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[ON-SCREEN HEADLINE: Karine Jean-Pierre]

TONY DOKOUPIL: Former White House spokeswoman Karine Jean-Pierre is here. She will talk about leaving the Democratic Party to become an independent instead.

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8:12:17 a.m.

5 minutes and 16 seconds

[ON-SCREEN HEADLINE: Karine Jean-Pierre on Leaving the Democratic Party]

DOKOUPIL: President Joe Biden's former press secretary is here to explain her decision to leave the Democratic Party. Karine Jean-Pierre was a registered Democrat for 20 years. She served in the Obama and in the Biden administrations, and in 2022, she became the first black and openly LGBTQ person to be named White House press secretary. And she was in that role for years. After Biden left office in January though she became a registered independent, criticizing how Democrats failed to rally behind the President before he dropped his reelection bid. In her new book, *Independent*, it's an inside look at *A Broken White House Outside the Party Lines*. That is the sub title, and Karine Jean-Pierre joins us here. Great to have you here.

KARINE JEAN-PIERRE: Thank you, Tony. Thank you, Gayle. Thank you, Nate. Thank you for having me.

DOKOUPIL: So, when this book landed on my desk and I saw *A Broken White House* in the subtitle, I have to say I thought that you were going to say that try as you might to convince Joe Biden to drop out of the race, because what we were seeing is what you were seeing and he was struggling, couldn't do it, I thought you would say you were angry at that, but mostly —

GAYLE KING: I did too.

DOKOUPIL: — what you said in the book is you're angry at the people who tried to push him out.

JEAN-PIERRE: Yes, that's correct and —

DOKOUPIL: Some Americans are going to say, seriously?

JEAN-PIERRE: — and — and — but not just the party that pushed him out, the party as it's behaving today in this moment when we need a Democratic Party to be fighting, to be an

opposition party. And that really is what ignited the book. Right after the administration, I was just minding my business, right? No longer a public servant, going to the grocery store, going to my kids' school and people would come up to me, strangers and say, what is going on with the Democratic Party, why aren't they fighting? We knew what was going to happen after this election. Why are they not prepared?

DOKOUPIL: The stakes were really high.

JEAN-PIERRE: The stakes were really high, so it's connected also to the moment that we are in. I'm telling a story, obviously my story, and how I started thinking about the Democratic Party and my involvement in it, and then fast forward to today, the disappointment, the disillusionment millions of people have. And I'm trying to —

KING: But I want to pick up on what Tony was saying because I too thought that. You said — people said, why didn't members of his inner circle speak up about what many believe was the apparent decline of — of Joe Biden and you said you're a member of the inner circle and you never saw the decline. After that I wrote, how?

JEAN-PIERRE: Yeah.

KING: You even write, Karine, you were on the plane with him going to the debate and you didn't see anything.

JEAN-PIERRE: Well, we were —

KING: It is so hard to understand.

JEAN-PIERRE: — when we were on Air Force One going to the debate, you got to remember people were on the team, his family was on the team. I actually was — one of those rare trips I didn't see him until after the debate even though I was on the plane. So, really, I take — I want everybody to know that I take this question incredibly seriously, I do.

NATE BURLESON: Yeah.

JEAN-PIERRE: I was his White House press secretary, which means I had a role that saw him practically every day and traveled with him —

KING: And you saw nothing?

JEAN-PIERRE: — for more than 95 percent — we've always said we are not going to say, oh, he didn't age. He aged —

BURLESON: Yeah.

JEAN-PIERRE: — and he poked fun at it. We always owned up and with age comes what

happens when you get older.

DOKOUPIL: Which is?

JEAN-PIERRE: What I — what I — but when we talk about the mental acuity, and, again, I take this very, very seriously.

BURLESON: Yeah.

JEAN-PIERRE: I never saw anyone who wasn't there. I saw someone who was always engaged.

BURLESON: Yeah.

JEAN-PIERRE: I saw someone who understood policy, pushed us on the policy, and also understood history. And there were times — I'll tell you this story — there were times he would call me into the Oval Office and I would be like, oh, no, oh, no, because I knew whatever he was going ask me was going to be direct —

BURLESON: Yeah.

JEAN-PIERRE: — was going to be about a story he read or about how we're pushing back, how we're pushing a message forward.

BURLESON: And — and you write about the people within the party pushing him out. Some would describe those people fighting for a replacement candidate is fighting, but you also described his current state of the Democratic Party as too timid.

JEAN-PIERRE: I —

BURLESON: And what can the Democratic Party do to get out of this timid and even some will say disappointing place?

KING: So timid that you've gotten out of the Democratic Party.

BURLESON: Right.

JEAN-PIERRE: — here is the thing. I actually think that the system is broken. The two-party system is broken and we need it to be fixed, to be working in order —

BURLESON: How you do that?

JEAN-PIERRE: — in order for democracy — well, just this past Saturday, millions of people -- seven million people showed up to the street to talk about no kings, right? It was a No Kings rally, to talk about bringing — bring — making sure we're paying — excuse me — fighting for our democracy.

BURLESON: Right.

JEAN-PIERRE: And it grew. That was the third one. It grew, so the power should be in the hands of the people, not in the White House, not with one establishment more broadly.

BURLESON: Yeah.

JEAN-PIERRE: And so, I think as an opposition party we should see, for example, why aren't there more lawsuits from Democrats. Why are outside groups lining up to do the opposition protests? We should have the Democrats more involved. Why are Democrats not standing in front of a hospital that's about to be shut down because of GOP hikes that is going to cost lives?

BURLESON: Yeah.

JEAN-PIERRE: Why aren't they doing press — press conferences there? We should not — what I am seeing and hearing from people, not just me —

BURLESON: Yeah.

JEAN-PIERRE: — they feel as if the Democratic Party is acting as if it is normal times and relinquishing their power.

DOKOUPIL: Will you create a new party? Is that what you're angling for?

JEAN-PIERRE: No, so I actually talk about this in the book and it's very nuanced. I'm aligned with the values of the Democratic Party and I understand what it means to have a third-party system and how that can — I talk about the history of third-party candidates in presidential. What I am saying is I want to start a conversation and I feel like I am now a private citizen and I have the ability to do that.

BURLESON: Yeah.

JEAN-PIERRE: And if I could be from the outside pushing and saying, hey, this two-party system isn't working, there are millions of people — not just me —

BURLESON: Yeah.

JEAN-PIERRE: — millions of people who are part of the independent party who feel like they're not seen.

BURLESON: For sure.

JEAN-PIERRE: And younger people are —

DOKOUPIL: Yeah.

JEAN-PIERRE: — becoming independents by the day.

BURLESON: We — we would love to see our representatives get along too as well.

JEAN-PIERRE: Yeah, and I talk about that too in the book, the partisanship has hurt us.

DOKOUPIL: Karine Jean-Pierre, thank you very much. We're — we're up against the wall here, but the book is a great read for people who are interested in what happened inside the White House. It is called *Independent*. It goes on sale tomorrow. Thank you very much.

JEAN-PIERRE: Thank you. Thank you, Tony.

KING: And *The Battle Inside the White House* too.

JEAN-PIERRE: Thank you.

DOKOUPIL: Yes. Yeah.

JEAN-PIERRE: Thank you.