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Annie: Hi friends! Welcome to another episode of That Sounds Fun. I'm your host Annie F. Downs. I'm really happy to be here with you today. Happy Presidents' Day. You may be off work or out of school today and I'm so glad you've chosen to join us, we get to be a part of your day. We've got a great show in store.

My first question for you today is, how are you observing Presidents Day? And my second question is, have you gotten your tickets to the Here For You Tour with me and my pal Carlos Whittaker? We're hitting 12 cities in June. We want your shining face to be among the ones we get to see while we're out there.

Gather up your friends, plan that road trip if needed, decide who's bringing the snacks and who's making the playlist, and pop over to hereforyoutour.com and snag your tickets. Those pre-party and post-party or the combo tickets are the cherry on top. Y'all come hang with us. Again, that's hereforyoutour.com, which we obviously put in the show notes for your convenience.

And before we dive into today's conversation I want to share about one of our amazing sponsors, BetterHelp. When you're at your best you can't conquer the world, right? But sometimes life gets you bogged down. You may feel overwhelmed or like you're not showing up in the way that you want to.

Working with a therapist can really help you get closer to the best version of yourself. Because when you're feeling centered and empowered, you're more prepared to take on everything that life throws at you in high. Life is throwing things at you. Me too.

I'm super grateful for my counselor and the invaluable help she provided over the years that I've been seeing her. If you're thinking of giving therapy a try, BetterHelp is a great option. It's convenient and flexible, affordable, entirely online. You just fill out a brief questionnaire to get matched with a licensed therapist. And you can switch therapists anytime for no additional charge.

If you want to live a more empowered life, therapy can get you there. Visit betterhelp.com/thatoundsfun today to get 10% off your first month. That's betterhelp.com/thatoundsfun.

Intro: And today on the show I made a call to my dear friend Sharon McMahon. You may remember Sharon from the That Sounds Fun Tour live show in Minneapolis back in 2021. If you missed that episode, be sure to go back and listen.

She's a former high school government teacher and she's known as America's government teacher shedding light on the complex aspects of the US government with a nonpartisan and truly clarifying approach. She's helped mobilize her amazing social media following and philanthropic initiatives that have raised more than \$6 million for teachers and domestic violence survivors, terminally ill kids, medical debt, forgiveness programs, Ukrainian refugees, just to name a few.

She has an incredible podcast called Here's Where It Gets Interesting. I love it. She provides entertaining and factual accounts of America's most fascinating moments and people. So she is the perfect person to have on with us for Presidents Day. I just wanted to talk about government-y things. So here's my conversation with America's favorite government teacher, Sharon McMahon.

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Annie: Sharon, welcome back to That Sounds fun.

Sharon: Yay. Thank you for inviting me. This really sounds fun. Sounds like a fun way to spend my day.

Annie: Thank you. What a pleasure that we get to do Presidents Day together. No better day. Is this one of your highest national holidays? Are the political ones your highest favorites?

Sharon: It's right up there with Christmas, let me tell you. It's a massive gift-giving opportunity. Everything's on sale.

Annie: Oh my gosh. Yeah, everything's on sale.

Sharon: Everything's on sale.

Annie: So if you didn't get it for Christmas-

Sharon: Washers and dryers.

Annie: So let's even just start there. What is President's Day?

Sharon: Well, it's actually not a thing.

Annie: Oh, good. Good.

Sharon: There is no federal holidays in Presidents' Day.

Annie: What?

Sharon: There's just Federal holiday of Washington's birthday. But we call it Presidents Day because there's a lot of presidents who were born in this general time range, you know, Lincoln, Washington, etc. But technically it's Washington's birthday. And that's what we're celebrating. And of course, with a little Lincoln thrown in there.

For a while, we celebrated them separately and then they sort of rolled into like, you know, two presidents in a couple of weeks is too much. We'll just call it Presidents Day. So that's colloquially what we call it, but in reality it's Washington's birthday.

Annie: Wow. Okay. So we all just get a day off of work. Well, not everybody does-

Sharon: No.

Annie: But a lot of people get it. That's the other funny thing is it's become a thing where everyone was off and then not everyone's off now. Just federal.

Sharon: Yes, that's right. Well, I mean, it's kind of like retailers realize that because it's big holiday, Federal holiday, everybody's off for work, so it's a great day to go shopping for washers and dryers.

Annie: That's right. That's right. So everybody who works to sell washers and dryers are still active on this very day.

Sharon: It's correct.

Annie: What should we be thinking about? What should we be thinking about today? Is there anything worth pondering or do we not even need to care?

Sharon: You know, I think it's always worth pondering where we've come from. Always, right? Because where we've come from is important. And if we want to learn from it, we have to think about it sometimes. Washington has a very, very important legacy in the United States. It's a complicated legacy.

Of course, there has been a lot of renewed attention on the fact that he enslaved people. And one of his slaves that escaped he hunted until the day she died. So there is this sort of renewed attention on that aspect of his life. Yes, that is undeniably a part of who he was as a person and we can't cover that up and we can't pretend that isn't real.

But we also can't pretend it's not real that he had a massive impact on the United States that continues to this day, that America would not be what it is without him. So it is not an "either or", it is a "both and." We can condemn the aspects of his presidency that we wish were not there, the things that we know were morally wrong, while simultaneously saying America is who and what it is in part because of George Washington.

Annie: I mean, it just feels like every president that we look at in history has something really complicated about them.

Sharon: Totally.

Annie: But that's true about me, too. That's true about all of us.

Sharon: That's exactly right.

Annie: That there's something complicated about us. How do we balance that, Sharon? I think it's one of the things you're great at. Teach us, how do we balance like, here's what's real about who they are, and here's how we honor what we can honor.

Sharon: You're absolutely right that all of us, every single one of us has aspects of our lives that we would prefer the internet not dissect on our behalf. Right?

Annie: Yes! Yes!

Sharon: We would be like, "I am glad there was not a cell phone when I was that age." I'm not pretending that what we all did in college is the same as enslaving people. I'm not equating those things in any way.

Annie: Certainly.

Sharon: But I do think if we want to tell the truth, which I think is a valid common shared value and goal, that the light of truth is an important one to seek, the light of truth then demands that we look both at the contributions and at the negative aspects of somebody's life. And that's fair to do. It's a fair way to judge our historic figures.

I like what one historian has to say about this because I asked this question to guests that study history all the time: how are we supposed to judge people who lived in the 1700s by today's standards? One guest's response was, it's not our job to judge them, it's our job to learn from them.

Annie: Wow.

Sharon: Again, don't mistake me by saying, like, Oh, we shouldn't judge enslavers. That's not the larger point I'm trying to make. It's that there is something to be learned even from the negative actions of a president. I think one of George Washington's greatest achievements, he has many, but I think one of them was that he did not seek to surround himself with YES men. He did not create a cabinet full of people to do his bidding.

Annie: Wow.

Sharon: And that is kind of what we think of, you know, presidents, that's who they should hire. Right? Like people who believe what they do.

Annie: That's who I think-

Sharon: People who believe what they do.

Annie: Yeah, not just Biden.

Sharon: Yeah, totally.

Annie: But in modern day I think-

Sharon: Absolutely.

Annie: ...your cabinet is full of people who agree with you, right.

Sharon: Totally. And George Washington did the opposite. He hired a bunch of people who purposely disagreed with each other and in fact, many cases disliked each other because of the idea that, you know, iron sharpens iron, and he wants all of the good ideas on the table and not just the ideas he already agrees with.

That's one of his things that I think is worth considering is, you know, we shy away from listening to people who have different ideas and beliefs than we do because they feel uncomfortable because we find them morally wrong. After listening to somebody else's beliefs, it's okay to still arrive at the conclusion that you disagree. But we are intellectually matured by listening to those ideas. It's not to our betterment to only surround ourselves with people who believe like we do.

Annie: Someone chirped at me last week on the internet. You get it significantly more than I do, but their complaint was they were disappointed in somebody I followed on Instagram. And I thought, "Wait, I thought part of what we were supposed to do is listen to voices that we don't necessarily agree with so we can learn and grow."

And I feel like what culture pushes us to do... I won't say us, I'll say me, is Annie has a fake Instagram where you actually follow who you want to hear because people are watching who you follow. So how do we as consumers, as me who also may at times look at who other people follow, how do we balance that in our own minds of...? I guess, how do we give permission to other people to learn?

Sharon: I know that's so tough, right? Because what if the person you're following... I'll just use, say, Kanye West as an example. What if you're like, "Well, I like him. I love his music." I mean, *College Dropout* was one of the best albums that I... You know, I love it. And then he takes a hard curve and you're like, "What is happening?" What if you're still following him and then you be called out on following somebody who's really anti-Semitic now?

So I get that. I get your concern as a public figure of wanting to appear to follow people that are appropriate. You know, appropriate people to follow. That's a legit concern. Nobody wants to be like, "Well, who I follow are Nazis." Nobody wants that. You know what I mean?

Annie: Yeah, yeah, I know.

Sharon: No. But I think it is okay to say to people, Yeah, I follow people that I don't always agree with because agreement is not a prerequisite for learning. Learning happens when I hear things that I don't already know or I don't already agree with. And even if I continue to disagree with them, I can learn something from them. Even if all you're learning is how other people think, that's still a valuable thing to learn.

Annie: When we think the presidency, when we're watching that office, and what it takes in the US right now to get in that office... I mean, we're just past midterms so we are right at two years until we have a new president or Biden gets elected again. So when we're looking at the presidency on this day of presidents or we're looking at the presidency, what are some things we should be paying attention to? Do we need to read every briefing that comes out? What are we actually needing to be paying attention to on like a weekly basis coming out of the White House?

Sharon: No, I don't think it's your job to read every briefing. I think it's your job to be... You know, we all have our own jobs and we all have different things that we are equipped and called to do. And you know, 330 million Americans, it's absurd to think that we're all equipped and called to read White House.

Annie: Right. Right.

Sharon: That's absurd.

Annie: Right.

Sharon: Somebody needs to be good at preschool teaching and somebody needs to be good at heart surgery.

Annie: That's it, surgeons. I need surgeons to stay focused. I do not care how they vote.

Sharon: I'm not saying, put your head in the sand, ignore what's going on. That's not what I'm saying. But I am absolving you of the responsibility for paying attention to literally every announcement that comes out of the White House if that is not what you are equipped and called to be doing. Right?

Annie: Yeah.

Sharon: So I do think it's useful to find a handful of sources that are not all the same, that help you better understand what is going on in the world. Just like if you have a serious heart condition you would seek the advice and counsel of somebody who understands heart conditions—they would help you make sense of your health condition. It does not mean that you then would need to read every single issue of the Journal of the American Medical Association.

So that is, I think, the beauty of human community is that we can all have different giftings. And some of us are here to help us learn about preschool teaching, and our heart conditions, and government, and things that sound fun. And that is actually desirable that not all of us do the same thing.

Annie: I'm thinking about, as I'm hearing you, there is a line that I don't know of: this is the amount that it makes sense to learn and pay attention, and after that is expert level in which you go to experts for. So I think you're giving me permission... Because I as an Annie, I am nervous about the next election as an Annie F. Downs who has a public face. I am very nervous about what's going to happen between me and my friends and me and the people on the other side of the work I do.

Sharon: Totally. I mean, I hear that from literally almost everybody.

Annie: I bet. I bet you do.

Sharon: There's almost nobody who was like, "I am looking to 2024 with complete confidence and excitement."

Annie: Right. Right.

Sharon: You know what I mean?

Annie: Right.

Sharon: That's not how really anybody is feeling.

Annie: No, no.

Sharon: So you're not alone in that. But I think it's also okay to give yourself permission to understand more broadly what's happening in the world. Like, we need to know there's a war in Ukraine. We need to know about things like that. We need to understand what's happening in our own communities, etc.

But you know how there are just some issues that really tug at your heartstrings? And that might be child hunger, that might be cancer patients, it might be education. Whatever that is for you, I believe that you are given that tug on your heartstrings for a reason. And that no human has the capacity to have an equal level of care and concern about literally every issue happening in the world.

So all of us need to follow that unique calling, so to speak, of the things that really matter to you. Those things matter to you for a reason.

Annie: Our friend John Eldredge calls it benevolent detachment of the things that you aren't passionate about. You can care but you also have to detach to some degree.

Sharon: That's right.

Annie: Yesterday, Sharon, we got an alert, about eight o'clock last night, that the condition of the air in Nashville was really bad. It was like red and all sorts of like... The atmosphere is not healthy. And everybody starts talking about it. And then about an hour later, the news says, "Oh, sorry, it was a glitch in the system. It was a glitch in the system, everything's fine."

And I need you to know that all of us were like, "Yeah, right. Okay, sure. You just are trying to cover up that something's going on." So even me, about something so simple as the quality of the air, I'm not trusting the news sources anymore. I am looking to Sharon McMahon or to, you know, all sides to tell me, "Was the weather really okay in Nashville last night? Because the news is trying to feed me..."

So how can we identify trusted sources when it comes to things like elections and China balloons and what's going on in Ukraine? There's so many varied beliefs about even what's going on in Ukraine. So how do we find the trusted sources that tell us whether the atmosphere is really safe or not?

Sharon: Well, here's the thing, is that information that is based on facts can be verified.

Annie: Got it.

Sharon: That's the thing. We all know there's a difference between facts and opinions. But some news sources that will remain nameless are very, very heavy on opinions. They don't even pretend to be news. They're like, "We're not news, we're entertainment."

So I think it's important to know, first of all, what is the source of this information, how is this information being verified? There's no infallible news source. There really is not because everything is run by humans. But I would caution people against extreme skepticism, extreme skepticism where you move into this fatalistic view of the world that everyone is a liar, nobody can be trusted, nobody has my best interests at heart, everyone is trying to deceive me. That is a very dangerous way to view the world and a very dangerous way to interact with the world.

Now, I'm not saying that... I have no idea about Nashville air quality. I can't help you.

Annie: Are you sure, Sharon? Because they switched on a dime. All of a sudden, the technology was busted. Come on, Sharon. But you're right. I just like that about me. I didn't like that my first thought when I heard that the machine was busted was not... I didn't like that.

Sharon: And I'm not saying that nobody has ever covered anything up, nobody has ever lied about anything. That's not the assertion that I'm making. But if the lens through which we view the world is that everyone is a liar, then that means that the way we interact with them is not going to be the way that we are meant to be interacting with our human brothers and sisters.

If my automatic assumption is you're a liar, everything that comes out of your mouth is a dupe and a fake and a cover-up, and this is all a conspiracy. That is not how we are meant to be in human community with each other. And I think it's also not a fun way to live.

Annie: No, no, because I just want to believe that the air is fine and that the machine was wrong. But don't you know everybody was like, "I have had a headache today." I mean, of course, we all were like, The weather, you know?

Sharon: Yeah.

[00:20:04] <music>

Sponsor: Hey friends! Just interrupting this conversation real quick to share about one of our amazing partners, [Indeed](#). Okay, take a moment, get a picture of your imagination of someone who's been a positive influence in your life. Do you have that person in your brain? Great.

Chances are, there's something unique about them and their experience matched up with a need that you had when you needed help. Like I think about my college pastor and how he was such a gracious truth-teller in a season when I needed someone to shoot straight with me, and how life-changing that was for me.

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Sponsor: And I've got one more incredible partner to tell you about, [Ritual](#). So do you know anyone who's a bit too perfectionistic for their own good? Maybe it's something you struggle with yourself. Well, the truth is perfection is an illusion. You know this. It's definitely evident when we're trying to do healthy things for our bodies, right?

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And now back to our conversation with Sharon.

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Annie: I mean, let's talk about you being at the State of the Union Address. Because one of the things I liked that you said is someone asked you, did they split the people in the gallery based on Republican and Democrat like our leaders split on the floor. And you said, "No, I don't actually think so"-

Sharon: No. Mm-mm.

Annie: ...based on who you sat around.

Sharon: No.

Annie: So even in those moments, the people around you aren't all going to believe the same thing and y'all are in the same room hearing the same speech.

Sharon: It was shocking how nobody broke out into a fistfight, Annie. So weird that we were able to sit next to each other. Strange! Never heard of it.

I haven't been able to figure out if we were seated by alphabetical order by the last name of our representative, which I think might have been the case, or if we were just randomly assigned to seats by the person in charge, who is not your own individual representative. But there was not a like, "Okay, if you have a Democratic Representative, y'all sit over here, and Republican, y'all sit over there." There were definitely people sitting near me where their representative for sure was a Democrat and another was a Republican. It was also very interesting to observe the behavior of Congress firsthand.

Annie: Right. Because you can watch all of them. We can only watch the ones the TV was showing us.

Sharon: That's right.

Annie: You could watch anybody.

Sharon: That's right. That's right. And it's very interesting to see them play off of each other, when they do, how they do, what the people who are not on camera are doing. Yes, when you see them on TV, you do get a nice close-up view of their face that perhaps you don't get when you're sitting in person in the gallery, but you can survey the territory in a way that you cannot when they're in-person.

And one of the things that I don't—I said this on my Instagram too—one of the things that I don't think came across when you were watching it, there were absolutely moments of contention between President Biden and Republicans who were challenging him on some of the things that he was saying and he pushed back. Like there was this back and forth, you know, thinking about things like social security.

So there was that contentiousness of it. But I don't know if this came across or was overshadowed by that contentiousness. People on both sides clapped for way more things than they challenged.

Annie: Wow.

Sharon: There was way more like, "Yes, okay. More money for teachers, okay, we can agree with that." You know, the super lowest unemployment in 50 years, like we can all clap for that. We don't need to pretend that that's not a good thing because we don't like the president or whatever. I think that that is sometimes lost when you're watching it at home. That was very interesting to see.

It was interesting to see too how much certain people feed off of each other where they, you know, are turning and whispering to each other. And then somebody will yell something almost like they got the idea from somebody else.

Annie: Oh like one of them going like, "You go do it."

Sharon: Yeah.

Annie: Peer pressuring each other.

Sharon: Mm-hmm. That's right.

Annie: Fascinating.

Sharon: Or somebody would yell. Like they were talking about fentanyl, and somebody yelled "It's your fault!"-

Annie: Oh, wow.

Sharon: ...to the President. Like he was saying we have too many fentanyl deaths, 70,000 fentanyl deaths or whatever the statistic was, and somebody yelled, "It's your fault." It was very interesting to see the reactions of the people sitting around that person. Most of the people sitting around them were like, "Shhh."

Annie: Wow.

Sharon: Most of the people were like, "Mm-mm. Mm-mm, don't do that. Don't yell the word communism right now." You know what I mean? "That's not appropriate." Most people were shushing those people with the exception of a couple of times where a big chunk of them all wanted to say the same thing. Otherwise, there was a lot of like, Shhhh.

Annie: Wow.

Sharon: Which I thought was really interesting. Like, shut it.

Annie: Because I wonder if there's a majority that is quiet that is more middle of the road like many of us, who are, you know, the middle 80% of the world who disagrees with some.

Sharon: Oh, it is.

Annie: So in that room, it has to represent the US, that the majority are in agreement and in disagreement, and then the extremes are the ones who yell.

Sharon: That's right.

Annie: Wow.

Sharon: I mean, of course, you know that the Democrats are not going to heckle a Democratic president.

Annie: Right.

Sharon: That's a given. And vice versa. But I would say that the number of people who were actually heckling was approximately seven. It's like seven out of over 200 republicans. Most of them were clapping for accomplishments or sitting quietly if only the Democrats liked that thing. But it was approximately seven people who get all of the negative attention. And there's a strong incentive structure to continue that negative behavior. They make a ton of money doing it.

Annie: They get on the TV when they do that. And then we know their faces. Did they give you a seating chart? Meaning do they hand you like here's who's sitting below you? Do you just seem to view...

Sharon: Mm-mm.

Annie: I mean, it's your job, you know, everybody who's down there. But if I was sitting next to you, I'd have needed like, Seat B is this person, seat C is this person. Or were you just able to identify them?

Sharon: No, there's no seating chart that you're given, in part because, you know, you're sitting in the House of Representatives plus all of the senators are scrambled in there. Scrammed?

Annie: Yes.

Sharon: That's not a word. Scrammed?

Annie: It's a government word.

Sharon: Everyone is scrambled in there, plus the cabinet, plus all of the pages, plus the Joint Chiefs, plus the Supreme Court-

Annie: Oh, my gosh, right.

Sharon: They're all scrambled in there, which is a new word we just came up with.

Annie: Using it.

Sharon: So it's kind of like sit where you can.

Annie: Oh, wow.

Sharon: You know, everyone knows where the dividing line is and most people know generally where they sit and they have an idea. Like, my representative was like, "Yeah, I'm gonna be sitting by him tonight." You know, I think plan ahead like who are you sitting with. But it's kind of more like benches and not like chairs. Like if 32-

Annie: Right. That's what I imagine. They just all slide in together like pews at church.

Sharon: Mm-hmm, that's right.

Annie: Oh my gosh. Did you read or notice if the President was nervous?

Sharon: I did not notice or read that he was nervous. Because here's the thing. They take all of your electronics before you go in there.

Annie: I could not believe that.

Sharon: It was-

Annie: But everyone on the floor gets to have theirs just you get in the gallery door.

Sharon: That's right. That's right.

Annie: Terrible.

Sharon: It was truly painful to not be able to record any aspect of it.

Annie: Your addiction showed when you got up halfway through and they got your phone.

Sharon: Yeah, yeah. Sure did. Sure did. I'm like, "I am done sitting here for an hour and a half staring at the wall. I'm doing that. I'll be back in 30 minutes." And then I got yelled at for standing in the hallway. But anyway, I was imagining before the speech started, what would he have to be doing back at the White House?

There's no way that you wouldn't be nervous knowing that, you know, 75 million, 100 million people are watching you. Knowing that you're about to literally speak to people who actively oppose you, that has to be nerve-racking. Knowing that you have a speech impediment and that public speaking can be a challenge for you. That has to be nerve-racking. I can't imagine a scenario in which it would not be nerve-racking knowing how high stakes it was.

I think one of the things that I was a little surprised at was how much Biden pushed back against some of the things that people were yelling at him.

Annie: Yeah, off-script?

Sharon: Yeah, off script. And he just went in. He just went in for it. He was like, "Great, we're not cutting Social Security. We're all in agree... unanimity. Great. We got it." The off-script aspects demonstrated a little bit that he felt a little bit of confidence in what he was doing. He could deviate from the script and recover.

Annie: I mean, part of me wonders that he's just a lifelong politician.

Sharon: Totally.

Annie: He has been in that room his entire adult career. So he's like, "You guys, you guys, you guys, stop. Cut it out." Right?

Sharon: Yeah.

Annie: Okay. One of the things you noted after the speech, after the State of the Union, you showed us a video on your Insta Stories of the cars leaving with the President in it, and you said they accelerated around the corners.

Sharon: Oh, yeah.

Annie: Why is that? I don't know why that is.

Sharon: I don't know for sure. But here's the thing. They did not like, "Okay, well, here we go. Driving back to the White House." No, they tore out of there. They tore out of there. You know, like, ewwmm around the corners. Noteworthy. It was very noticeable how much they accelerated around those corners.

The only thing I can think of is that being in a motorcade is a more vulnerable position for the president than it is being in a building that has tons of security. So my hypothesis is we want him traveling in this motorcade for as little time as

possible and also this is a particularly vulnerable time because everyone knows where he is right now.

Annie: Yeah, that's right.

Sharon: Everyone knows he's in that building, everyone knows every member of Congress is in that building and everyone knows he's leaving, they can watch it on TV, know when he's exiting and know exactly where he's headed. So the vulnerability of trying to get the president from point A to point B safely just led me to conclude that they wanted to make that motorcade as fast as possible.

Annie: It's amazing that they are able to keep that secure-

Sharon: Oh my gosh.

Annie: ...and have everybody in the same room.

Sharon: Ah.

Annie: Were you ever nervous?

Sharon: No, I wasn't nervous. I don't think you could be there and be like... There's no way that you felt it was unsecured. You know what I mean?

Annie: You're like, everywhere.

Sharon: The level of security. First of all, a huge fence is erected around the entire Capitol building.

Annie: Oh, wow.

Sharon: And there's one entrance in and out unless you can access the tunnels underneath which members of Congress can. So I walked through the tunnels with my member of Congress. But there's one entrance in and out which it has multiple layers of security. To get into the building, there's metal detectors and ID, etc. Then to get into the gallery, more metal detectors.

When I say there were probably 50 members of the Secret Service and the US Capitol Police in every floor, that's not even an exaggeration.

Annie: That is unbelievable.

Sharon: On literally every corner.

Annie: How amazing.

Sharon: Multiple on every corner. There was absolutely no messing around. There was one man sitting near me who was very enthusiastic about what Biden was saying and he thought that almost... like the President was making a touchdown approximately every 90 seconds. He was that excited about it.

And there is a lot of clapping during the State of the Union. There's a lot. And then sometimes where you stand up and you're like, so and so's family is here and you stand up to clap for them. You know, things along those lines. Well, he was incredibly enthusiastic about everything. He was like, "Yes! Whoooo!"

And very quickly security sternly said to him, "You need to stop. You need to stop." They did not want anyone in the gallery making any kind of a scene or disruption or to be a distraction. And he did. He knew that they were not messing around and they were going to kick him out if he did it again. So he did comply. But even overt enthusiasm, it was viewed as a negative. Like you keep it within these lines. Keep it appropriate or you're done. No touchdown damns.

Annie: No touchdowns for President Biden.

Sharon: No. No.

Annie: I have thought about this. I wonder where you have thought about this. If I get an invitation to the White House with this President to come to a prayer breakfast or to come to something, if I get an invitation from the next President to come, what if I don't fully endorse either? Or what if I don't fully endorse the one-

Sharon: Totally.

Annie: To me, you don't have to fully endorse Biden to have said yes to go to the State of the Union. That's so cool. So how do we balance that? I mean, for you, is it if the White House invites me, I'm coming?

Sharon: Probably. If they invite me under the right circumstances. If it's for a thing that I think is worth attending, sure. You know, I'm probably not interested in going to like a Halloween party. Do you know what I mean? Or like somebody's 50th birthday-

Annie: This is where our paths depart. Because I'm like, A Halloween party? I think that's adorable that the President stands in the front and passes out candy, Sharon. We are

going. You and I are going to if I get invited. So it's more about the why than the person?

Sharon: Okay. So, first of all, if the president invites you to the White House, my feeling is that that is an incredible learning opportunity, even if you don't agree with everything the President has done or said. Also, the White House does not belong to the President. The White House belongs to the American people. It is the people's house and it will continue to belong to the American people no matter who occupies it.

Just as the Congress belongs to the American people, the United States government is of the people. And regardless of if you voted for that President or regardless of if you voted for your representative that invites you to the State of the Union, they still represent you. I don't believe in this like, "He's not my president." Oh, that's just not a fact. I'm sorry, he is.

Annie: The fact are-

Sharon: That's just a fact. That's not right. He represents you even if you did not vote for him. And the white house belongs to you even if you did not vote for who lives in it currently. So, again, it would depend on the right circumstances of like, what am I being invited to attend?

But to me, there's a larger issue around democracy. A democracy is a government of the people. And to me, to attend those kinds of official government functions are, you know, in my view, a way to see democracy in action. Like this is our government.

Annie: I mean, you saw a historical thing in January.

Sharon: Yes. Absolutely. You know, being a witness to history I think is also always fascinating. Even if you don't love everything that happened, being a witness to history is something that is meaningful to me. I tend to view it through that lens that, you know, even if my representative, I don't agree with everything he has voted for, which is true I don't agree with everything my representative has voted for, he still represents me. And this is not a campaign rally. I'm not like, "Vote for Bob."

Annie: That's a whole different thing to be invited to.

Sharon: That's right. That's right. He has already been elected and he already represents me. And it actually is his job to represent all of his constituents, not just the people who agree with him, not just the people who voted for him or donated money to his

campaign. It's actually the job we as taxpayers are paying them to do: represent all of us. So that's the lens that I view that through.

Annie: That's beautiful. That's helpful.

[00:39:36] <music>

Sponsor: Hi friends! Just interrupting this conversation one last time to share about one of our amazing partners, [ButcherBox](#). You are gonna want to hear this, you guys. Your girl AFD is not going to back down from a challenge. But I'll be honest with you. I'm happy to let someone else solve this challenge of finding amazing deals on high quality meat and seafood.

ButcherBox saves the day with 100% grass-fed beef, organic chicken, pork that is raised crate-free, and wild-caught seafood. All their meats are humanely raised with no antibiotics or added hormones. With ButcherBox you can enjoy a range of high quality cuts, some that are hard to come by at the grocery store and at an amazing value.

So if you're like my parents, Mr and Miss F. Downs who love to grill and entertain, or if you're like me and want to cook once a month, and use the bounty of that meal prep for several days, ButcherBox has got you covered. Get just what you want delivered right to your doorstep with free shipping for the continental US and no surprise fees. I love the variety of options. You can choose a curated or customized box and change your plan whenever you want.

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And now back to finish up our conversation with Sharon.

[00:41:25] <music>

- Annie:** We're recording this about five days before people are going to hear it. And in the current calendar, that's about five things shot down from the sky different from where we are right now. But can we talk for just a minute, what is going on in our skies as far as we know, Sharon McMahon?
- Sharon:** Oh my goodness!
- Annie:** Lake Huron right near you. I was like, "This is Sharon's backyard."
- Sharon:** Sharon loves the Great Lakes.
- Annie:** She loves the lakes. They're very cold, I've learned that from her. Now there's a UFO in the bottom of Lake Huron.
- Sharon:** Yes, yes. And Lake Huron is my second favorite great lake. And I'm just like, "Not Lake Huron."
- Annie:** This didn't move it to top? Not Lake Huron! Say it ain't so! The Atlantic is my second favorite ocean.
- Sharon:** That's right. I mean doesn't everybody rank the Great Lakes in order of their favorite? I do. So Lake Huron is my second favorite. I mean-
- Annie:** Oh my gosh.
- Sharon:** Okay, what is going on? Great question. I'd love to tell you.
- Annie:** What is going on?
- Sharon:** I mean, chances are good that these are not alien life. You know, people have been asking me, "Are these aliens?" I did think it was interesting that the Pentagon refused to... They did not say absolutely not, they're not aliens. They were like, "We cannot talk about that."
- Annie:** Right.
- Sharon:** But again, based on this premise of like if it walks like a duck, it talks like a duck, it's probably a duck-
- Annie:** Versus an alien.
- Sharon:** Chances are good that it's not an alien but a foreign adversary. And China's the most likely explanation. It really is. China is the country that has the largest

surveillance apparatus. We already know that they have sent balloons over the United States. These are different than the one we shot down in South Carolina. But that's the most likely explanation. Although I can't say definitively that's 100% for sure what it is.

They did make a point of saying that the payloads were not dangerous to humans. People always ask, like, What's a payload? It's the cargo that a vehicle is carrying. So it could be people or whatever it is. So sometimes the payload of an airplane is a weapon and sometimes it's UPS packages, right? And in the case of a balloon, the first balloon we shot down the payload was surveillance equipment. That's the most likely explanation is surveillance equipment. But because these are metal, these are like metal cylinder-type situations, they are dangerous to aviation.

Annie: Right. Because the last three were flying at a different height than the balloon.

Sharon: Different altitude. And if they're not communicating with air traffic control on the ground, you don't want to just assert... Like if you're in a passenger jet, like...

Annie: Can you imagine?

Sharon: No. What are you gonna...? No, no, we're not... That legitimately could crash a passenger airplane. Legitimately. If that got sucked into a jet engine, mm, mm. I mean, I know it's too big, blah, blah. I don't want to get DMs from all the pilots. I'm hypothesizing that it could damage a passenger jet.

Annie: Yes. You don't need pilot bros going into your DMs over this. I know. And we have a big pilot audience, so I mean, don't worry. Every morning I listened to two very different short news things. I listen to The Daily and I listen to The Daily Wire every morning because I want to hear both sides. And those feel like extreme. They both are very clear about where they stand.

Both of them said this morning that one of the reasons we saw the last three is that the US changed what they were looking for. Whenever they agree, I am shock and awe. I am shock and awe whenever two shows agree. So for them to say that... Also, my follow-up question is, should we be afraid?

Sharon: Here's the thing. I don't think it's a good thing that they're there. I don't think it's a good thing. But I do think the fact that the reason they were detected was because we changed the software that was being used, exactly what we're trying to pick up, the fact that we did that and then we suddenly detected three of them or several of them in short order-

Annie: In a weekend.

- Sharon:** Uh-huh. They have probably been there for a long time. For a long time.
- Annie:** There's a community of things floating above us.
- Sharon:** Uh-huh. Uh-huh. I mean, China already has low-altitude surveillance satellites.
- Annie:** I mean, they already have TikTok. Let's just call it.
- Sharon:** It's also that. Also that. And by the way, when I was flying to the State of the Union, I sat next to somebody who has the top secret security clearance who works in government defense contracting specifically in cybersecurity.
- Annie:** Oh, wow.
- Sharon:** So we spent the entire plane ride. Like I did not even get to watch any of my pre-downloaded Bravo shows.
- Annie:** You had them all ready to go. *Shahs of Sunset, Real Housewives.*
- Sharon:** That's right. Precisely. I did not get to watch any *Million Dollar Listing-*
- Annie:** None. None.
- Sharon:** ...on the way out there because we were talking about cybersecurity. TikTok used to be a client of his.
- Annie:** Wow.
- Sharon:** So we talked about the danger TikTok poses. And he said, Here's the thing about TikTok, this is what he told me, is right now nobody's doing anything with any of the information. The information that they can collect about you is not in and of itself a national security threat. Annie likes videos about baking muffins and she likes horse and horse videos. Annie likes shoe triumphs from Amazon. You know what I mean? Like, these are not national matters of national security?
- Annie:** No. No.
- Sharon:** He said, the interesting thing, though, is that they collect this data and then they can create these big sort of demographic maps and they can begin to understand overall patterns within the United States. Like, for example, what is the actual overall percentage of Americans who hate Donald Trump based on the number of videos that they negatively interact with-

Annie: Wow. Wow.

Sharon: ...or the pro-Biden videos that they are watching, or the people who actually really hate North Korea, whatever it is. They can take the temperature of Americans in ways that no amount of public polling data ever could. Because this is what you actually think and not what you say to a stranger on the phones.

Annie: That's right. That's right.

Sharon: I thought that was an interesting insight. That it's not that they're going to be like, "And now because we know Annie enjoys muffins, we're going to fire a nuclear weapon at you."

Annie: That's right. That's right.

Sharon: You know what I mean?

Annie: That's right.

Sharon: Because that's not the danger. It's learning about Americans in ways that the US government doesn't even know about Americans.

Annie: Wow. One of the questions I've been dying to ask you, and then we will finish up. Do you know things you can't tell us?

Sharon: Oh, yeah. Absolutely. I mean, I have a close family member in the FBI.

Annie: Oh, very good.

Sharon: And they don't tell me things that they can't tell me. They take their job very, very seriously and would never disclose classified information. But I also have a lot of contacts inside the federal government.

Annie: I am sure at this point. I mean, I'm sure people reach out and go, "Hey, I'm gonna tell you something that you can't say it's from me."

Sharon: They totally do. They totally do. They absolutely do. Yes. It is kind of surprising sometimes... It doesn't stop being surprising to me like who's actually watching?

Annie: Yeah, right.

Sharon: You know what I mean?

Annie: Right. Right.

Sharon: Who's actually watching my stories like inside Congress, who inside the Department of Justice is watching my stories.

Annie: Wow.

Sharon: And I'm not claiming to be some kind of all-powerful puppet master. Not at all. I'm just saying that I sometimes get some information from people that perhaps is not widely available to the public.

Annie: And then they trust you to hold on to it until it goes public.

Sharon: Yeah. Not classified information, not accusing anyone of wrongdoing. But I will say that there are just things that they would not want to attribute it to them.

Annie: Yes, yes. And you took no classified papers when you left the Congress?

Sharon: No.

Annie: Left them all there weirdly.

Sharon: I did. I did. I did speak to somebody who was in charge of the Senate classified information. Like how do senators get access to classified information? I'll tell you very briefly, and then I know we have to go. Basically, it is next to impossible for members of Congress to walk away with classified documents. Next to impossible.

Annie: Shocking.

Sharon: The way that they're allowed to view them is inside a secured facility. They can only view them inside the secured facility, unless they want to bring them back to their office. But in order to bring them back to their office, first security has to come do a complete sweep of their office to make sure there are no listening devices, to make sure there are no hidden cameras, to make sure that their office has not been bugged in some way. I mean, they have to bring in the specialized equipment before that person would be allowed to transport the documents to their office.

Annie: Shocking.

Sharon: Then the person who is in charge of those documents, like the custodian of those classified documents, remains with the documents until the Senator would be done

with them and then they take repossession of them and bring them back to the secure facility.

Annie: And they've seen the whole face?

Sharon: Yes. There is no like, "Bob checked out 25 pages of top secret documents and we don't know what happened."

Annie: That's how it seems.

Sharon: That's right. No, Congress cannot do that.

Annie: Wild!

Sharon: The President has much broader latitude to do things like that. But members of Congress cannot.

Annie: Wow.

Sharon: So I found that really interesting, like the great lengths that they go to. Like when members of Congress enter the secure facility, they also have to leave all electronic devices, including Apple Watches, etc, outside of the facility. So they cannot take any pictures. No third party can be accessing their electronics to try to see what's happening in that room. Even the notes that they take are then examined before they leave to make sure that there's nothing classified on the notes that they took.

Annie: Oh my gosh.

Sharon: It's taken very, very, very seriously the members of Congress.

Annie: That is shocking.

Sharon: As it should be. As it should be.

Annie: As many of pieces of paper have found themselves across the eastern half of our country in the last decade apparently, it is now... I mean, I am shocked how hard it is to do... Well, that's good to know. It's good to know-

Sharon: It's good to know.

Annie: ...that they're actually floating around.

Sharon: No. I did expect there to be a ball drop at the end of the State of the Union with just like, "Grab as many as you can. They're yours to take as a parting gift."

Annie: That's right. That's right. "Just put them in a box, put them somewhere in your garage, lock them up. Put them somewhere-

Sharon: That's where they belong.

Annie: That's where they belong-

Sharon: That's where they belong.

Annie: ...as long as they're locked up. Do you have any presidential facts you want to leave us with? Is there one thing you love about presidents that we need to know or about a particular president? And then we'll ask you what sounds fun.

Sharon: I think it's interesting to note that the reason we eat turkeys at Thanksgiving is because of United States presidents.

Annie: I did not know that.

Sharon: There was no like, Beginning in 1776, we started eating turkeys. You know what I mean? Wild turkeys are not everywhere in the United States. You can't get them all the places.

Annie: Sure. Sure.

Sharon: There's no human DNA that says eat a turkey on a Thursday in November. People have to decide that.

Annie: Right. Right.

Sharon: But the reason it became popular was because turkey farmers began sending them to United States presidents. And it became a big deal where they would dress up alive Turkey, like in an outfit, literally in an outfit and build a special cage for it so that it had shock absorbers so that as it flew on the bouncy airplane, it wouldn't feel too jostled.

Annie: Wow.

Sharon: And then there would be all kinds of pictures in the newspaper like, Oh, this turkey has made its way to the White House. So we all know that Calvin Coolidge of course famously had raccoons as pets. Two raccoons as pets. But the reason he had

the raccoon as pets is because somebody else was trying to interest the president in an alternative Thanksgiving Day meal and sent him a raccoon to eat.

Annie: Oh, what if we ate raccoons on Thanksgiving?

Sharon: And the President's children were like, "No, we're keeping this as a pet." And then they ended up getting another one as a friend for the pets.

Annie: Oh my gosh. Those are trashy animals.

Sharon: So trashy.

Annie: I cannot imagine if we were eating raccoons.

Sharon: Eating trash canners.

Annie: That is bottom-dwelling. Trash can. That is a bottom-dweller behavior. Oh gracious!

Sharon: There we go.

Annie: You are a holiday to be with. So thank you for doing this today on Presidents' Day.

Sharon: Thank you.

Annie: The last question we always ask. Because the show is called That Sounds Fun, Sharon, tell me what sounds fun to you.

Sharon: You know what sounds fun to me right now is sleeping in. Sounds really fun.

Annie: Just a little more sleep.

Sharon: Just sleeping in. Like not being awakened at 5:48 in the morning every day by my internal alarm clock-

Annie: Oh, it's your own body doing this to you?

Sharon: Yes. Like every morning.

Annie: Ooh, so there's no defeating it.

Sharon: Mm-mm. No matter what. I was all my years of getting up super early as a teacher-

Annie: Oh, listen, our teacher bodies. And that's why you and I can eat lunch in 18 minutes is because our teacher bodies-

Sharon: That's right. You only have that amount of time.

Annie: Yes. Yes. That's it.

Sharon: I would love to just sleep in and have somebody bring me a cappuccino and just read a book with no responsibilities. That sounds really fun to me.

Annie: Let's try to schedule you one of those. But it's between you and your body technically.

Sharon: I know, right?

Annie: So can only help so much. Any series coming on the pod we should get ready for? The World War II women series has been fabulous.

Sharon: Thank you. Thank you. I've some interviews coming up that I think people are going to be really interested in, including somebody who is an underwater archaeologist, Annie.

Annie: Oh, fantastic.

Sharon: Which is so fascinating to me. But we are hard at work on another documentary series. I can't tell you about that. But it's coming out in a month or two.

Annie: Okay, very good. Sharon, thanks for making time to do this. I just love talking to you. It's such a treat. Likewise, it's my pleasure.

Annie: Thank you, friend.

[00:56:46] <music>

Annie: Oh, you guys, don't you love her? Okay, be sure you're subscribed and listening to Here's Where It Gets Interesting. One of my favorites was about Theodosia from *Hamilton*. Y'all gotta go back and hear that one. And follow Sharon on social media if you aren't already, tell her thank you for being on the show today. And if you enjoyed this episode or know someone that you think would enjoy it, be sure to share it.

And don't forget to check the show notes for links to all of our amazing partners, tickets for the Here For You Tour, and the link to sign up for our AFD Week in Review newsletter. They are all there.

So we heard what sounds fun to Sharon, and now we get to hear what sounds fun to one of our friends who is listening just like you.

Alright Kiacha [SP], because the show is called That Sounds Fun, tell me what sounds fun to you.

Kiacha: What sounds really fun to me is I am part of a large friend group of about 16 ladies and I would love to go on a beach trip with all of them and all of their families and all of their kids. That would be the best time ever.

Annie: Okay, what's your beach of choice? If you're dream pickin' and money's not an option, where y'all going?

Kiacha: The Bahamas maybe.

Annie: Okay, I see you. I have never been to the Bahamas but I've heard it's awesome.

Kiacha: I've never been either.

Annie: We're going. We're taking all 16 of your friends and their family and I'm just gonna sneak in. Can I just sneak along?

Kiacha: Oh, absolutely.

Annie: Great. Great. I love it so much.

If you need anything else from me, you know I'm embarrassingly easy to find. Annie F. Downs on Instagram, Twitter, Facebook. All the places you may need me, that's how you can find me.

And I think that's it for me today, friends. Go out or stay home and do something that sounds fun to you. I'll do the same. Today what sounds fun to me is at two o'clock today I am going to be sitting in the Gershwin theater watching our very favorite Elphaba, Mary Kate Morrissey debut on Broadway. You guys, today is the day Mary Kate debuts on Broadway. I could cry just telling you about it. I cannot wait.

So make sure you hop over to Instagram, I'll show you everything I can show you today from behind the scenes of Mary Kate's Broadway debut. Oh my gosh. I can't

Episode 442: Sharon McMahon on Presidents, Current Events, and Our Responsibility as Everyday Americans
That Sounds Fun with Annie F. Downs

believe it. Y'all have a great week. We'll see you back here on Thursday with the incomparable Beth Moore. Y'all are going to love this episode. Will see you then.