cause we knew if we were gonna gain any traction, we had to get people's attention.

Elissa: Yes. And you did that to great effect. I mean, I think, what was amazing about that was first the stupidity, right? Of you had a bunch of veterans in town —

Jon: Unbelievable stupidity. Yes.

Elissa: You had veterans in town to celebrate the passing of like a really important piece of legislation, right? My generation's Agent Orange.

Jon: Correct.

Elissa: And so everyone was in town and then you thought that you were gonna flip your vote and vote against veterans and that it was gonna be like a good week for you, you know?

Jon: And fist bump Pat Toomey on your way out when you did it. So weird. But to your point of them not reading the legislation, that was the most shocking part. To see them talk so confidently on cable about, “well they inserted a provision for —” And you're like, that's just a flat out falsehood.

Elissa: Right. Right. And actually, you know, in that whole debate, I have to say, Pat Toomey was the one who was like, “I think this is too expensive.” I mean—

Jon: Oh, he was the only one who was consistent the whole time. He had brought this up when he voted against it the first time.

Elissa: Right.

Jon: But these other senators had voted for it —

Elissa: Right.

Jon: And nothing had changed —

Elissa: Right

Jon: And so they just sounded like idiots.

Elissa: Like, and I can't stress to you enough. And maybe it's because of my background or whatever. My dad was a Republican, my mom was a Democrat. I deeply, deeply believe for the future of the country, we need two parties, healthy, decent, who debate on the role of government in our lives. That is George Washington, mom and apple pie. That is how we should be debating here in this country. That's a legit conversation. And I would say even further than that, that when the Republican party, when the soul has left the body on the Republican party side —

Jon: Mm-hmm.

Elissa: It's not good for the Democratic party, we stop listening to any ideas coming from the other side because they're tainted. We start having fights amongst ourselves. We don't actually react to that push and pull about the role of government in our lives. I deeply want a healthy Republican party, and I think that makes Democrats more healthy. But what we have right now it just doesn't represent where the average person is and I —

Jon: They have a brand that's working for them and it's that paranoid style. And, Trump has sold them on the idea that the way to do this is, be as big an a\*\*hole as you can be. And there's gonna be no accountability for it. And that's how you win.

Elissa: Well, we're gonna find out, right? In the state of Michigan, we're often a harbinger of what's to come on national trends. We're having a legit split in the Michigan Republican Party. They almost came to blows at their convention in August. I mean —

Jon: Really?

Elissa: I mean, I was concerned about people in there. They were alternative candidates and slates and booing and rawr, you know, there was drama. And what ended up happening is this sort of Trump MAGA candidates all won up and down the ticket.

Jon: Yeah.

Elissa: And we have, you know, a bunch of races and they're going to lose up and down the ticket. And let me tell you, nothing focuses the mind more of a national party than their inability to win in swing districts, in swing states, right?

Jon: Boy that's interesting.

Elisa: So, Michigan, Pennsylvania, Wisconsin, Arizona, we're watching those states because what we want is for the leaders of the Republican party to say, "You know what, we fed that beast for so long —

Jon: There's accountability now.

Elissa: — and it came back and bit us. It came back and bit us and now we need to change course. We need to go and do an offsite and figure out how we get out of this mess." I want that. I am not a Republican. I can't fix their party. What I can do is beat them in November. So they start to think about a different path.

Jon: Representative Slotkin, you're exactly right. And if there is no accountability for bad behavior and extreme politics —

Elissa: Yeah.

Jon: —then it continues, these things continue until they no longer work. And the strangest thing about Trumpism that I've seen is how unsuccessful it is at governance and forget about even just the, the emotional aspect of it and the maturity of it and all those things.

Elissa: Yeah.

Jon: Do I wish he was a better person? Of course. But my main complaint with him is incompetence. He's an idea man, loves the idea, hates the execution. Doesn't follow through on anything. Doesn't do anything. So that's the real issue. And that's the lesson the party seems to have taken.

Elissa: Yeah.

Jon: And if you beat them maybe that does change things to some extent, but boy, it's a lot closer for comfort in a lot of those states than I think people would wish for.

Elissa: Well, of course. I mean, we're not, we're not dealing with best case scenarios. We're dealing with, you know, I would say this, I have taken a lot of solace in reading history, in the last couple of years, to put our moment in time in context. And the truth is, we have had really difficult moments in our history where regular citizens like us, are saying to themselves, "Is this the end?" I mean the Civil War or the Great Depression, the McCarthy hearings

Jon: 60s and 70s.

Elissa: Right! And we look back on history and we often think, "Well, it was inevitable. You know the good side came out and won." [JON GROANS] No, it was like you know, Civil Rights didn't happen because 90% of Americans thought that African Americans should have the right to vote freely.

Jon: Right.

Elissa: It's cause just enough pushed us over the edge. And I think what we did in all of those scenarios, what got us through were two things, engaged citizens and principled leaders.

Jon: Leadership has to come to the fore. And that's, there's no question.

Elissa: That's what it is!

Jon: We need that.

Elissa: The average person has to do a few inches more than they ever thought they'd do and then there has to be leaders ready to receive that and do something about it.

Jon: And not flatter our worst instincts. And I'll end with this and I really appreciate you spending the time with us. But you know, the final situation that I think worries me is Donald Trump was sort of a white hat hacker where he found a lot of the vulnerabilities in the system. And one of the vulnerabilities I think the Republicans have identified is the administrative state of elections. That elections are generally administered by partisans, but not ideologues and zealots. Well, they're trying to change that. And that's the part that concerns me most. Cause I think you're right about popular opinion. But popular opinion pales to one crazy person in a room counting the votes.

Elissa: Yep, yep. We certainly were up against, you know, backs against the wall here in Michigan, where we had actually one, one brave —

Jon: Right. One wasn't gonna certify.

Elissa: Yeah. One brave Republican 33 year old lawyer who was on our board of canvassers, flipped and voted with the Democrats. That one guy is the reason we certified our elections in Michigan.

Jon: Right, an election that Trump lost by a hundred thousand votes.

Elissa: Right. 150. But who's counting?

Jon: Right, exactly.

Elissa: But, what we are doing on our ballot this year, we have a ballot proposal to basically say the Board of Canvassers can't make their own independent decisions about certifying our election. We're trying to go back and clean up those vulnerabilities that, you're right, the last president exposed, and I hope that every state in the country is doing the same thing by hook or by crook. Cause we have a Republican legislature here, so it's not easy, that's why we're doing it on our ballot. But that just because it's not easy doesn't mean that it's not our responsibility to do something about it. So—

Jon: There you go. Well, thank you so much. And the next thing that's coming up, food insecurity for veterans. Too many of 'em having to be on food stamps, too many of 'em having housing issues. Once again it's something that's gotta be, that's gotta be cleaned up, so. We'll, —

Elissa: Yeah, I'm with you.

Jon: We'll come down there and hang out again soon.

Elissa: Please, please come haunt everyone in the halls.

Jon: I will do that. Representative Slotkin, thanks so much for joining us and we'll talk to you again soon.

Elissa: Thanks for having me.

[TRANSITION MUSIC]

Jon: Woo. Fired up. That is a Representative Slotkin. We're gonna bring back Jay and Kasaun. Jay and Kasaun that was Congresswoman Slotkin spitting truth and fire.

Jay: And nuance.

Jon: And nuance.

Jay: Is that allowed Jon?

Jon: No. [JAY LAUGHS] And believe me, we'll cut that out of the end.  
[LAUGHTER] That won't be in there. But, you were tasked with a very important—

Jay: Mm-hmm.

Jon: —goal.

Jay: Mm-hmm.

Jon: And that is to create a beautiful segue,

Jay: All right.

Jon: From that interview, do you have anything for me?

Jay: Oh yes. When Congresswoman Slotkin said that she's gonna beat the GOP and remind them all I could think of as a black preacher saying, “Spare the rod, spoil the GOP.” [JON LAUGHS]

Jon: “Spare the rod, spoil the GOP.” You know, I know a man who could beat any comer, any challenger.

Jay: He was flipping over tables.

Kasaun: This episode is sponsored by the B3 organ. It's a B3 Hammond organ.

Jon: Can I tell you something though? Here's the difference between black church and Jewish synagogue. Jewish synagogue works in minors, sharps and flats.

Jay: Mm-hmm.

Jon: It's all slightly up, like everything sounds haunted and like slightly sad. Like it's — there's very little that feels celebratory. It all feels like, are we about to get attacked?

Jay: Oh, okay.

Jon: It's all got like a tinge of like, [JON SINGS] “they're coming to take us away [LUAGHTER] and now you're going to have to march with all your belongings. You're going to be taken – ”

Jay: Jon explaining —

Jon: “ I hope you packed some crackers”

Jay: — history through music theory.

Kasaun: If you gave my grandmother a choice between her pastor and the lead singer of the choir.

Jon: Mm-hmm.

Kasaun: She'd be like, “I love you Pastor Walker, but we can't get another Cheryl.”

[LAUGHTER]

Jon: [JON CLAPS] That's talent. Cheryl's brining something that cannot be replaced.

Kasaun: We can get another pastor., We don't get another Cheryl to sing “Total Praise” that high. That's not gonna happen.

Jay: You know what's funny though because like a lot of times when you talk about black church, when you talk about charisma, that's like, these are like the qualifiers

and the traits that we want politicians to have. So like when you have a black pastor who is running for his Senate seat, usually as a black person you're like, okay.

Jon: Warnock, isn't Warnock in Georgia's a pastor?

Jay: Yeah. In Georgia. But here's the crazy part. You know what they said? The GOP was like, you know how we counteract a black pastor? We use a black Heisman winning running back from Georgia.

Kasaun: That's right. It's CRT versus CTE.

[LAUGHTER]

Jon: [JON SINGS] We're going to get a joke and we're going to get some complaints.

Jay: Herschel Walker —

Kasaun: We have the successor of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. versus the successor of Tony Dorsett.

[LAUGHTER]

Jon: This abortion story though. I mean, if there is anything,

Kasaun: Oh boy.

Jon: And everybody keeps saying like, “Oh, well now the abortion story, that'll do it.” But this guy has said so many ridiculous things and it's all still like, “it's within the margin error.” Like does any, what are people voting on down there?

Jay: I don't know Jon. A personal check? He should have just — a personal check. And he signed it. He just drew a picture of the baby with the X through it.

[LAUGHTER] When he gave her \$700.

Jon: Don't you love though? He went to a card store. He went to a card store and got one of those like Live, Laugh, Love cards [LAUGHTER] from Hallmark and wrote it down and gave it to her and, I mean his son —

Jay: Yes. Christian.

Jon: Who has been an influencer? Yes. And he's like right wing, yes?

Jay: Yes. Right wing right wing, queer, Tik-Toker, social media person. He —

Jon: But very much a provocateur, like all of a sudden came out and it's like —

Jay: He was like, “Listen, I know I joke around on here a lot, but we need to take this seriously.”

Kasaun: I don't even know him like that.

Jon: I love that s\*\*\* though, because that's when like the real family stuff, like I've got that in my family.

Jay: Yeah.

Jon: So like, it's all jokes. And then one day just turn around and go, “Listen, motherf\*\*\*er you ruined our lives.” Like it's all like, I'm branding myself, but then at a certain point I'm just gonna turn around and go, “Just shut up. Shut up, dad!”

Jay: Jon, this isn't a deal breaker in my —

Jon: No, no.

Jay: — in my heart of hearts, as a southerner, as a black person, I'm like you should be done in Georgia politics.

Jon: No. Margin of error.

Jay: If someone says, “He gave me \$700 for an abortion.”

Kasaun: And then when they asked him about it and this man said — this is truly what the first thing out of his mouth, he said, “You know, I send so many Get Well cards. I don't know —” [LAUGHTER, JAY CLAPS] It's on record. This man said it. That's the first thing he said. Before he denied it. He said “I send so many get well cards. I don't know who I be —”

Jon: By the way, is get well card a euphemism for girls that I forced to have an abortion? [KASAUN LAUGHS] Like is that “I send so many Get Well cards. I mean, there was this one girl in Wichita.”

Kasaun: It always shows to me like how strong the agenda is, is because on paper, this man has done everything you can possibly do to not be a candidate in Georgia.

Jay: Including saying, “You know what? I'm not, Listen, I'm not smart. I don't have any policy. I don't even know why I'm here. But yeah, I'm gonna go to this debate.”

Kasaun: “He gonna destroy me in this debate.”

Jon: Here's what's amazing about it to me. Imagine being in a political party where you are the pro-life party. Your candidate comes out and says, “I am pro-life. Did I obviously get a woman who wasn't my wife pregnant, have her have an abortion pay for it and all that. We can argue semantics all night long.” [JAY LAUGHS] and the result of it is the political class going, “Well, I guess it's all gonna come down to turn out,” You know, that's like the idea that that doesn't it, it has removed any connection to —

Jay: Jon, it's Roy Moore and Doug Jones all over again.

Jon: Right.

Kasaun: He came out and said, “We need more fathers in the home.” And then they were like, “You got a kid you don't even claim.” He was like, “Hey y'all, I wanna

introduce y'all to my son. [JON LAUGHS] Man, it's, I don't know why this feels like the right time to do it, but come on out, son. Where you at?

Jon: And here's what's the most f\*\*\*ed up thing about it. If he really wanted to tank his chances, all he'd have to do is come out after all that and go, “Get your vaccines people.”

[LAUGHTER]

[KASAUN SLIDE WHISTLES]

Jay: They'd be like, Oh, it's bridge too far. Bridge too far.”

Jon: That's it.

Kasaun: Hey Jon. You know what he said this week?

[JAY LAUGHS]

Jay: K.

Kasaun: This is true. Jay what do you want—

Jay: Say it.

Kasaun: I gotta say it.

Jon: Let me hear it. Let me hear it.

Kasaun: This is what he said this week. He said [KASAUN LAUGHS] he was given a speech and he said, “I don't think trans kids are gonna make it to heaven cuz Jesus may not recognize them.”

Jon: They always say that when you get to heaven, the first thing they say to you is, “And you are?”

[LAUGHTER]

Kasaun: But I do wanna say Herschel Walker may be prophetic. Wink, wink. Because season two we have an incredible episode coming out.

Jon: Gender episode, our first episode is the episode about gender. And the basic premise—

Jay: Yeah. Sadly he's not on it. We couldn't get him as a guest.

Jon: He's not on it. And, people are gonna be very mad at us. But the basic premise is this, it's not simple. It's complicated.

Jay: And personal.

Jon: And personal.

Jay: And a personal decision between doctors and families.

Jon: It's personal and it's complicated. And that's all we wanted to get across. But the truth is it's not binary and it's not black and white and it's not simple. And it's no business of the attorney generals. Here's what I'm thinking to myself, “like, oh, the trans and the gender issues not gonna get us canceled enough. The thing I'm gonna take the most s\*\*\* for about this podcast is we're doing it on Yom Kippur and I'll guarantee you that I, “So you, you, you, you talk gender. And you wanna do it on the Day of Atonement.”

[LAUGHTER]

Jon: It's unbelievable, guys. Uh, boy, thank you. This has been a Premier Week podcast for the ages. I'd say out of our two Premier Week podcasts [KASAUN LAUGHS] this has been one of my favorites.

Jay: Oh my goodness.

Jon: Alright, the TV show is back. Season two. It's on Apple TV+ this week, premiering on October 7th. The episode is gender. Kasaun Wilson, Jay Jurden. My god, are you guys hilarious. Representative Elissa Slotkin, thank you for bringing the fire. Thanks to everybody. Really excited about season two. So this first episode, they're just making available for free. We're the Pusher Man. First episode free. Next one? F\*\*\* you, pay me. Guys, thank you very much. Great job.

Jay: Thank you.

Jon: Buh-Bye.

[OUTRO MUSIC]

Jon: "The Problem with Jon Stewart Podcast" is an Apple TV+ podcast and a joint Busboy Production.