



## How Close Were You? The Lone Gunman Approaches

*How do you mount a revolution when the crazy people have all the guns?*

By HAL CROWTHER

Imagine a second American Revolution, not the colonists against the British this time but the sane against the insane. Imagine that the sane — you and me, and everyone balanced enough to pose no threat to themselves or the community — actually win this war. We imprison or deport every official connected to the gun lobby and the NRA (“One of the most evil organizations to exist in any nation, past or present” — novelist William Styron), along with thousands of craven, mercenary legislators who functioned as the lobby’s marionettes. We confiscate tens of thousands (millions?) of AR-15s and dump them down the throat of an active volcano. We outlaw bullets, at least all the bullets that couldn’t have been fired by guns that existed when the Founders passed the Second Amendment.

This is a ridiculous utopian fantasy, a fever dream of pathetic futility, because a revolution requires firearms and in this country the crazy people own all the guns. Because of that cruel truth, each of us, sooner or later, is bound to encounter that lone crazed gunman we read about in the paper every day. My wife and I came close — as close as we ever will, we hope — at the end of October. October 25, precisely. On our way home in the fall we always stay overnight with close friends in Bowdoinham, Maine. On the evening of Wednesday the 25th, we were eating lobsters with our friends while a deranged firearms instructor, Robert Card, was strafing a bar and a bowling alley in nearby Lewiston with his assault rifle. The body count was 18 dead and 13 wounded, the 10th most lethal mass shooting in US history.

We heard the news when we woke up in the morning, along with the announcement that people in most of Southern Maine were advised to “shelter in place” with their doors locked while the shooter was still at large. There were a couple of disturbing details. While the bowling alley in Lewiston is 20 miles from Bowdoinham where we were staying, the killer’s home was just two miles down the road that runs past my friend’s house. When last reported, he was heading in our direction. He had abandoned his car and was believed to be looking for another one. We were just a

*Continued on page 8*



Illustration by DOLORES CULLEN

**INSIDE:**  
**TRUMP THE FASCIST JOKER**

EDITORIAL, PAGE 2

**PASSION OF GEORGE SANTOS**  
*The Mary Magdalene of Congress is banished from the House, because he was not appreciated in his time.*

ALEXANDRA PETRI, PAGE 20

**CHOICE: WALL ST/WORKING CLASS**  
*Democrats can't have it both ways indefinitely. If they really help working people, they'll lose favor with barons of finance.*

LES LEOPOLD, PAGE 10



# The Progressive POPULIST

A Journal from America's Heartland

**Business Office:**  
PO Box 487  
Storm Lake, IA 50588  
1-712-732-4991

**Subscription Information:**  
1-818-286-3104

USPS 016011. Periodicals postage paid at Storm Lake, Iowa 50588. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to The Progressive Populist, PO Box 487, Storm Lake, Iowa 50588-0487.

**Editorial Office:**  
PO Box 819  
Manchaca, Texas 78652  
512-828-7245  
Email: editor@populist.com  
http://www.populist.com

**JAMES M. CULLEN**  
Editor

**ART CULLEN**  
Managing Editor

**DOLORES CULLEN**  
Illustrator

**JEN OLSON**  
Copy Editor

**PAT TURNER**  
Proofreader

**STEVE HAMILTON**  
Legal Counsel

**JOHN CULLEN**  
Publisher

The Progressive Populist is an employee-owned, independent journal that believes in the Bill of Rights and that the truth shall make us free.

Writers are responsible for their own work. In publishing them we do not necessarily agree with them, but we think their points of view are worth sharing. The Progressive Populist cannot vouch for representations made in advertisements.

Subscriptions are \$45.00 for one year (22 issues). Back issues: \$3.50 prepaid. Foreign, group bulk rates and advertising rates available on request. If you don't want your name shared with other progressive groups in list exchanges, call 800-205-7067 or email [populist@usa.net](mailto:populist@usa.net) and ask to be "unlisted."

The Progressive Populist (ISSN 1096-5971), entire contents copyrighted 2023, is published twice monthly, with combined issues in July and January, by Ampersand Publishing Company, 220 W. Railroad St., Storm Lake, Iowa 50588.

## AN EDITORIAL

### Trump the Fascist Joker

Donald Trump has been airing his authoritarian fantasies during the course of his campaign to restore him to the presidency, as he tries to avoid criminal prosecution for various felonies. At first, his signature line was, "I am your retribution."

At the Conservative Political Action Conference March 4, Trump told the room packed with his cultists that they, not him, were the real targets of his supposed oppressors.

Trump defined MAGA's enemies with a special emphasis on prosecutors.

"From the beginning, we have been attacked by a sick and sinister opposition, the radical left communists, the bureaucrats, the fake news media, the big money special interests, the corrupt Democrat prosecutors," he said. "Oh, they're after me for so many things. Oh, those prosecutors. Some are racists. Some hate our country. They all hate me. They'll get me for anything, anything."

"In 2016, I declared I am your voice," he said. "Today, I add I am your warrior, I am your justice. And for those who have been wronged and betrayed, I am your retribution. I am your retribution."

Since then, Trump and his allies have begun mapping out plans for using the federal government to punish critics and opponents in a second term. The former president has named individuals he wants to go after, and his associates are drafting plans to potentially invoke the Insurrection Act on his first day in office to allow him to deploy the military against protests that might develop.

In private, Trump has told advisers and friends in recent months that he wants the Justice Department to investigate one-time officials and allies who have become critical of his time in office, including his former chief of staff, John F. Kelly, and former attorney general William P. Barr, as well as his ex-attorney Ty Cobb and former Joint Chiefs of Staff chairman Gen. Mark A. Milley, according to people who have talked to him, who, like others, spoke on the condition of anonymity to describe private conversations, the *Washington Post* reported. Trump has also talked of prosecuting officials at the FBI and Justice Department.

In public, Trump has vowed to appoint a special prosecutor to "go after" President Biden and his family. The disgraced former president has frequently made corruption accusations against the Bidens that are not supported by available evidence.

Trump's associates have been drafting plans to dispense with 50 years of policy and practice intended to shield criminal prosecutions from political considerations, the *Post* reported. Critics have called such ideas dangerous and unconstitutional.

Much of the planning for a second term has been unofficially outsourced to a partnership of right-wing think tanks in Washington, led by the Heritage Foundation. Dubbed "Project 2025," the group is developing a plan, to include draft executive orders, that would deploy the military domestically under the Insurrection Act, the *Post* reported. The law, last updated in 1871, authorizes the president to deploy the military for domestic law enforcement.

The plan also reportedly includes Trump proceeding with plans to greatly expand the number of government employees exempted from protection under the Pendleton Civil Service Reform Act, which was signed into law in 1883 to reduce the number of government jobs awarded as political patronage.

In October 2020 Trump signed an executive order to create a new "Schedule F" classification making "policy-making positions" at-will employees who could be thrown out of work by administrators. President Joe Biden rescinded the order shortly after taking office.

Not only would high-profile employees who publicly disagree with the president be targeted for removal, but also lower level employees tasked with collecting the data and evidence underlying much of what the federal government does — whom MAGA Republicans consider part of the "Deep State" — could be removed.

Trump has frequently argued that punitive steps against his perceived enemies would be justified by the current prosecutions against him. Trump has claimed the criminal charges he is facing — a total of 91 felonies across four state and federal jurisdictions — were made up to damage him politically, though the cases look solid.

"This is third-world-country stuff, 'arrest your opponent,'" Trump said at a campaign stop in New Hampshire in October. "And that means I can do that, too."

During an interview on Dec. 5, Fox News' Sean Hannity tried to help Trump tone down the authoritarian rhetoric. Hannity asked Trump whether he would abuse power if he was returned to office and noted that Trump has been using the line, "I am your retribution" in his campaign. Trump responded by praising Al Capone, who he called "one of the greatest of all time, if you like criminals," but Trump failed to promise that he wouldn't abuse power.

Hannity tried again, asking Trump to promise the public that he wouldn't abuse power as retribution against anybody. "Except for Day 1," he replied. Trump followed this by saying, "I want to close the border and drill, drill, drill." Trump then acknowledged that Hannity wanted him to say he's not going to be a dictator, before repeating that he will be a dictator "on Day 1."

Some Republicans said the former president was joking when he told Hannity he wouldn't be a dictator "other than Day 1."

Trump's authoritarian rhetoric has not cracked his dominance of the Republican Party, but it has raised concerns among critics in both parties. "I think people who like Donald Trump like Donald Trump regardless of what he says and he entertains them with bombast, which they find humorous and compelling," said Sen. Mitt Romney (R-Utah), who voted twice to convict Trump following his Senate impeachment trials. "His base loves the authoritarian streak. I think they love the idea that he may use the military in domestic matters and that he will seek revenge and retribution. That's why he's saying it and has the lock, nearly, on the Republican nomination."

And why would Trump give up on his dream of being a dictator? His heroes are dictators, such as Vladimir Putin, Xi Jinping, Mohammed bin Salman and Kim Jong Un. In Trump's view, they know how to run their countries, and he wants to follow their examples.

Many on the center-left are concerned about Joe Biden's age and his inability to get the price of groceries down to pre-pandemic levels, despite Biden's success in leading the economic recovery that has kept the unemployment rate 4% or below since December 2021. But remember, Trump is a 77-year-old aspiring fascist who faces 91 felonies in four jurisdictions, including efforts to overturn the election — and he wants to deport Muslims and put his critics in jail, while he uses the presidency as his "Stay Out of Jail" card.

We remain hopeful American voters will make the correct choice, and Trump's only "Day 1" is when he reports to jail. — JMC

## This issue in The Progressive POPULIST

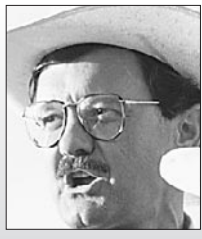
<b>COVER/Hal Crowther</b>	<b>p. 1</b>
How close were you? The lone gunman approaches	
<b>EDITORIAL</b>	<b>p. 2</b>
Trump the fascist Joker	
<b>JIM HIGHTOWER</b>	<b>p. 3</b>
Corporate giants say you don't mind their price gouging. Do you? Woody Guthrie's anthem mocking right-wing republicanism. Here's a wild idea that's taking root. Voters reject the illiberal bigotry of Moms 4 Liberty. Why 'Supreme Court Ethics' is an oxymoron. When and where was the first Thanksgiving feast.	
<b>LETTERS TO THE EDITOR</b>	<b>p. 4</b>
<b>DON ROLLINS</b>	<b>p. 4</b>
Prison for the holidays	
<b>RURAL ROUTES/Margot McMillen</b>	<b>p. 5</b>
Boomer pols: Be more like the Carters	
<b>DISPATCHES</b>	<b>p. 5</b>
More jobs drop unemployment rate further. Study shows corporate profiteering 'amplified' global inflation.	
It's high time, as 6 Democratic governors urge DEA to reschedule marijuana by year-end. Rural jobs grew in September, but still lag. Senate Republicans hand Putin victory. Chattanooga VW workers announce push to join UAW.	
<b>FROM HARROP</b>	<b>p. 6</b>
What happens if anti-vaxxers just face the consequences?	

<b>ART CULLEN</b>	<b>p. 6</b>	<b>KATRINA VANDEN HEUVEL</b>	<b>p. 12</b>	<b>BARRY FRIEDMAN</b>	<b>p. 18</b>
Woke made Sen. Ernst choke		Russian fate: A memoir I'll never write		If Biden were Trump	
<b>ALAN GUEBERT</b>	<b>p. 6</b>	<b>SARAH ANDERSON</b>	<b>p. 13</b>	<b>LINDSAY KOSHGARIAN</b>	<b>p. 18</b>
Soybeans' big players looking to a bruising year ahead		Scraping away the anti-worker, anti-racial equity vestiges of the Reagan era		The Pentagon just can't pass an audit	
<b>GENE LYONS</b>	<b>p. 7</b>	<b>ROBERT B. REICH</b>	<b>p. 13</b>	<b>RALPH NADER</b>	<b>p. 19</b>
The hypocrisy is strong with these two		America's anxiety disorder		Israeli government's mass terrorism fortified by Biden and Congress	
<b>SONALI KOLHATKAR</b>	<b>p. 7</b>	<b>JESSE JACKSON</b>	<b>p. 14</b>	<b>TED RALL</b>	<b>p. 19</b>
The high cost of low holiday prices		The humanitarian disaster in Gaza		Cut Israel loose	
<b>JOHN YOUNG</b>	<b>p. 7</b>	<b>JOSEPH B. ATKINS</b>	<b>p. 14</b>	<b>SETH SANDRONSKY</b>	<b>p. 19</b>
How extortion machine fueled the Big Lie		Keeping the line to heaven		Private employers hired 103,000 new workers in November; pay growth decelerates	
<b>KAZMYN RAMOS</b>	<b>p. 8</b>	<b>WALTER EINENKEL</b>	<b>p. 14</b>	<b>SAVANNAH ROSE</b>	<b>p. 20</b>
The importance of home		Rep. James Comer's newest 'smoking gun' debunked in record time		Outrage in Wyoming erupts over public land auction	
<b>DICK POLMAN</b>	<b>p. 9</b>	<b>HEALTH CARE/Joan Retsinas</b>	<b>p. 15</b>	<b>ROB PATTERSON</b>	<b>p. 20</b>
Trump's tenure "did not bestow on him the divine right of kings to evade the criminal accountability that governs his fellow citizens."		Dangerous ideas need stifling		Finally sold on reading Ebooks	
<b>JOE CONASON</b>	<b>p. 9</b>	<b>SAM URETSKY</b>	<b>p. 15</b>	<b>ALEXANDRA PETRI</b>	<b>p. 20</b>
What the numbers now tell about Biden's economy		Congress finally agrees on George Santos		The passion of George Santos	
<b>DAVID McCALL</b>	<b>p. 10</b>	<b>FRANK LINGO</b>	<b>p. 15</b>	<b>MOVIE REVIEW/Ed Rampell</b>	<b>p. 21</b>
Workers need a fighting chance		Climate conference offers little hope		Polynesian happiness on the soccer field of dreams	
<b>LES LEOPOLD</b>	<b>p. 10</b>	<b>WAYNE O'LEARY</b>	<b>p. 16</b>	<b>EDGE OF SPORTS/Dave Zirin</b>	<b>p. 21</b>
Wall Street or the working class: The Democrats must choose		Refugee roulette in Israel		How Zionism feeds antisemitism	
<b>MARY SANCHEZ</b>	<b>p. 11</b>	<b>JOEL D. JOSEPH</b>	<b>p. 16</b>	<b>AMY GOODMAN</b>	<b>p. 22</b>
The Voting Rights Act of 1965 suffers another blow		Henry Kissinger made the biggest mistakes in U.S. history		Carbon colonialism, COP28 and the climate crisis	
<b>ROBERT KUTTNER</b>	<b>p. 11</b>	<b>JAN SCHAKOWSKY</b>	<b>p. 16</b>	<b>BONNIE JEAN FELDKAMP</b>	<b>p. 22</b>
Charlie Peters and the odyssey of neoliberalism		Hey House GOP, keep hands off Social Security and Medicare!		Remember who Christmas traditions are really for: The kids	
<b>MARC G. RATCLIFF</b>	<b>p. 11</b>	<b>JUAN COLE</b>	<b>p. 17</b>	<b>DANA MILBANK</b>	<b>p. 23</b>
The poignant path to despotism		Palestinian-Israeli leader Mansour Abbas calls for nonviolent struggle; says Hamas's Oct. 7 atrocity blasphemed against Islamic values		The last temptation of George Santos	
<b>THOM HARTMANN</b>	<b>p. 12</b>	<b>JASON SIBERT</b>	<b>p. 17</b>	<b>GENE NICHOL</b>	<b>p. 23</b>
If Democrats ran red states fewer people would die		Second Cold War will have no winners, except arms makers		The expanded NC Republican secession caucus	
		<b>JAMIE STIEHM</b>	<b>p. 18</b>		
		Haley best to vie vs. Trump — and Biden			

Cover illustration by Dolores Cullen  
See our blog at [progressivepopulist.blogspot.com](http://progressivepopulist.blogspot.com)  
Like us at [Facebook.com/ProgressivePopulist](https://www.facebook.com/ProgressivePopulist)  
Call the White House at 202-456-1111



# JIM HIGHTOWER



You can't squeeze blood out of a turnip, but corporations can squeeze profits out of customers, with junk fees, hidden charges and other 'gotchas.'

## Corporate Giants Say You Don't Mind Their Price Gouging. Do You?

According to an old saying, "You can't squeeze blood from a turnip." True. But that raises this question: Who would even try squeezing blood from a turnip?

Well, metaphorically speaking, if "blood" means profit, and "turnips" are customers, airlines are eager to apply the squeeze. As are banks, credit card outfits, cable TV and internet hucksters, car rental companies, concert promoters... and can anyone decipher their insurance policies?

I'm not talking about fair profit, but junk fees, hidden charges, undisclosed add-ons and other "gotchas" that brand-name giants sneak into the fine print of their price tags. It's pure corporate larceny, adding up to a stunning level of unearned profit for the perpetrators: Airlines picked our pockets for nearly \$7 billion last year in baggage fees alone; credit card dealers plucked \$14 billion from us in punitive late fees; and the overall corporate haul from this secretive squeeze on consumers now tops \$64 billion a year!

Shouldn't companies have to tell you — in plain language — what they're actually charging you... and for what? "Yes!" says President Joe Biden, who's pressuring the gougers to come clean. "Hooray!" exult consumers, who're tired of being played for suckers.

Of course, as another saying notes, "Where there's a will, there's a thousand won'ts." So, a flock of corporate lobbyists are now swarming the Capitol, crying: "Save junk fees!" Their arguments are hilariously absurd: They assert that price disclosure will "confuse consumers"; that government should not "interfere" in the free market; that it's "technically infeasible" to tell consumers the real price — and a group who actually quibbled, "What exactly is a fee?"

To help raise common sense and plain fairness to high places, check out the work Public Interest Research Group at [www.pirg.org](http://www.pirg.org).

## Woody Guthrie's Anthem Mocking Right-Wing Republicanism

What it is about today's vituperative, foam-at-the-mouth Republican party?

No longer disguising their desire to repress women, workers, immigrants, the poor and all others who differ with (or are different from) their own partisan clan, the party has turned to a politics of hatred and division, openly seeking to (SET ITAL) punish (END ITAL) opponents they now brand as "enemies" and "vermin." What's motivating this plunge into such undiluted political sourness?

My simple observation is that they've succumbed to a base impulse expressed in one straightforward word: MEANNESS. After all, their current agenda amounts to hurting people they don't like, trying to keep America's diverse majority from getting such basic human needs and rights as health care, the vote, fair wages, reproductive liberty and public education free of church dictates. That's not "conservative," it's just mean.

This malicious strain of selfish Republicanism has flared up periodically in our history, with the few striving to repress the many. Woody Guthrie even wrote an anthem in the 1940s mocking those crusading for such a morally depraved politics:

"I'm the meanest man that ever had a brain ...

I hate everybody don't think like me... And I'm readin' all the books I can To learn how to hurt...

Keep you without no vote, Keep you without no union ...

Well, if I can get the fat to hatin' the lean,

That'd tickle me more than anything I've seen,

Then get the colors fightin' one another,

And friend against friend, and brother and sister against brother ...

I love to hate and I hate to love! I'm mean, I'm just mean."

This song is dedicated to Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis, Rep. Marjorie Taylor Green, Rep. Jim Jordan, House Speaker Mike Johnson, Texas Gov. Greg Abbott, and ... well, you know who you are.

## Here's a Wild Idea That's Taking Root

Growing up, I absorbed a lot of values from my Ol' Texas Daddy: a strong commitment to the common good, a healthy work ethic and a lively sense of humor. But one thing about him I've rejected: his determination to have a perfect yard of thick, verdant St. Augustine grass. Lord, how he worked at it — laying sod, (watering), fertilizing, (watering), weeding, (watering), spreading pesticides, (watering), mowing... (more watering). But it was too hot, too dry, too infested with blight, bugs, slugs and such. He was up against Texas nature, and he just couldn't win.

So, I've gone in the opposite direction — slowly nurturing a natural yard of native trees, drought-tolerant plants and a general live-with-nature ethos in my little landscape. I'm hardly alone in this rejection of the uniform "green grass imperative." A spontaneous yard rebellion is taking hold across our country as more and more households, neighborhoods, businesses, etc. shift to a nature-friendly approach. A particularly encouraging push for change is coming from schoolkids — elementary through college — who're appalled by the poisoning of our globe and organizing locally to do something that both makes a difference and makes a statement. One exemplary channel for their activism is a student movement called Re:wild Your Campus.

Of course, some people consider wild yards to be scruffy, ugly... unruly. That's their choice, but some also insist that tidy grass lawns must be everyone's choice. So, they proclaim themselves to be the yard police, demanding that cities and homeowners associations make green-grass uniformity the law, filing busybody lawsuits and running right-wing social media campaigns targeting people and groups that disobey.

These attacks are silly because... well, they are silly, and also because they're attacking the future, which is nearly always a loser strategy. To work for yard sanity and choice, go to [Rewild.org](http://Rewild.org).

## Voters Reject the Illiberal Bigotry of Moms 4 Liberty

In one of their satirical songs, the Austin Lounge Lizards lampooned the ridiculous bigotry of some Christian factions, singing: "Jesus loves me. But he can't stand you."

That could be the bellicose anthem of a quasi-religious Republican front group with a very sweet-sounding name: "Moms for Liberty." Far from sweet, however, these moms are funded by rich Republicans to be ground troops in the party's culture wars — essentially an anti-liberty campaign against people, books, teachers and ideas they don't like. In the last few years, squads of these moms have turned into political hate groups, persecuting small town school board members by baselessly accusing them of conspiring to indoctrinate children

with pornography, hatred of white people and "liberal" thinking.

Having stirred up dust devils of division and fear, the momsters ran candidates in local board elections this fall, hoping to take over public schools. But they miscalculated on an essential political reality: Most Americans are not right-wingers, bigots or Christian nationalists. The group had counted on surprising voters in what are usually low visibility/low-turnout races, but the extremists were the ones surprised by an aggressive voter pushback against their scheme.

Indeed, various surveys show that the GOP's mom-wing lost about 80% of its races across the country, even in major swing states like Ohio, Pennsylvania and Virginia. For example, in the very conservative school district of Pennridge, Pennsylvania, where a far-right majority of the board was attempting to impose a national model of a politically driven educational system, five Republican incumbents were up for reelection. All five were swept out, turning the Pennridge school board blue for the first time in years!

To help push back against right-wing politicizers of your school district, contact Campaign for Our Shared Future: [CampaignSharedFuture.org](http://CampaignSharedFuture.org).

## Why 'Supreme Court Ethics' Is an Oxymoron

Let me be blunt: The problem with today's Supreme Court is that it consists of too many 5-watt bulbs sitting in 100-watt sockets.

While most of the nine members are assumed to be brilliant, "smart" is as smart does, and this court's right-wing majority wallows in stupid, consistently pushing plutocracy, autocracy and theocracy over the democratic will of the people. Compounding this stupidity, many of the judges have flagrantly accepted "gifts" of cash, luxury vacations and other freebies from the corporate and right-wing interests that have benefited from the court's rulings. Yet, caught red-handed, the narcissistic jurists assert that We the People should just trust their integrity.

These nine legal power brokers, who pose as America's arbiters of justice, have even exempted themselves from having an ethics code, allowing each one to make up their own, unwritten ethical rules. Thus, corruption flourishes; so, the public, Congress and the media have finally demanded that, at the very least, the eminences be subjected to basic ethics. "OK, OK," the nine finally grumped. "We'll sign onto a code."

BUT ... their acquiescence included a killer gotcha: They would write their own rules of behavior! Sure enough, their 14-page code is a toothless watchdog with no bark, much less bite. It starts by snarling

that the great unwashed simply fail to understand that the entire court is, as the chief justice had earlier proclaimed, made up of "jurists of exceptional integrity." So, the new "code" promises boilerplate ethical behavior, but provides no enforcement mechanism beyond claiming the judges will police each other.

## When and Where was the First Thanksgiving Feast

Let's talk Turkey! No, not the Butterballs in Congress. I'm talking about the real thing, the big gobbler — 46 million of which we Americans devoured this past Thanksgiving.

It was the Aztecs who first domesticated the gallopavo, but the invading Spanish conquerors "fowled up" the bird's origins. They declared it to be related to the peacock — Wrong! They also thought the peacock originated in Turkey — Wrong! And they thought Turkey was located in Africa — well, you can see the Spanish were pretty confused.

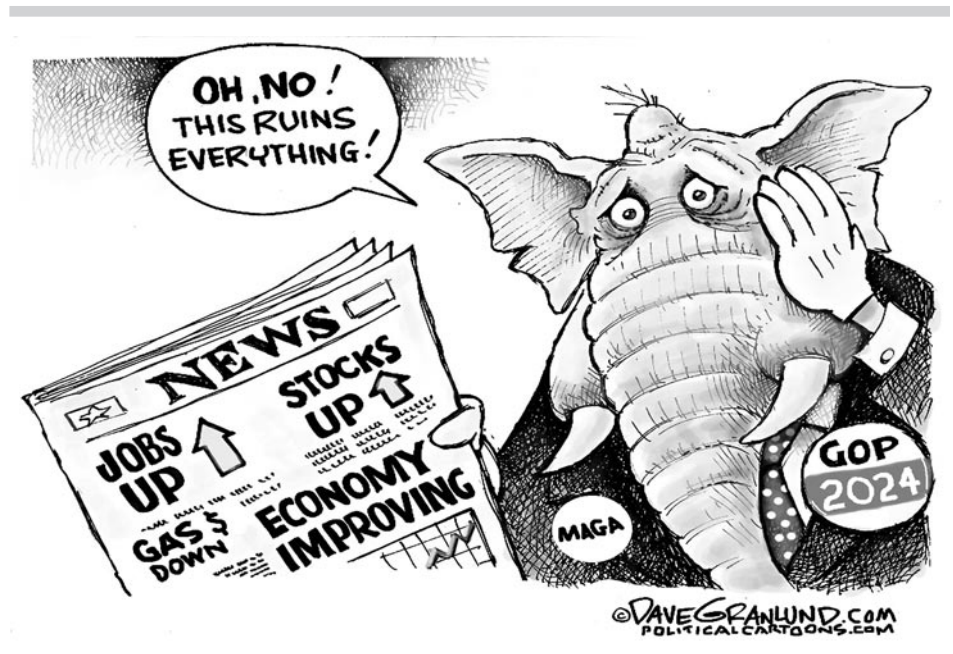
Actually, even the origin of Thanksgiving Day in the U.S. is confused. The popular assumption is that it was first celebrated by the Mayflower immigrants and the Wampanoag natives at Plymouth, Massachusetts, in 1621. They feasted on venison, furkees (Wampanoag for gobblers), eels, mussels, corn and beer. But wait, say Virginians, the first Thanksgiving Food-a-Palooza was not in Massachusetts — the feast originated down here in Jamestown colony, back in 1608.

Whoa there, pilgrims! Folks in El Paso, Texas, say it all began way out there in 1598, when Spanish settlers sat down with people of the Piro and Manso tribes to give thanks, feasting on roasted duck, geese and fish.

"Ha!" says a Florida group, asserting the very, very first Thanksgiving happened in 1565 when the Spanish settlers of St. Augustine and friends from the Timucuan tribe chowed down on "cocido" — a stew of salt pork, garbanzo beans and garlic — washing it all down with red wine.

Wherever it began, and whatever the purists claim is "official," Thanksgiving today is as multicultural as America. So, let's enjoy! Kick back, give thanks we're in a country with such ethnic richness, and dive into your turkey rellenos, moo-shu turkey, turkey falafel, barbecued turkey ... and so on.

Jim Hightower is a former *Texas Observer* editor, former *Texas agriculture commissioner*, radio commentator and populist sparkplug, a best-selling author and winner of the *Puffin/Nation Prize for Creative Citizenship*. Write him at [info@jimhightower.com](mailto:info@jimhightower.com) or see [www.jimhightower.com](http://www.jimhightower.com).



### all in one place

jim hightower • amy goodman • gene lyons • froma harrop  
jesse jackson • margot mcmillen • ralph nader • mary sanchez  
ted rall • joan retsinas • robert reich • jamie stiehm  
**the progressive populist • 1-818-286-3104**  
**(9 a.m. to 6 p.m. Central Time, Monday-Friday)**



## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

# Locking Up Mental Health Centers is a Step Backwards

Froma Harrop, in her *Progressive Populist* November 1 article, "Bring Back Locked Mental Health Facilities" describes the '60's Community Mental Health Act as "the most dreadful piece of legislation in American history!" Really?!

A progressive/populist commentator should be able to identify dozens of racist and discriminatory legislation in America that was far more "dreadful" than this Community Mental Health Center (CMHC) effort.

Froma copies from the right-wing playbook: 1) Cite violent acts by individuals as if they are the routine behavior of members of the group to be vilified. 2) Dehumanize all members of this minority group as disproportionately dangerous. 3) Then blame federal activism or "liberal" legislation as the root cause for fear of this group. 4) Then advocate for reactionary curtailment of the human rights or community resources extended to this minority group. 5) Finally, urge policy and practices that punish members of the group with involuntary confinement, without regard to their civil rights.

Then it's easy for Froma to assert that, for our safety, remand these folks to involuntary care in "clean and well-staffed hospitals."

A progressive/populist commentator should rely on accurate history, meaningful facts and constructive policy suggestions before any thoughtful assignment of blame.

Froma misleads us to think that Thomas Szasz, the "Close-all-the-Hospitals" proponents and '60's anti-institution advocates ever had the numbers or political clout to create the CMH Act.

In fact, it was compassionate media coverage of conditions in state hospitals, new anti-psychotic medications, advocacy by family members and professionals and bipartisan efforts by elected officials, with family members with mental health problems, that resulted in the CMH Act.

The federal funding was to build CMH centers and provide federal funding to address severe shortages of mental illness and substance abuse services for our most-at-risk and least-able-to-pay neighbors.

The legislation gave each CMHC seven years to secure creative local or state level funding through health insurance or public and private sources. Clearly hate for this kind of federal activism opposes any government effort to eliminate discrimination toward a minority group or improve access to services for a marginalized group.

Expanded community mental health services addressed needs in courts, schools, public health, counseling and psychiatry, emergency services, long term care, and child and family services.

However, it was, in fact, the Reagan administration that stopped CMHC construction and CMHC funding in 1981. Federal dollars were reallocated to the states in the form of Block Grants.

As we went from county to county, as part of our con-

sultations, you could see how well or how poorly states reformed their mental health services, reduced discrimination and anticipated the support needs of those with the most disabling mental illnesses.

One can't rely on the mainstream media to educate the public on: continuing stigma and discrimination, the "root causes" of homelessness, the successes when communities use mental health "best practices" or the huge impact when Medicaid funding increases or shrinks. There continue to be enormous disparities and wide state-to-state differences in mental health resources.

In several large urban areas, there are legitimate concerns when a group of homeless people create a negative impact on commerce, tourism or public safety.

Ironically, Froma is from Rhode Island, and so are we.

A populist commentator should do homework on services that work in her home state, and those developed in other states with Rhode Island advocacy. She would have discovered numerous examples of successful services that minimize the debilitating use of involuntary institutionalization.

*The Progressive Populist* could promote the notion that people who have been historically marginalized, denied reasonable accommodations and involuntarily remanded to detention facilities can be expected to appreciate and accept useful services only when they are provided in a respectful, accessible, competent and compassionate manner.

**KATHRYN POWER and CHRISTIAN L. STEPHENS**

*(Ms. Power is the former director of the Rhode Island Council of CMHCs, former director of the R.I. Department of Behavioral Health, and a former director at the federal department of Substance Abuse and Mental Health Administration. Mr. Stephens is the former president/CEO of Northern RI CMHC, Blackstone Valley Mental Health Realty Corp. and Horizon Healthcare Partners)*

## Netanyahu Knew Hamas Was Coming

A relative, John Ertz, enlisted in the Navy in 1941. He was assigned to the carrier Enterprise, and kept a diary. Through the summer and into fall his entries were unremarkable: meals and movies. In late November his carrier group put to sea.

They steered into the north Pacific, charting course changes that puzzled the sailors.

I'm convinced FDR had intelligence of the Pearl Harbor attack. He ordered the carrier fleets to vanish in the vasts. The obsolete battlewagons, relics of WWI naval tactics, were sacrificed to convince the enemy of their victory. They were manned, of course, so our leaders could "wave the bloody shirt" the duration of the war. (Never doubt leadership counts everyone else as pawns.)

Benjamin Netanyahu knew the abominable Oct. 7 attack was coming. Small price, however, to launch his Palestinian solution. You could call it final.

Gaza will be reduced to rubble and glass. Two million Palestinians will be exposed to thirst, famine and diseases of sanitary failure. Four million of the West Bank will be eliminated along the present model of gradual encroachment—the constriction of an anaconda. This real estate, unlike Gaza, is valued by Bibi for cultural significance.

The Palestinians will endure a decimation. I'm using the word strictly: One in 10 dead. Survivors will be expelled from the Holy Land — refugees to reluctant hosts, or "evacuated" to the pre-existing hellscape of Sinai — with no chance of return. Indeed, this is how the Jewish state came into being.

You cannot declare a "Jewish state" without conceding unequal citizenship. That is apartheid. The just solution is One-State: a single government with proportional representation, exactly equal rights and benefits, and constitu-

tional minority protections (which might one day protect the Jews) for all of the people "from the river to the sea."

Hamas must be obliterated. But the US focus should be Likud; we have pull with Israel. Our absolute priority must be withholding munitions from Likud.

There is no qualitative difference between a Chosen People and a Master Race. Likud is Nazism with the absolute perfect camouflage.

**M. WARNER, Minneapolis Minn.**

## Distorted Israel/Palestine History

Trying to respond to your bevy of unnuanced anti-Israel commentators is like trying to plug a hole in a dam with one's finger. But now I am compelled to do that with Wayne O'Leary, someone I have always respected for thoughtfulness and accuracy — until now. ("Reaping What's Been Sown," 12/1/23 *TPP*)

First, O'Leary attributes the decision of President Truman to support the establishment of Israel to a myth that he was primarily influenced by an old friend named Eddie Jacobson. Reality was far more nuanced than that. Truman was concerned that the Soviet Union might establish a sympathetic foothold in the region, in supporting Israel as a progressive outpost in the Near East. Indeed, Andrei Gromyko made one of the most moving speeches on behalf of a Jewish state at the UN. Truman was probably also moved by the reports he had received on the plight of Jewish refugees in need of a homeland. He had to be influenced by the vote of the UN General Assembly in 1947 advocating partition of Palestine into two states. And further, he was surely sensitive to the thinking of Jewish, and yes, progressive, voters in the 1948 election year, with Progressive Party candidate Henry Wallace strongly supporting the establishment of a Jewish state and criticizing Truman for waffling. (Of course the untutored new-generation leftists have no idea that Israel was actually a progressive cause at its outset.)

O'Leary is also incorrect that America has "had its backs" in every Arab-Israeli conflict since 1948. The Eisenhower-Dulles administration was quite hostile to the British-French-Israeli invasion of the Suez and Sinai of 1956, and put tremendous pressure on Israel to withdraw after its military success. America refused to provide any significant military equipment to Israel until 1962 with the Kennedy sale of Hawk missiles to Israel. The Bush-Baker administration, rightly or wrongly, was very hostile to the Israeli government of the early 90s.

Further points of refutation: The Jewish community did not settle in Palestine with consistent British support. Look at the White Paper of 1939, which sharply limited immigration and banned land sales to Jews. The Arab Legion, which attacked the new state, was headed by a British general, John Bagot Glubb. O'Leary is not aware that Arab flight from the land in 1948 was due to a myriad of factors, not just some expulsion by some Jewish forces. He refuses to acknowledge the Jew-hatred of Arabs like the Mufti of Jerusalem, who broadcast hate propaganda from Nazi Germany during the war. He sees only Arabs as the rightful historic occupants of the land and not Jews who were there in some presence for thousands of years.

Finally, and maybe worst: O'Leary minimizes the savagery and treachery of the Oct. 7 Hamas attack on Israel, and, at best, equates the Israeli response with the willful killing and kidnapping of members all ethnic groups, ages, religions, and refugee background, by Hamas. For shame!

**STEPHEN APPELL, Brooklyn, N.Y.**

*Editor's note: A reminder that this is the only issue that will be published in December.*

email us: [editor@populist.com](mailto:editor@populist.com)

or write PO Box 819, Manchaca, TX 78652

## Prison for the Holidays

By DON ROLLINS

"Behind the bars, locked out from 'society,' you're being re-habilitated, corrected, re-briefed, re-educated on life itself, without you having the opportunity of really reliving it. You're the object of a widely planned program combining isolation, punishment, taming, briefing, etc., designed to make you sorry for your mistakes ..." — Johnny Cash

I was 19 when I played my first gig for incarcerated persons. God bless 'em, the inmates at Marion County (Indiana) Jail made for a stellar crowd, forgiving of the occasional fret buzz or flat note. Some sang, some kept beat with their hands and feet. Some did both.

The chaplain had prepped me to stick to the gospel stuff, but I'd been stocking up on Neil Young's catalog for the last month: Clerical authority be damned, "Needle and the Damage Done" got twice the applause as "Amazing Grace".

I would eventually repeat some version of Marion County in three other states, one of them home to a maximum security facility. Each time out was the same: We sang about wounds and scars, damage inflicted and (sometimes) damage redeemed. My heart was broken at each stop. Only the gigs in homeless shelters, substance abuse units and psych wards could provide so raw a witness to the human condition.

As the nation moves further into the winter holiday season 2023, nearly two million persons like the ones I sang for will spend this time in local, state and federal detention facilities - roughly 20% of them due to drug-only related laws dating back to before my visit to Marion County.

Black Americans will be overrepresented once again this year: Blacks are almost twice as likely to enter the legal system for the same charges as Whites, due in part to a sinister bail bond system based in most places on ready cash only.

While the numbers at all levels are in modest decline compared to the winter holidays 2022, the US will continue its streak as the busiest jailer in the world — an ignominious claim that also applies to juveniles, elders (55 and older), persons who identify as LGBTQ+ and those living in poverty. Bigotry will attend yet another spate of holy days.

Insult to injury, after all this waste, discrimination and institutional dysfunction, the 2022 recidivism rate (41%) showed but another paltry downward trend. Which in a sane country would trigger outrage over such intransigent year-end statistics.

All of which tells the objective observer what they already know: Today's detention maze looks far too much like the one I encountered all those years ago.

Relying on relief from within the system may prove an exercise in patience if not futility; thus the groundswell of non-government organizations (NGOs) focused on one or more avenues to a better way for administering justice with respect. Some examples:

- Releasing detainees convicted on substance-only charges;
- Enfranchising persons jailed on felonies, then granted full release;
- Halting imprisonment disparities based on race, class, age, gender, gender identities, religion and immigration status;
- Increasing funding for life skills training, during and post incarceration;
- Lobbying elected officials for specific changes to specific criminal codes;
- Ending public funding for privately owned super max facilities;
- Increasing funding, training and staffing to better ensure detainee safety.

These are but a few of the grassroots ways NGOs are meeting head on an unjust, often dangerous approach to meting out justice. The point is progressives tired of Republican roadblocks and Democratic distraction have allies for change. The point is more numbers advocating for fewer prisoners come next year.

Addendum: Sometimes activism gets personal, especially when you're behind bars during holy days. There are NGOs whose mission it is to match incarcerated persons with outside pen pals. A simple "prisoner correspondence" search will turn up several options.

*Don Rollins is a retired Unitarian Universalist minister in Jackson, Ohio. Email donalldrollins@gmail.com.*



# Boomer Pals: Be More Like the Carters



The Carters are responsible for building and renovating 4,390 homes. To say home ownership has given families a boost is a huge understatement.

A few weeks ago, a *New Yorker* cover poked fun at our baby-boom politicians with a drawing of Joe Biden, Nancy Pelosi, Mitch McConnell and Donald Trump racing for office, each with a racing-style number on their chest, each leaning forward on a walker. Cartoonist Barry Blitts and the magazine received a bit of criticism for the drawing but at our house it was pinned on the refrigerator for a good long time. What could these leaders be doing if they retired?

First off, they could go home and work at solving home-style problems. The passing of Rosalynn Carter brings the opportunity for productive retirement into bold relief: Since joining Habitat for Humanity in 1984, Habitat and the Carters have been responsible for the building, renovating and repairing 4,390 homes in 14 countries. You may know some of these folks. I do. To say that home ownership has given these families a boost would be a huge understatement. If you are looking for how democracy and capitalism can co-exist, the Carters' work in retirement makes an excellent example.

But the Carters are rare folks. They started with firm ideals and prepared themselves to put those ideals into action. According to the Habitat website, Jimmy was jogging in New York and came upon a group of workers involved in a Habitat project. With his work life behind him, he liked the Habitat ideas and took the news home to Rosalynn. Considering the power of their voices, the Carters were able to make a difference that most of us cannot, but folks with ideals and direction are always the best leaders.

According to the White House Historical Association website, Rosalynn was born in Plains on Aug. 18, 1927, the cusp of the Great Depression. She was the eldest of four children. When she was 13, her father died, and her mother became a dressmaker to help support the family. Rosalynn helped with sewing, housekeeping, and the other children.

Rosalynn completed high school and enrolled in Georgia Southwestern College at Americus. In 1945, after her freshman year, she first dated Jimmy Carter, who was

home from the U.S. Naval Academy at Annapolis. In 1946 they were married. She was 19 years old.

They started married life with the Navy. When his father died in 1953, the Carters returned to Plains to run the family business. Managing the accounts of the peanut, fertilizer, and seed enterprise, Rosalynn (like many farm wives) was working full-time from home. When Jimmy was elected President, having served as Georgia governor, she attended Cabinet meetings and major briefings.

She focused national attention on the performing arts. She brought major artists to the White House—classical artists from around the world, as well as bluegrass bands, fiddlers and other traditional American artists. She also took a strong interest in programs to bring attention to mental health issues, the community, and the elderly.

And, in retirement, she wielded a hammer for Habitat.

There should be a lot of similar examples but there aren't. The rarity of folks like the Carters shows how poor our system is at preparing people for lives beyond work. In retirement, a human's inner life becomes obvious. While work life forces us to suppress our desires for the good of our masters, the freedom of retirement means that we can let loose. In their grasping for office, most politicians reveal that they have nothing to offer except the competitive drive that brought them to politics in the first place. Governing? Advocating for the voiceless? Don't be ridiculous. Even the act of listening is beyond most of our politicians, deafened by their own voices in the megaphones.

It's hard to say what Biden, Pelosi, McConnell or Trump could do to help solve problems in the hammer-wielding way of the Carters. Eighty-three-year-old Pelosi could use her voice and her time to work on passage of the Equal Rights Amendment. "Equality of rights under the law shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any state on account of sex." Twenty-four words that could change America and the world.

We can imagine Biden working for veterans' causes. Plenty to do in that area. According to American Addiction Centers, "In 2020, there were 6,146 veteran suicides, which averages to 16.8 veterans dying by suicide every day. Additionally, in the two decades between 2001 and 2020, the prevalence of mental health or substance use disorder among participants using Veterans Health Administration rose from 27.9% to 41.9%."

It is hard to imagine McConnell or Trump doing anything more than speaking at fundraisers for Republicans, but maybe they have some beloved causes now hidden by their ambitions to stay in power. Unlike the Carters, they seem to be without any ideals at all. But maybe they have hobbies that could help society. Poodle rescue? Bass fishing? Stand-up comedy?

*Margot Ford McMillen farms near Fulton, Mo., and co-hosts "Farm and Fiddle" on sustainable ag issues on KOPN 89.5 FM in Columbia, Mo. Her latest book is "The Golden Lane: How Missouri Women Gained the Vote and Changed History." Email: margotmcmullen@gmail.com.*

## DISPATCHES

**MORE JOBS DROP UNEMPLOYMENT RATE FURTHER.** The Department of Labor showed another strong jobs report Dec. 8, which showed the economy added 199,000 jobs in November, dropping the unemployment rate to 3.7%, marking the 22nd straight month under 4% unemployment. The job tally included 30,000 United Auto Workers returning from their strikes at the Big Three automakers and 15,000 actors returning after the end of the Screen Actors Guild strike.

The Bureau of Labor Statistics also reported that, in the third quarter, labor productivity rose at annual rate of 5.2%, which is "really, really fast," economist Paul Krugman noted in the *New York Times* (12/7). "[T]here is increasing reason to hope that our economy is capable of growing considerably faster than we previously thought."

The average hourly wage grew at a 3.4% annual rate over the past three months, which indicates the moderation in wage growth seen throughout the year is continuing, economist Dean Baker noted. This pace is very much consistent with the Fed's 2% inflation target. It should also allow a decent pace of real wage growth if inflation is close to 2%.

Economists tout the strength of the economic numbers, with low unemployment, much lower inflation, and significant growth—and, even better, a reduction in inequality, meaning the benefits are accruing more to those who need it most. And when people talk about this good news in the press or on social media ... the pushback is ferocious and intense.

"Nonetheless, many Americans continue to have very negative views of the economy," Krugman wrote. "Some of this may reflect the fact that while inflation has come way down, prices are still high compared with the recent past."

On the other hand, he added, "inflation has been a global phenomenon, but the huge gap between favorable economic indicators and grim public perceptions is unique to the United States, where people believe many bad things about the economy that simply aren't true."

The latest reading of inflation for groceries stands at 2.1% on an annual basis. That means that, on average, Americans paid \$102 for groceries this October that would have cost them \$100 a year ago. This is a small difference, and most people would be hard-pressed to notice this change.

However, when asked what has happened to grocery prices in their area in the past year, almost everybody in a Daily Kos/Civiqs survey conducted Dec. 2-5 — 88% of those surveyed — said prices had gone up in the past year. Indeed, groceries in October 2022 cost 12.4% more than they did in the previous year.

The survey also found that 50% of Americans think the problem of inflation won't be solved until prices drop back down to where they were a few years ago. But Daniel Donner of Daily Kos noted that if prices fell by around 20%, a reversal of the increases since the pandemic began, "that would imply something pretty grave has happened in the economy, and likely result in—or be caused by—a severe recession."

**STUDY SHOWS CORPORATE PROFITEERING 'AMPLIFIED' GLOBAL INFLATION.** A pair of London-based think tanks released research (12/7) showing corporate profits contributed substantially to the high inflation that the US, Germany, the

UK and other major nations experienced amid recent global shocks, including the coronavirus pandemic and Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

The new report by the Institute for Public Policy Research (IPPR) and Common Wealth argues that while corporate profiteering was not the "sole driver of inflation," the market dominance of a few powerful companies "amplified" economywide price increases, Jake Johnson reported at CommonDreams (12/7).

Examining the profits of major firms listed on the stock exchanges of five countries, the analysis shows that many large corporations were able to keep their margins stable or even boost them—as in the case of major oil and gas companies like ExxonMobil—during pandemic-related turmoil and global energy market disruptions caused by Russia's attack on Ukraine.

Researchers estimated that the profits of major corporations, bolstered by a relatively small number of companies, were at least 30% higher at the end of 2022 than they were at the end of 2019, prior to the coronavirus crisis.

As corporate executives and rich shareholders reaped the benefits of rising profits, ordinary people around the world suffered the consequences of soaring fuel, food, and housing costs.

"Our analysis of companies suggests many large firms, beyond just the commodities sector, are using their power to preserve their profit margins," said Chris Hayes, chief economist at Common Wealth and a co-author of the new report. "This pushes the shocks downstream to workers, consumers, and labor-intensive industries that are less able to absorb them."

The new report—which adds to a growing body of research on the role of corporate profits in driving inflation—offers several possible explanations for the coinciding rise of consumer prices and profit margins.

One explanation, the report says, is that "an inflationary

environment might give firms cover to hike prices." Some corporate executives admitted on earnings calls that high inflation was good for business.

The report authors also suggested that corporations' growing market power gave them the ability to "increase prices more than inflation," thus maintaining or adding to their margins.

"Our research finds that markets aren't working efficiently, enabling large companies to make profits that likely amplified inflation," said Carsten Jung, a senior economist at IPPR and report co-author. "This has made the cost-of-living crisis worse for most people, and for many smaller firms across the economy."

Jung argued that economists have focused "too much on the labor market" as a source of inflationary pressure. The U.S. Federal Reserve and other central banks have explicitly targeted job markets by jacking up interest rates in a bid to rein in inflation, which has cooled substantially from its peak.

"In fact, most wage earners have taken real losses while many businesses protected their profit margins or even raised them," Jung noted. "We should be scrutinizing the role profits have played in amplifying inflation."

To prevent corporations from exploiting future inflation shocks, Jung and Hayes called for a "new international approach to taxing excess profits," which they said would help "reduce inefficient behavior by dominant corporations." The Economist estimated in July that excess corporate profits globally hit around \$4 trillion over the past year.

Other interventions, such as price caps, could "help stabilize markets during economic emergencies," Jung and Hayes added.

**IT'S HIGH TIME, AS 6 DEMOCRATIC GOVERNORS URGE DEA TO RESCHEDULE MARIJUANA BY YEAR-END.** Six Democratic gov-

*Continued on page 22*





## FROMA HARROP



### What Happens If Anti-Vaxxers Just Face the Consequences?

“Medical Freedom” crusaders are trying to end vaccination requirements for schoolchildren. Places where they succeed, epidemiologists warn, will, for starters, become overrun with measles, a disease that was virtually eliminated thanks to vaccines.

Measles used to kill up to 500 people a year, while polio left more than 15,000 paralyzed. Parts of America that stop re-

quiring vaccinations will be turning their clocks back to an unhappy past. And as it happens, those parts tend to be right-wing Republican.

No major religion objects to vaccines, but anti-vax activists summon religious objections to them nonetheless. Or they jump on a useful anecdote here or there.

One letter writer to the *Wall Street Journal* complained that months after getting a COVID booster, “I contracted COVID.”

You don’t say. So did I. But neither of us ended up in a hospital or the morgue. The shots make the disease less deadly.

A study by top epidemiologists estimates that nearly a quarter-million Americans who died of COVID would have survived had they received the COVID vaccine.

The letter writer was giving a thumbs up to *Journal* columnist Allysia Finley, who has turned casting aspersions on the COVID vaccines into a second career.

One of her columns, titled “Why Vaccine Skepticism is Growing on the Right” blames the medical establishment for many conservatives’ refusal to get shots.

Perhaps ignorance, stupidity and laziness are to blame. Just a suggestion.

Anyhow, Finley writes, “Authorities no doubt worry that alerting the public to potential safety risks could discourage vaccination, but their lack of transparency and

dismissal of critics fuels the distrust in vaccines.”

Oh, so it’s the authorities’ fault that they didn’t alert the public to safety risks that political wingnuts make up or highly exaggerate.

You know what political ballpark you’re playing in when a writer accuses “the self-professed expert class” of “sneering” at anti-vaxxers.

I don’t know about you, but experts, self-professed or quietly acknowledged, are the ones I follow. That’s not to say that horoscopes don’t give you a good idea of the future.

Do the experts really “sneer” at the anti-vaxxers, as Finley charges? If so, let me join them.

In January, Finley’s column asked “Are Vaccines Fueling New COVID Variants?” Note the weasel use of a question mark to cover the writer’s rear end from a ridiculous contention.

And it is ridiculous. As Dr. David Wohl, an infectious disease specialist at the University of North Carolina School of Medicine told CBS, “The virus is evolving because we keep transmitting it to each other.”

In other words, “Vaccines don’t fuel those variants; unvaccinated people do.”

If right wingers choose to not protect their health or even their lives by refusing

to get some simple shots, there will be fewer right wingers. A respected study found that early in the pandemic, deaths from COVID were about the same for Democrats and Republicans. Once the vaccine came out, though, excess deaths for Republicans were almost double those for Democrats. Perhaps it’s in the right’s interest to keep its voters alive.

Vaccine mandates are good in that they create a herd immunity that slows the spread of disease. Even though younger people infected with these viruses are at less risk of dying, they can pass them onto grandparents. That said, between 2021 and 2022, over 1,300 American children died from COVID. And 20% of them had been healthy beforehand.

Texas Attorney General Ken Paxton is now suing Pfizer over “misleading” claims about the efficacy of its COVID vaccine. He accused the drugmaker of intimidating critics by issuing social media posts that call out vaccine misinformation.

Imagine calling out vaccine misinformation. What terrible thing will those experts do next?

*Froma Harrop is a columnist with Creators Syndicate, formerly with the Providence (R.I.) Journal. Follow her on Twitter @fromaharrop. Email fharrop@gmail.com.*

### Woke Made Sen. Ernst Choke

By ART CULLEN

Sen. Joni Ernst can work up one hankerin’ hunger in her role as human scaffolding for Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell to make certain he does not fall over at Capitol press scrums.

So last week she chomped off a hunk of Iowa Chop served by the Cattleman’s Association — yes, Sen. Chuck Grassley said so, and the world just tilted a bit on its axis on Iowa Day in DC — and it got stuck in her throat. She started choking.

Sen. Rand Paul, R-Ky., adamant in his opposition to corn ethanol, put politics aside and sprang to action to perform the Heimlich Maneuver. Ernst coughed up the pork, and got them squealing with this line on social media after she came up for air: “Can’t help but choke on the woke policies Dems are forcing down our throats. Thanks @randpaul!”

Good one. Except that it might be bad form to compare the venerated Iowa Chop to low-down Dems. This regal cut of excellence should rise above politics. And, any Iowan should know that the cooks in DC

or anyplace else outside of Iowa have no clue how to prepare proper pork. Is this heaven? No, it’s the 801 Chophouse in Des Moines. When in DC, order the ribeye. It might cost a hundred bucks but it can be consumed medium-rare. Which raises that question again: Why are cowboys serving pork chops? I trust checkoff funds were not used to choke Ernst.

Another question: Just what is “woke?” I didn’t know I was woke until a pollster woke me up to the phrase about five years ago. I drive a hybrid plug-in. I think a gay person might have ridden in it, not sure because the car does not have gaydar. This makes me woke, I guess.

I looked it up on the interwebs. It sounds like the great blues singer Leadbelly coined the phrase in the 1938 song “Scottsboro” about nine Black Alabama teens who were wrongfully accused of raping a White girl. Leadbelly advised young Blacks to “best stay woke, keep their eyes open.”

In 1860, a Black youth group formed in Hartford, Conn., called the Wide Awakes to support Abe Lincoln and the Republican ticket.

“Woke” became a political aphorism as other groups latched onto the word and reintroduced it to general culture sometime after 2000. Over the past decade the right wing found woke to be a useful catch-all for

fruits and nuts and other things lib, with its roots in racist code. If Blacks came up with the colloquialism, let’s make fun of it as hopelessly stupid and naive. It works every time.

It is woke to think that police murdered George Floyd. It is woke to believe that carbon dioxide, methane and other gases are contributing to a warming climate and extreme weather. It is woke to suggest that Washington and Wall Street worked hand-in-hand to rend independent pork producers and regional processors. It is woke to acknowledge that we depend on undocumented immigrants to produce pork. It is woke to think that Huckleberry Finn should not be banned from schools.

It’s hard to know what is being shoved down the senator’s throat other than some overcooked drug-infused pork. The woke Dems want more aid for Israel and Ukraine for bombs and bombers built by US contractors so the nations can defend themselves, and Rockwell Collins makes a buck or two. Rand Paul is an obstacle to defending Ukraine and Israel, and to developing American energy independence by trying to kill renewable fuels. The woke Biden Administration has unsuccessfully attempted to pursue anti-trust action in the food and tech industries, something Grassley has talked about since Moses was learning to

read the Ten Commandments (“No. 11: Thou shalt not overcook an Iowa Chop”) in junior high school. It is woke to defend Social Security against aspirations by Nikki Haley to scotch it. It is woke to get a COVID booster shot, which I just did.

One day will they come to arrest me, when my eyes are closed, for asking why aren’t the pork producers serving up the Iowa Chops? What if the libs were posing as cattlemen to undermine the pork industry by choking a US Senator with shoe leather? Huh? What about that?

The House Judiciary Committee should look into whether Hunter Biden had anything to do with this. This wokeness is getting out of control. They’re stuffing it down our throats. Right there at Iowa Day. Cattlemen serving pork. Make America Great Again or they might serve tofu if those woke get their way. Cattlemen serving tofu. The thought makes me gag even in my wokeness.

*Art Cullen is publisher and editor of the Storm Lake Times Pilot in northwest Iowa (stormlake.com). He won the Pulitzer Prize for editorial writing in 2017 and is author of the book “Storm Lake: A Chronicle of Change, Resilience, and Hope from America’s Heartland.” Email times@stormlake.com.*

### Soybeans’ Big Players Looking to a Bruising Year Ahead

By ALAN GUEBERT

After a five-year run that featured a costly trade war and an even costlier, deadly pandemic, the biggest players in the global soybean market — the United States, Brazil and China — are positioning themselves for a big, bruising 2023/24 marketing year.

Of the three, Brazil remains planted in the driver’s seat. The US Department of Agriculture (USDA) forecasts that Brazil’s mostly-planted 2023/24 crop will yield an export-hogging 6 billion bushels, 5% more than last year’s record production and an astonishing 16% larger than the 2020/21 crop.

Two factors favor that outlook. First, after three consecutive years of dry, hot La Niña weather, this year’s El Niño should bring more moisture and less crop stress. Second, for the first time in memory, soy production costs are falling, encouraging Brazilian farmers to do what farmers anywhere would do: swap costly corn acres for cheaper bean acres.

If the projected, record 113 million soybean acres are planted and the better

weather forecast comes to pass, USDA expects Brazil to export a record 103 million metric tons (mmt) of soybeans in its 2023/24 marketing year. That’s 6 mmt more than last year’s 97 mmt.

Just how many bushels are in 103 mmt of soybeans? A staggering 3.75 billion bu.

At that level, Brazil’s projected 2023/24 soy exports will — brace yourself — equal 91% of this year’s entire US soybean crop of 4.1 billion bu.

That hard-to-believe comparison isn’t the only hard-to-swallow export news for US soybean farmers this year. The really bad news is that 2023/24 US soybean exports, projected at 1.8 billion bu., marks the third consecutive year of falling soybean exports.

According to USDA data, the current marketing year’s soy exports will be a stunning 491 million bushels, or 21%, under the 2020/21 marketing year’s total of 2.3 billion bu.

The worldwide winner in this flooded global soybean market is the world’s biggest importer, China, that buys “more than 60% of the oilseed shipped worldwide to crush into meal for animal feed and oil for cooking,” reported Reuters a month ago.

Typically, China’s fourth quarter purchases are made in the U.S. market to take advantage of the price-flattening effects of the American harvest glut. Early November reports indicate China did buy 600,000

metric tons (22 million bu.) during harvest. Still, market watchers claim China will import 26 mmt of soybeans during the fourth quarter with “45% of the volumes arriving from Brazil...”

Given those estimates, China is on its way to import a record 105 mmt of soy in 2023, a figure nearly—and eerily—equal to Brazil’s projected soy exports for the coming year.

In years past, that almost insatiable Chinese need for soybeans would be good news for farmers everywhere, especially in the US But markets, like countries, evolve and change and the global soybean market has changed rapidly in the last decade, wrote DTN Lead Analyst Todd Hultman in late October.

First “and more important,” he explained, Brazil is outracing everyone in almost every market aspect — especially production and exporting—and no one, especially the US, “has ever seen this level of competition for export sales.”

A second worry, noted Hultman, is the “larger market environment”: “two wars” (Russia/Ukraine and Israel/Hamas) “plus pressure on the Federal Reserve to keep raising interest rates, already at their highest level in 16 years.”

Neither condition—let alone both—creates the “kind of atmosphere that encourages traders to invest in the market,” he

explained.

Still, US carryover stocks, at about 5%, are tight so soybean “prices should stay supported above \$13 for the remainder of 2023 and any opportunity near \$14 (per bu.) should be considered a good sale.”

After New Year’s, however, Hultman warned, “the risk of lower soybeans prices increases, depending largely on the conditions of South American crops.”

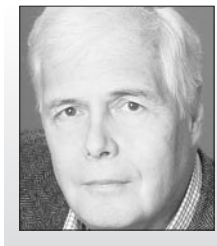
But you already knew that.

*Alan Guebert is an agricultural journalist who was raised on an Illinois dairy farm and worked as a writer and senior editor at Professional Farmers of America and Successful Farming magazine and is now a contributing editor to Farm Journal magazine. Guebert and his daughter Mary Grace Foxwell co-wrote “The Land of Milk and Uncle Honey: Memories from the Farm of My Youth” [University of Illinois Press, 2015]. See past columns, supporting documents, and contact information at farmandfoodfile.com*

Send a friend a sample of The Progressive Populist Email: populist@usa.com



## GENE LYONS



Bridget Ziegler, co-founder of the book-banning Moms for Liberty, and Florida GOP chair Christian Ziegler were caught in at least a three-way.

### The Hypocrisy is Strong With These Two

It's gotten to where it's almost axiomatic in American politics: Show me somebody who gets TV face-time railing against others' sexual sins, and I'll show you somebody hiding naughty secrets. The latest example is an amusing scandal involving Moms for Liberty, the Florida-based right-wing organization that made its name by publicizing what this column described as "the preposterous idea that the nation's public-school librarians and grade-school teachers are plotting the sexual subversion of small children."

One correspondent framed the new scandal this way: "Newest children's title approved for Florida school libraries: 'Bridget's Totally Non-Gay Three-Way.'" Cruel, but funny.

The Bridget in question is Bridget Ziegler, the Sarasota spokesmodel and co-founder of Moms for Liberty, and her husband, Christian Ziegler. Among other things, Mrs. Ziegler is credited with helping inspire Gov. Ron DeSantis' "Don't Say Gay" law forbidding teachers from mentioning the existence of homosexuality.

See, it turns out that husband Christian stands accused of raping the woman with whom he and Bridget had been sharing sexual liaisons. Sarasota police released a heavily redacted investigative report containing the words "raped" and "sexually battered." The allegation is that Christian Ziegler, the elected chairman of Florida's Republican Party, showed up at the alleged victim's place seeking a more traditional two-way adulterous encounter.

According to an affidavit obtained by the Florida Center for Government Accountability, and reported by Lucian K. Truscott IV, the woman demurred, explaining, "Sorry, I was mostly in (it) for her." She says Ziegler proceeded to take her by force. His lawyer told the *Washington Post* that when all the evidence comes out, Ziegler will be "totally exonerated."

Criminally, perhaps. Politically, not a chance. You see, Ziegler told Sarasota police that the encounter was consensual and offered as evidence a video he'd made. I expect that's one selfie you won't be seeing on Facebook. The cops have taken possession of all of Ziegler's electronic devices. The accused also argues that he's being persecuted for his political views.

Meanwhile, DeSantis has said Ziegler should resign from the GOP chairmanship.

The governor hasn't said anything about Bridget's position on the Sarasota County school board, nor about her oversight role with the special tax district he created to punish the Walt Disney Co. In the latter capacity, Bridget has in the past accused the company of making cartoons corrupting children.

Almost needless to say, the Zieglers are also big Trump allies. Because nothing enhances one's credibility with right-wing Christians like being strong with the old pussy-grabber.

Bridget Ziegler has also admitted a sexual encounter involving her, her husband and his accuser, but says it only happened the one time. A cynic might suspect she knows that the woman can prove it. It would appear unlikely that there's just the one video.

Politically, Moms for Liberty has done the Republicans more harm than good anyway. Banning books, attacking teachers and librarians, and picking on vulnerable LGBTQ students has turned out to be less popular among voters than many imagined it would be. Recent school board and state legislative elections, in Pennsylvania and Virginia in particular, resulted in candidates associated with the group losing pretty much across the board. It appears that voters aren't happy about being told their local schools are run by perverts and subversives.

Perhaps in consequence, pious frauds in general are a little more cautious about accusing everybody else of sexual libertinism of late. Erin Burnett had a fascinating segment on her CNN program in late November about a book called "The Revivalist Manifesto," for which GOP House Speaker Mike Johnson wrote a laudatory foreword in 2022.

Basically, it was one of those deals where a political crony back home in Shreveport produced an extreme-right screed that played very differently in the nation's capital. The author, Scott McKay, a Louisiana blogger, is all about the so-called Gay Agenda. He's particularly exercised by Transportation Secretary Pete Buttigieg, variously described as "openly and obnoxiously gay" and as displaying what the author calls "queer sanctimony," whatever that is. He describes him as a complete nonentity with no qualifications for public office apart from his sexual identity.

Never mind that Buttigieg is a Rhodes scholar, a war veteran and former mayor of South Bend, Indiana. The insinuation is that no sanctimonious queer could possibly know anything about harbors, railroads and trucks. In the real world, the secretary is widely credited with solving the post-COVID supply-chain problems that contributed so much to monetary inflation.

McKay also spends a lot of time on the QAnon-endorsed "Pizzagate" fantasy accusing name-brand Democrats of child sexual abuse orgies conducted in the basement of a Washington, D.C., restaurant that has no basement.

But why go on? Speaker Johnson, who has an extensive history of denouncing the "homosexual agenda," now says he never actually read the manifesto he promoted and disagrees with its slurs.

I wonder who's next.

*Gene Lyons of Little Rock, Ark., is co-author of "The Hunting of the President" [St. Martin's Press, 2000] and received the National Magazine Award. Email eugenelyons2@yahoo.com.*

### The High Cost of Low Holiday Prices

*Give a gift to the starving workers who made your favorite holiday sweater — tell their employers to pay up.*

By SONALI KOLHATKAR

It's the season for holiday sales. But on the other side of the planet, there's a high cost for those low prices. This is especially true for "fast fashion," the clothing equivalent of a Big Mac: attractive, affordable, and throwaway.

The Bangladeshi women who toil as underpaid garment workers so we can wear disposable outfits are making their voices heard loudly enough to reverberate across oceans. Mass protests for higher wages have roiled the South Asian country.

Bangladesh is the world's second-largest exporter of apparel in the world, after China. Recognizable name brands like H&M, Zara, Calvin Klein, American Eagle, and Tommy Hilfger, among others, rely on Bangladeshi

garment factories.

The country's 4 million garment workers, most of whom are women, until recently took home a meager pay of just \$75 a month and hadn't gotten a raise in years. By one estimate, the cost of living for a single person in Bangladesh is about \$360 a month, not including rent.

Workers have demanded a modest \$205 a month, but pay increases offered by the country's manufacturers totaled barely half that.

As protests intensified, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina — once hailed as a liberal leader — unleashed security forces that have intimidated and attacked union organizers. Police recently fatally shot a 23-year-old mother and sewing machine operator named Anjuara Khatun after firing at protesters.

On the surface, US brands who purchase their inventories from Bangladesh's factories appear to be on the right side of the fight. The American Apparel and Footwear Association (AAFA), an industry trade group, wrote a joint letter urging Hasina to "raise the minimum wage to a level ... sufficient to cover workers' basic needs."

The AAFA even asked the government to avoid retaliating against unions and to respect "collective bargaining rights." The US

State Department issued a statement saying, "We commend the members of the private sector who have endorsed union proposals for a reasonable wage increase."

Further, global retailers are offering to eat into their profits by increasing the price they pay factories to help them offset increased wages. Currently, the cost of the labor to produce garments is a mere 10 to 13 percent of a product's total manufacturing cost.

But are companies really committed to raising garment workers' wages?

A survey of about 1,000 factories in Bangladesh, published in early 2023, revealed that companies like Zara and H&M underpaid factories for garment purchases, making it harder for them to pay their workers. And when the COVID-19 pandemic led to global shutdowns, large retailers canceled orders and delayed payments.

"Only when suppliers are able to plan ahead, with confidence that they will earn as expected," one industry expert told *The Guardian*, "can they deliver good working conditions for their workers."

It's been more than 10 years since the deadly collapse of Bangladesh's Rana Plaza, the world's worst garment industry disaster. The eight-story compound in Dhaka was filled with thousands of workers when it

crumbled under the weight of government neglect and worker exploitation in April 2013. More than 1,100 workers, most of them women, were killed.

In the wake of the disaster, North American brands refused to join other global companies in signing on to the Accord on Fire and Building Safety in Bangladesh. Citing high costs, they chose instead to form their own alliance for inspecting factories, one that applied lower safety standards.

It was a stark indicator of where these companies' priorities lay — and suggests their latest comments about higher wages are just lip service.

Fast fashion is expected to more than double its market size over six years, growing from \$91 billion in 2021 to a projected \$185 billion by 2027. Meanwhile, the workers who fuel the profits behind that expansion are facing starvation.

This holiday season, perhaps the best gift we can give is a commitment to force the industry to pay up.

*Sonali Kolhatkar is the host of "Rising Up With Sonali," a television and radio show on Free Speech TV and Pacifica stations. This commentary was produced by the Economy for All project at the Independent Media Institute and adapted for syndication by OtherWords.org.*

### How Extortion Machine Fueled the Big Lie

By JOHN YOUNG

Upon voting to expel George Santos from Congress, Nebraska Republican Rep. Don Bacon pronounced, "We're not going to tolerate people that lie and steal in our ranks."

Goodness, Congressman. Do you hear yourself?

A Republican in good standing in Congress swears to one thing only. Hint: It's not to support and defend the Constitution, as the oath says. It's to abet and obey a lie and a liar.

Donald Trump, the Napoleon of Prevarication, the Hannibal of Dishonesty, lives by the lie just like little George Santos.

In Trump, however, we aren't talking about petty fictions and dime-store theft. We are talking lies for the ages — in particular one lie so massive and offensive that history will forever encase it in capital letters.

He now stands indicted for, among a

stunning array of criminal charges, defrauding the government in the effort to negate the voters' verdict on him in 2020.

And here's another offense, whether or not the criminal code applies: Trump has extorted fellow partisans to swear to the Big Lie, thereby seeding the beanstalk of BS that so many Americans salute as fact today.

Liz Cheney saw it up close. Few books are more appropriately named than her new work, "Oath and Honor."

Honor? Liz Cheney kept hers. Adam Kinzinger kept his. And so did dozens of Republican officials like former Arizona Speaker of the House Rusty Bowers, who testified to the Select Jan. 6 Committee about the many ways by which Trump sought to subvert our democracy. They were methods by which Bowers could not abide.

Many Republicans in Congress will say they have no choice but to embrace Trump's acts and his prevarications. That excuses none of them.

As one congressman told Cheney, it was either embrace all that Trump says and does or face threats to his family and himself and, more frighteningly, getting a Trump-backed primary opponent.

That's the definition of extortion.

What a telling gem it is for Cheney to report that "Orange Jesus" had become a nickname in the GOP caucus for the Tangerine King.

Extortion. Recall how Trump committed this very act — and got himself impeached — for dangling military aid before Volodymyr Zelenskyy to get him to lie that Ukraine was investigating Joe Biden. Just say it, said Trump, even if an investigation isn't in the offing. The falsehood was the thing.

Jonathan Martin and Alexander Burns, in their book, "This Shall Not Pass," write about how Trump honed this tool — political extortion — in his attempt to return to power.

Then-Arizona Gov. Doug Ducey set up a "Hail to the Chief" ringtone so he would recognize — and not answer — Trump's incessant calls to get him to protest loudly about Arizona's election results — vote totals which Ducey knew he had no reason to contest.

At one point, a despondent Ducey told a friend he feared for his political future for not playing Trump's game. If Ducey were to run for anything, he said, "Trump's going to primary me."

However, "Nowhere did Trump do more to attack the foundations of democracy than in Georgia," Burns and Martin write.

The matter far transcended Trump's phone call in which he sought to intimidate Georgia Secretary of State Brad Raffensberger, insisting that he "find 11,780 votes."

When Republicans in Georgia begged the pouting ex-president to come there to boost senators David Perdue and Kelly Loeffler in a crucial run-off, Trump said he'd do it only if the two echoed his "stolen election" line at the event. Neither believed the claims, but both repeated them dutifully, knowing the consequences of bucking Mr. Big.

Both would lose. Many Georgia Republican officials believe some Trump voters stayed home from the runoff because he had convinced them their votes wouldn't count in a "rigged election."

Extortion. It's how the Big Lie became so monumental as to threaten the world's oldest democracy.

*John Young is a longtime Texas newspaperman who now lives in Fort Collins, Colo. Email jyoungcolumn@gmail.com. See johnyoungcolumn.com.*



## Cover Story..

Continued from page one

brief walk from his homeplace, and if he'd arrived on foot he might have noticed the last car parked in the driveway — ours.

It made for a paranoid morning. It turned out that Card had killed himself at a marina seven miles away, some time during the night. The Maine-New Hampshire border was shut down during the manhunt, but reopened in time for us to cross over and drive south. It was way too much excitement for our senior group. And back home in North Carolina, the first paper I picked up carried a story about a fatal shooting, apparently accidental, at the Youngsville Gun Club in Franklin County. It was the second fatality at a local shooting range in the month of November, the first one occurring at the Personal Defense & Handgun Safety Center near Raleigh. I relish the irony, as always. But irony is on life support in America, and satire is a case for the coroner. Donald Trump "hath murdered satire," as surely as Shakespeare's MacBeth "hath murdered sleep."

There are some things, and some people, so outrageous that comic exaggeration can never touch them.

Americans and their guns. I've been beating this drum as long as I've been strong enough to grip the drumsticks. I'm glad I didn't have to win my argument by taking a fatal bullet from Robert Card's AR-15, but it would have made a great talking point for the next masochist who took up the gun control torch. There's no conceivable defense for assault rifles, high-capacity magazines or "bump stocks." No rational, even semi-civilized nation would allow civilians to buy and stockpile military weapons like the AR-15. The chief responsibilities of any government are to keep the peace and protect the lives of its citizens; allowing the peasantry to own weapons of war is just a simple recipe for anarchy and terrorism.

Assault rifles have no practical value. Only a bloodthirsty idiot would use one to kill large animals, and they're pointless for "self-defense" unless you're being attacked by a platoon of terrorists with guns as lethal as yours, a home invasion you're unlikely to survive. AR-15s are strictly for warfare — and for deranged mass killers like Robert Card and the ones who murder schoolchildren. Yet these weapons have become iconic among the kind of belligerent Americans who might vote for Lauren Boebert or Donald Trump.

"It's an icon, it's a symbol of freedom," one AR-15 owner told the New York Times. "To me, it's America's rifle."

America's indeed, and America's only. Item, from the Raleigh, N.C., News and Observer: "On Thursday, Feb. 23, a juvenile brought an AR-15 rifle to a basketball game at Millbrook High School in Raleigh." It brings a whole new meaning to "foul shooter."

The Millbrook incident was one of a dozen reports of minors bringing guns to

North Carolina schools — including one my daughter once attended—in the month of February alone. From 2019 to 2021, the number of North Carolina minors killed by firearms more than doubled, to 121 deaths in all. In 2022 there were 46 school shootings in the USA, a new record, claiming 34 lives and exposing 43,000 schoolchildren to the lone gunman, mass killing experience. In 2022 a total of 48,000 Americans died by gun violence, one every 11 minutes. These ghastly statistics go on and on. I've been publishing and recycling them for years, to no obvious effect. But there's one clipping on my desk that seems to seal, once and for all, America's special place among the nations of the world when it comes to firearms.

It reads: "Last year, Shinzo Abe, the former prime minister, was assassinated by a gunman during a political speech. It was one of only four deaths by a firearm in Japan in all of 2022."

FOUR? Compared to 48,000? If you'd like to think this means the Japanese are a much less violent, less dangerous race of people than Americans, you probably aren't familiar with the samurai tradition, and you didn't fight against them in the Pacific in World War II. The reason there are so few bullet holes in their bodies in 2023 is that Japan has made it almost impossible for civilians to buy firearms, with some of the strictest gun laws in the world. This can be done — it has been done, in nearly every modern democracy. It can't be done here.

After a school shooting in Nashville in March, a headline read, "In Washington, a Shared Shrug at Gun Control Despite Mass Shootings." After Robert Card's bowling alley massacre, one read "Another Slaughter, Another Congressional Nothingburger." Republican Sen. John Cornyn of Texas dismissed President Biden's plea for a new assault-rifle ban as "tired talking points." A frustrated Democratic senator, Raphael Warnock of Georgia, said "We've got too many politicians in this town who work for the gun lobby. I'm still hoping against hope that somehow my colleagues will find enough courage to put the survival of five-year-olds ahead of their perceived political advantage."

Another pipe dream, Senator. In the same edition of the *New York Times* with a column by Jamelle Bouie headlined, "Our Gun Fetish Is Killing Us" (figuratively and literally — gun violence is the No. 1 cause of death for Americans under 19), her colleague Mike McIntire published a detailed history of the bizarre three-cornered marriage between the NRA, the firearms industry and Congress. Newly released files from congressional archives revealed that legislators were not just greedy stooges for the gun lobby, but in many cases the brains and muscle behind the crazy rise of America's gun culture. Rep. John Dingell of Michigan, a Democrat, was one of several congressmen who served on the NRA board of directors while they were in office. In his case, he outmaneuvered some of the gun club's more moderate "sportsmen" to

shape it into the uncompromising Second Amendment juggernaut it remains today.

I thought I was educated on these issues, but I learned a lot more from McIntire's article, all of it sickening and depressing. But on this beat there's always more, and worse. Did you know that the "active shooter defense industry," as it's described in the *Times*, is a multi-billion-dollar goldmine for scores of companies who promote themselves as our only protection against mass murder? "This is an entire industry that capitalizes on school shootings," said Odus Johnson, a professor at Johns Hopkins. "However, there's little evidence that what they are selling works." For schools, they're selling bulletproof glass, tables that can be used as bullet shields, special shooter-resistant locks for school doors, AI-linked security cameras, emergency drills for teachers and school nurses. When does a nation take a long hard look at itself and ask "Are we hemorrhaging brain cells? Are we hopelessly insane?"

The writer Stephen King, Maine's most famous citizen, published an essay after the Lewiston massacre that seemed to answer those questions in the affirmative. King expressed feelings of helplessness and hopelessness over the "addiction" to guns that has created bloody horrors beyond any he imagines in his fiction. Ever since the Supreme Court's District of Columbia vs. Heller decision in 2008, essentially dismissing "a well regulated militia being necessary to the security of a free state" as the operating clause of the Second Amendment (as our legal system assumed for 200 years), the unregulated ownership of deadly firearms has become an almost psychotic commitment for a huge minority of sick Americans.

What, if anything, can we do? A program in Chicago called CRED, which focuses on re-educating the young men most likely to be involved in gun violence, has reported promising results. But it's a modest response to the grotesque mixture of paranoia, machismo and diabolically manipulated class resentment that nourishes the gun cult — not to mention the MAGA-polluted moral and ideological septic tank that currently passes for the Republican Party. When cupidity joins hands with stupidity, they create an almost irresistible force. The weapons manufacturers and the gun dealers prosper, the captive legislators pad their campaign funds, and the slack-jawed, self-deceived Second Amendment true believers repeat their mantra, "We are the safe and free ones, the patriots, the real Americans." And the body count — 300,000 wounded, half of them fatally, in the last decade — continues to astonish the world.

You don't need to meet Robert Card to end up in the morgue. If you have any gun in your home, you've already multiplied the chances that you or one of your family members will die of gun violence. Suicides in America have reached all-time record levels — 50,000 in 2022 — and half of all gun deaths are now suicides. Gun sales soared all during the pandemic. With the

new vaccines, the deadliest viruses are much less likely to kill you than your own trusty six-shooter. Everytown For Gun Safety claims that 93% of American voters support strict background checks for all gun sales, laws the NRA still opposes. This means that the gun lobby has imposed its legislative will on a helpless, disenfranchised majority, along with its threat to our lives — an anti-democratic atrocity. And only 12 states, Gail Collins points out, prohibit loaded open- or-concealed-carry firearms at the polling place. Many people who call themselves Christians now enshrine the Second Amendment and dishonor the Sixth Commandment (or Fifth Commandment if you're counting sins in Catholic or Lutheran Bibles).

Along with irony and satire, another cultural delicacy the Republican Right and its NRA commandos have pushed to the edge of extinction is that honorable emotion we used to call shame. The Lewiston tragedy inspired many warnings and tormented outcries like Stephen King's, but it inspired no apparent shame and no meaningful change in the direction of gun control. The bullet brigade in Congress mumbled things like "criminals will be criminals" (Tennessee Rep. Tim Burchett after the Nashville school murders) and the usual nonsense about mental health. Not even the massed corpses of schoolchildren seem to soften these hearts or defrost these brains. The most appropriate words spoken on Capitol Hill came from Senate chaplain Barry Black, in a prayer: "Deliver our senators from the paralysis of analysis. When babies die at a church school, it is time for us to move beyond thought and prayers." "If kids dying didn't do it," echoed a distraught Maine parent, "I don't know what will."

We'll not soon forget our near encounter with the 10th-most-deadly mass murderer in American history. We hope you're not next. But we didn't need to travel to New England to smell gunsmoke. The rancid "supermajority" of rightwing Republicans currently dismantling North Carolina had been moving the needle on gun control while we were out of state. In the wrong direction, of course. On Dec.1, a new law went into effect, passed over Gov. Cooper's veto. It eliminates the state's requirement for a permit to buy a handgun. Keep your head down, avoid crowds, home-school your children and keep them indoors. If you believe in prayer, say one for all of us.

*Hal Crowther is a longtime journalist whose latest essay collection, "Freedom Fighters and Hellraisers: A Gallery of Memorable Southerners" (Blair, 2018) won the gold medal for nonfiction at the Independent Press Awards, as well as the gold medal for essays at the Foreword Review Awards. A winner of the Baltimore Sun's H.L. Mencken Writing Award, he is the author of "An Infuriating American: The Incendiary Arts of H.L. Mencken" (Iowa, 2015) and four previous collections of essays. Email delennis1@gmail.com.*

## The Importance of Home

*For generations, poor people have relied on each other to keep a roof over their heads. But in the world's wealthiest country, we need more.*

By KAZMYN RAMOS

Too many of us have to depend on sheer good luck to make it — especially when it comes to putting a roof over our heads.

We grow up hearing that hard work alone will lift us above the hardships we're born into. But many of us also watched as our parents worked two and three jobs, relied on extended family to watch us, and still struggled to afford stable housing. Far too many of us are living that same struggle ourselves.

It's not that we aren't resourceful. My

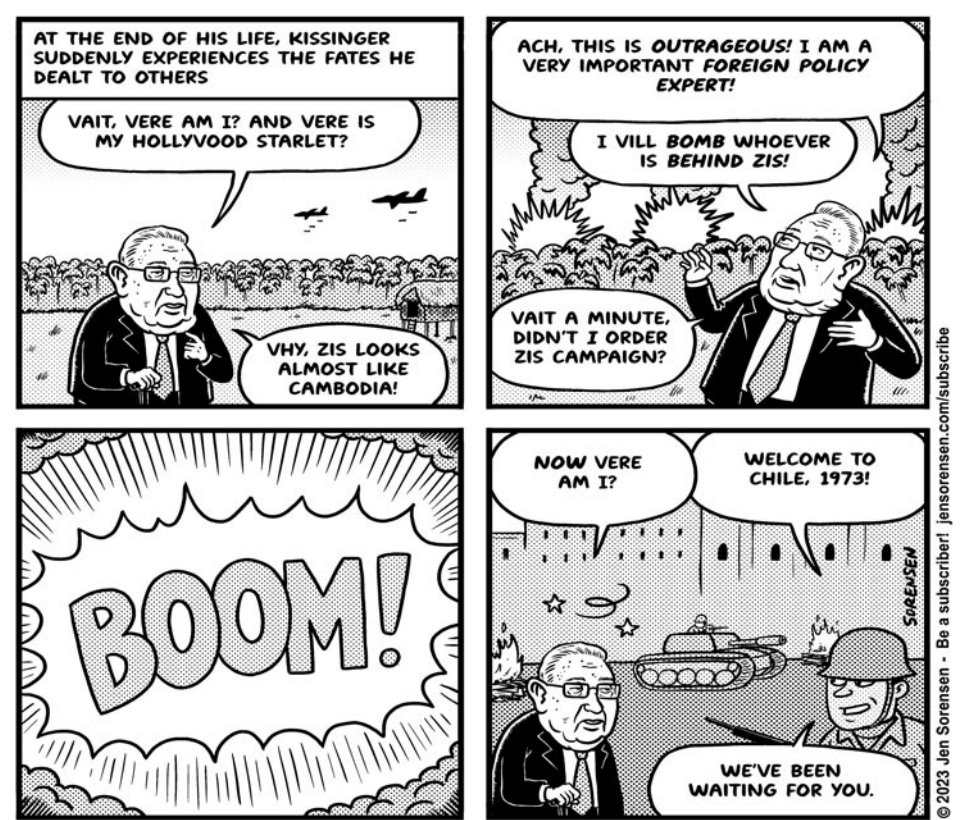
grandmother, who barely scraped by with factory work and countless odd jobs, pulled together with neighbors who supported each other through a mutual aid network. Thanks to her resourcefulness, our community, and luck, we had someplace to call home. That gave my mother the chance to become the first one in our family to go to college. I followed in her footsteps to attend graduate school.

We made it work. But I've learned through generational poverty that the lack of affordable housing is one of the biggest obstacles to thriving. I learned even more through my work with Healthy Families, a national, research-backed program.

I conducted home visits with low-income mothers, addressing maternal health, birth outcomes, and child development. Their poverty was different from what I grew up with. Many of these mothers were immigrants with language barriers and no access to the extended networks, mutual aid, or stable housing that I had.

Evictions were rampant. I saw conditions that you wouldn't believe existed in

*Continued on next page*





# Trump's Tenure "did not bestow on him the divine right of kings to evade the criminal accountability that governs his fellow citizens."

By DICK POLMAN

In this perilous moment for democracy, with the mainstream media (finally!) pumping out a plethora of warnings about the '24 election and the mounting threat of home-grown fascism, you may be forgiven for believing that there's nary a scintilla of good news.

But there is some! I kid you not!

In a mere 90 days (but who's counting?), the aspiring fascist will go on trial in federal criminal court for his relentless attempts to stage a coup and stay in office despite his 2020 defeat. The prosecution's case is rock-solid, he will be tried by a jury of his betters, and it's quite likely that he will be found guilty – which means that the MAGA-Putin cult would be stuck with a presidential nominee who doubles as a convicted felon with a date for sentencing on his personal calendar.

Best of all, the polls say that even a sizable share of Republicans would balk at the prospect of hiring a criminal to run the country, which I suppose is our very last line of defense.

Why do I think that a criminal conviction in the Washington, D.C. trial is "quite likely"? Because federal judge Tanya Chutkan has no tolerance for MAGA bullsh\*t – as evidenced by her kickass ruling Dec. 1, when she demolished Trump's desperate motion to dismiss the entire case. He claimed (hold your laughter until the end of this sentence) that he was entitled to "absolute immunity from criminal prosecution for actions performed within the 'outer perimeter' of his official" presidential duties. This was a fascinating theory, given the fact that his "outer perimeter" of duties featured subversion

of the Constitution he'd sworn to protect, plus the four federal crimes detailed in the indictment.

Judge Tanya Chutkan stomped on his bogus argument, clearing the way for trial on schedule. Let's luxuriate on some excerpts from her ruling, to remind ourselves that justice in this benighted country is not dead and that hope springs eternal:

"The Constitution's text, structure, and history do not support (Trump's) contention. No court – or any other branch of government – has ever accepted it. And this court will not so hold. (The presidency) does not confer a lifelong 'get-out-of-jail-free' pass. Former Presidents enjoy no special conditions on their federal criminal liability. Defendant may be subject to federal investigation, indictment, prosecution, conviction, and punishment for any criminal acts undertaken while in office...

"Defendant's four-year service as Commander in Chief did not bestow on him the divine right of kings to evade the criminal accountability that governs his fellow citizens...By definition, the President's duty to 'take Care that the Laws be faithfully executed' does not grant special latitude to violate them...

"America's founding generation envisioned a Chief Executive wholly different from the unaccountable, almost omnipotent rulers of other nations at that time. In Federalist No. 69 – titled 'The Real Character of the Executive' – Alexander Hamilton emphasized the 'total dissimilitude between [the President] and the king of Great Britain,' the latter being 'sacred and inviolable' in that 'there is no constitutional tribunal to which he is amenable; no punishment to which he can be subjected'... That widely acknowledged contrast between the President and a king is even more compelling for a former President...

"Perhaps no one understood the compelling public interest in the rule of law better than our first former President, George Washington. His decision to voluntarily leave office after two terms marked an extraordinary divergence from nearly every world leader who had preceded him, ushering in the sacred American tradition of peacefully transitioning Presidential power – a tradition that stood unbroken until Jan. 6, 2021.

"In announcing that decision, however, Washington

counseled that the newfound American independence carried with it a responsibility: 'The very idea of the power and the right of the people to establish government presupposes the duty of every individual to obey the established government.' (Otherwise) 'cunning, ambitious, and unprincipled men will be enabled to subvert the power of the people and to usurp for themselves the reins of government, destroying afterwards the very engines which have lifted them to unjust dominion.' In this case, Defendant is charged with attempting to usurp the reins of government as Washington forewarned."

Translation: Trump is on a glide path to adjudicated criminal guilt. And earlier March 5, Jack Smith's prosecution team said in a new court filing that it will prove Trump's "motive and intent" to subvert the '20 election, capped by the Capitol insurrection: "Perhaps most importantly, the defendant's embrace of January 6 rioters is evidence of his intent during the charged conspiracies, because it shows that these individuals acted as he directed them to act; indeed, this evidence shows that the rioters' disruption of the certification proceeding is exactly what the defendant intended on January 6."

Will Trump's lawyers appeal Chutkan's ruling to the higher courts? Of course. But, as former federal prosecutor Dennis Aftergut points out, Chutkan "meticulously crafted" her decision "with the Supreme Court in mind," relying on the Constitution's literal text. And appellate judges have acted speedily on other Trump cases, exhibiting "impatience with Trump's attempts to exploit the time courts take to act so he can run out the clock."

I continue to believe that when the chips are down, a majority of voters, or at least a share of voters sufficient to sway the Electoral College, would refuse to choose a convicted felon. Or perhaps I'm just grasping at straws. We'll know for sure in 11 bumpy months.

*Dick Polman, a veteran national political columnist based in Philadelphia and a Writer in Residence at the University of Pennsylvania, writes at DickPolman.net and is distributed by Cagle Cartoons newspaper syndicate. Email him at dickpolman7@gmail.com.*

## What The Numbers Now Tell About Biden's Economy

By JOE CONASON

You may have noticed in recent weeks that alarming headlines about inflation – specifically, those ubiquitous stories about the cost of gasoline, or eggs, or other household goods – have vanished. Media outlets no longer feature those fearsome charts with arrows zooming skyward, or video loops displaying the latest eye-popping gas station signage.

Much as the mainstream media seemed to enjoy scourging President Joe Biden with the bad news about raging hikes in the price of everything, that depressing theme has disappeared because inflation is falling.

In October, what economists describe as "core inflation," meaning the price of goods and services other than food and energy, declined to 2% – the target set by the Federal Reserve. And what they understandably call "headline inflation," the more volatile measure of prices that include all consumer purchases, including groceries and gas, dropped on a monthly level to zero.

Got that? Zero. Year over year, the rise in personal consumption expenditures has plummeted to 3%.

So encouraging were those numbers to the financial sector – and presumably the central bankers at the Federal Reserve – that some now forecast a cut in interest rates. Dropping rates would likely prevent the recession that has been forecast (with glee) by many Republicans – and bring America in for a "soft landing" from the pandemic recovery.

Will Biden get any credit for this improvement? Not from most media organizations, nor from pundits who wrongly blamed him for the inflation spurt in the first place, when they knew that other countries were suffering much worse price increases in the pandemic's wake. Indeed, too many outlets are barely even noting that inflation has collapsed.

At the same time, the president's "Bidenomics" program has brought continued steady growth and strong employment, with the annualized gross domestic product topping 5.2% in October – and unemployment steady at 3.9%. Economists have long

tended to view a 4% jobless rate as "full employment," essentially the best that can be achieved in a capitalist system without spurring inflation. Our current unemployment level is among the lowest in the G20 industrialized countries.

The reason is so simple that even a wingnut can understand: Under this president, the United States has seen an unsurpassed record of job creation, with 14 million new positions since he took office, far more than the last three Republican presidents combined. The social impact of high employment is profound, which is why traditional Democrats like Biden consistently promote infrastructure, education, environmental and income support policies that boost jobs. As California Democratic Gov. Gavin Newsom explained during last month's Fox News debate with Republican Gov. Ron DeSantis (whom Newsom crushed), the nation is now seeing the lowest rate of poverty in our history, as employment among Blacks, Hispanics and women have reached new peaks.

Are you starting to see a fuller picture here? Let's add a few more features: Personal income rose over 5% in the first quarter of this year and continued to go up into the second and third quarters. Consumer spending rose 3.6%, while housing investment increased to 6.2%, almost half again what had been predicted.

You may well retort that polling consistently shows – and the media persistently emphasize – that most Americans say they are unhappy with the economy and blame the president, resulting in poor approval ratings and endangering Biden's reelection prospects. And that's undeniably true, as far as it goes. But more than one expert now wonders why, if so many of our neighbors feel pessimistic and even angry, they keep buying stuff as if everything is working out just fine.

Economist Dean Baker suspects the influence of slanted news coverage and can imagine a very different political scenario. "If we had the exact same economy, and (former President) Donald Trump was in the White House," Baker says, "Trump would be endlessly saying 'greatest economy ever.' Every Republican politician in the country would be amplifying the claim and all the political pundits would be writing that the strong economy will make Trump almost a sure bet for reelection."

Sooner or later, the majority of Americans will wake up and realize that Joe Biden has not only protected us from re-

cession but has created the conditions for a generation of prosperity. Let's hope they figure that out before it is too late – and vote to defend the future from Trump's madness.

*Joe Conason is the editor in chief of NationalMemo.com and author of several books,*



## Ramos...

*Continued from previous page*

the richest country in the world.

I'm a strong believer in mutual aid. But in the world's wealthiest nation, should we really have to rely solely on working people sharing their meager resources among themselves? To eradicate poverty and housing instability, we're going to need more than that.

Nationally, a worker would need an hourly wage of at least \$28.58 to afford a modest two-bedroom rental – or nearly \$24 an hour for just one bedroom. The federal minimum wage is \$7.25 per hour. Almost half of low-income renters spend over 30 percent of their incomes on housing alone.

Building on my mother and grandmother's work in mutual aid, I've found community engagement to be invaluable – not only to connect families to housing, but also to organize our collective voices to push lawmakers toward solutions.

Solutions like building more affordable housing, more public housing, and more housing in general. Guaranteeing workers a living wage for their hard work. Making

sure we have a strong social safety net so families can survive lean times.

Unfortunately, housing policy often takes human rights and the need for community out of the policy process. It focuses on zoning, commerce, profit-maximization, and "protecting" wealthy communities from low-income neighbors. This does a disservice to the rich sense of community affordable housing can create.

Housing should be seen as a human right and a community builder, not a wealth builder. It should be a way to lift us all up rather than segregate us and perpetuate the cycle of poverty.

The more we separate ourselves from our fellow humans, the more damage we do to all of us as a society. My mother and grandmother taught me that. I bet yours did too. So let's work together to make the dream of housing for all a reality.

*Kazmyn Ramos is a Program Manager for an NGO that delivers cash to people in poverty, founder of the affordable housing nonprofit Seeking 1610, and a Poverty Expert at RESULTS. She lives in Indianapolis. This op-ed was distributed by OtherWords.org.*



# Workers Need a Fighting Chance

By DAVID McCALL

Keith Beavers began to cut household expenses and raid his savings when Allegheny Technologies Inc. (ATI) forced him and other union members into an unfair labor practice strike two years ago.

As difficult as it was for Beavers to get by without a paycheck, however, it pained him even more to see colleagues struggle and to know that the multibillion-dollar company intended to hold out long enough to squeeze workers into accepting deep concessions.

Beavers and other members of the United Steelworkers (USW) ultimately turned the tables and beat ATI at its own game, standing strong together for three months until the company signed a fair contract.

Now these USW members are battling to ensure that workers in Pennsylvania never face that kind of unfair fight again. They're advocating for state-level legislation that would provide unemployment compensation to striking workers and keep employers like ATI from attempting to starve them into submission.

Pro-worker Democrats, led by Reps. Dan Miller and Mandy Steele of Allegheny County, pushed the measure through the state House on a bipartisan basis in November. Now, the bill goes to the Senate.

"This is a tool that would give people the ability to stand up to corporations and

help the middle class," explained Beavers, president of the USW Local 1138 unit representing about 200 workers at ATI's plant in Vandergrift, Pa.

"We'd be able at the very least to keep food on the table for our families and pay some of our bills and fight the good fight without losing everything," said Beavers, who advocated for the legislation at a press conference. "All we're looking for is a way to level the playing field."

Right now, workers in Pennsylvania receive unemployment compensation benefits when they experience cuts in full-time work hours or lose their jobs because of layoffs, closures or other factors outside their control.

But it's just as essential for workers to access this lifeline during labor disputes, especially when companies like ATI refuse to bargain in good faith or commit unfair labor practices that force workers onto the picket line.

Unemployment benefits don't cover workers' full paychecks. They provide a basic level of support to help workers get by temporarily.

"We aren't asking for a handout. This is money we put in. This is money we contributed," said Beavers, noting that workers pay a withholding tax to help support the unemployment compensation program and only seek a return on that investment during strikes.

In all, the 2021 unfair labor practice strike affected about 1,300 workers at ATI sites in Connecticut, Massachusetts, New York, Ohio and Pennsylvania. USW members in Connecticut, Massachusetts and New York received unemployment compensation, while those in the other states went without.

"It would have made a huge difference

in my eyes," recalled Eric Poydence, vice president of USW Local 1196, which represents workers at the ATI plant in Brackenridge, Pa. "We have the right to strike. But without unemployment compensation, it's difficult to exercise that right."

Months before a contract expires, Poydence noted, companies often scale back overtime to siphon resources away from workers and undermine their financial footing. Then the employers provoke an unfair labor practice strike and sit back while workers struggle to provide for their families.

"You automatically start thinking, 'What is most important to me? My house, clearly. The power. The heat,'" recalled Poydence, emphasizing that union members want nothing more than to continue working and strike only as a last resort.

"Then you start thinking about what you do not need and how soon you have to start leaving these things behind," he continued. "You have to start making some real choices very quickly."

Union strike and defense funds provide crucial assistance. But the only other options, Poydence said, are to "blow through savings" and go into debt.

"We're put in a situation where we have to bury ourselves," he said, adding that the consequences can affect workers and families for decades.

Growing numbers of Americans are joining unions and staging strikes on the heels of the pandemic, making access to unemployment benefits more critical than ever.

In addition to Pennsylvania, union activists and pro-worker lawmakers in Massachusetts and Connecticut are advancing legislation that would make it easier for workers in those states to access unemployment benefits during strikes.

Separately, U.S. Rep. Adam Schiff of California and dozens of other congressional Democrats introduced legislation two months ago that would extend this assistance to striking workers throughout the country. The USW is among dozens of unions and other forward-looking organizations supporting the legislation.

But the bills often face stiff opposition from corporations and business groups. California's governor just vetoed legislation that would have provided unemployment benefits to striking workers in that state, where big, influential employers have a long history of mistreating workers just because they think they can get away with it.

In 2015, for example, Tesoro and other oil companies forced USW members into an unfair labor practice strike despite the industry's deep pockets and workers' concerns about unsafe working conditions.

"It was just a matter of them making a power play," recalled Dave Campbell, secretary-treasurer of USW Local 675, which represented workers at the Tesoro refinery in Carson, Calif., during the strike.

Instead of truly negotiating, Campbell and Poydence said, more and more companies prefer to make regressive contract proposals deliberately aimed at stonewalling bargaining and forcing union members into labor disputes.

Providing unemployment compensation to striking workers, however, would prompt employers to correct course.

"The companies would have to negotiate with us differently," Poydence said. "The whole dynamic would change. I do think the workers deserve this."

*David McCall is International President of United Steelworkers. See the blog at USW.org.*

## Wall Street or the Working Class: The Democrats Must Choose

***They can't try to have it both ways indefinitely. If they really helped working people meet the economic challenges facing them, the party would lose favor with the barons of finance and their corporate cronies.***

By LES LEOPOLD

The Democrats want it both ways. The Party of the New Deal claims to be still championing the working class while it is also working to enrich Wall Street. The obvious goal is to secure campaign cash from the wealthy while, at the same time, attract working-class votes. After all, the thinking goes, working people don't have any place else to turn politically. Certainly not to the Republicans, the historic party of the bosses.

But this thinking is wrong, and this approach hasn't worked. And it's still not working.

The more the Democrats have supported Wall Street over the past four decades, the more the working class, especially the White working class, has drifted away. Even after the anti-civil rights southern Dixiecrat exodus from the Democratic Party in the Nixon years, White working-class support for the Democrats remained strong. Jimmy Carter in 1976 gathered a solid 52.3% of the White working-class vote. Bill Clinton in 1996 received 50%, again a strong showing. But by 2012, Barack Obama won only 40.6%. And in 2020, Joe "Six-Pack" Biden stumbled to a meager 36.2% of the White working-class vote.

And it's not just the White members of the working class who are defecting. Recent polling reveals that Black and Latino working-class voters also show declining support for Democratic candidates.

What happened? It wasn't the Democrats embrace of social issues. The research done for my book, "Wall Street's War on Workers," shows clearly that the White working class has become more liberal, not

more illiberal, especially on LGBTQ+ rights, immigration, and abortion.

The real cause of working-class defections from the Democratic Party has been (and still is) mass layoffs. Working people got fed up with losing their jobs again and again, and they saw that the Democrats, who claimed to represent them, did little or nothing to stop the carnage. Since 1996, approximately 30 million of us have gone through a mass layoff (defined as 50 or more workers let go at one time.) Many more than once. Our research demonstrates clearly that in the key "Blue Wall" states of Michigan, Pennsylvania and Wisconsin, when mass layoffs go up the Democratic vote goes down.

Democratic pollster Mike Lux supports our findings:

"[C]ontrary to many pundits' assumptions, economic issues are driving the problems of Democrats in non-metro working-class counties far more than the culture war ... These voters wouldn't care all that much about the cultural difference and work thing if they thought the Democrats gave more of a damn about the economic challenges they face deeply and daily ..."

Why aren't Democrats giving "more of a damn?" Because if they really helped working people meet these economic challenges, they would lose favor with the barons of Wall Street and their corporate cronies.

It's not a win/win game. Mass layoffs are part and parcel of how corporate executives and hedge funds extract billions of dollars in profit. Those mass layoffs are very often used to finance stock buybacks, a legalized method of stock manipulation that was severely restricted by the Securities and Exchange Commission until 1982. Since corporate executives get most of their pay in stock incentives, jacking up the price of shares through stock buybacks is the quickest path to great wealth. The same goes for the Wall Street stock-sellers who force their way onto corporate boards and then demand massive stock buybacks to enrich themselves. Today nearly 70% of all corporate profits go to stock buybacks. (See "Profits Without Prosperity" by Williamazonick for an excellent account of this process.)

Leveraged buyouts—buying up companies with borrowed money and then sticking the debt on the purchased company—virtually guarantees that mass layoffs

will take place to help cover the debt costs. Case in point: Elon Musk bought Twitter, now called X, with \$13 billion in borrowed money and then placed that debt onto Twitter's books. This raised Twitter's debt service payments per year from \$50 million to about \$1 billion. Nearly 80% of the staff have been "X-ed" out to help service that debt.

Most of the Democratic Party, unfortunately, has drunk the corporate Kool-Aid. They believe that placating Wall Street and large corporate interests will strengthen the economy, improve the US position in the global economy, and produce better paying jobs at home. That's understandable when you view the economy through the elite lens of high salaries, growing 401(K)s, and the stock market, which seems to go up and up and up. But good luck selling that vision to laid-off workers.

Those workers remember that the Democrats eagerly supported the massive deregulation of Wall Street during the Clinton administration. They also remember Democrats pushing trade deals like NAFTA and China's admission into the WTO, which led to millions of manufacturing jobs rushing to Mexico and China. And that the Obama administration refused to punish and remove the Wall Street executives who crashed the economy in 2008-09 with their reckless gambling, enabled by deregulation championed by both political parties. Instead, the Obama administration bailed out Wall Street while distressed homeowners got nothing. That's 16 years of Wall Street coddling by Democratic administrations.

Democratic leaders may have thought this was too complicated for working-class people to understand. But they were wrong. Working people know who is prospering at their expense. They have learned the hard way that their former allies, the Democrats, have failed to protect them from the ravages of free-market capitalism. They understand that the Democrats are wooing the well-educated and affluent elites, society's most powerful. They also know that far too many Democrats look down on white workers, tarring them as racist, sexist, homophobic xenophobes. When Democrats show such disdain it's not unreasonable for working-class folks to switch allegiances.

Without protection from the Democratic Party or from a sizable labor movement, it's not unreasonable for working-class

people to think that supporting business interests and Republican policies might help save their jobs. This logic is especially strong in non-union situations, which today account for 94% of the business sector. If there is no Democratic Party or labor union to save your job, where else can you turn?

As the sinking working-class vote for President Biden reveals, the Democratic Party has a mountain to climb in order to dig out of its anti-working-class hole. Yes, low unemployment helps. Yes, the infrastructure bills help. Yes, showing up at picket-lines helps. But those measures, for example, don't offer any protection for the 253,629 workers at tech companies who have lost their jobs in 2023 alone. (While some of them had healthy salaries, many are lower-income workers like those at Amazon.)

Halting or slowing down mass layoffs requires real nerve. The Democrats would have to use all the levers of power (executive orders, legislation, regulation, the bully pulpit, etc.) to pressure Wall Street to stop cancerous stock buybacks and leveraged buyouts. Although the task would be difficult, there are plenty of levers to pull. At this point, however, the required New Deal muscle memory to tame corporate power is fading away.

As the 2024 elections near, democracy will be hanging by a thread. The Democrats hope to squeak through by making the national elections focus on Trump's lunacy and the abortion issue.

The Democrats would do better by revisiting their 1984 party platform which urged that workers should have "actual ownership of the company, employee representation on corporate boards ... and greater worker participation in management decisions." The platform also called for the government to "encourage employee participation and ownership, particularly as an alternative to plant shutdowns."

It's high time for concerned Democrats to take on the billionaire barons of job destruction.

If they don't, who will?

*Les Leopold is the executive director of the Labor Institute and author of the forthcoming book, "Wall Street's War on Workers: How Mass Layoffs and Greed Are Destroying the Working Class and What to Do About It." This appeared at CommonDreams.org.*



## MARY SANCHEZ



An appeals court moves to limit the ability of advocacy groups, such as the ACLU or NAACP, to sue for alleged violations of the Voting Rights Act.

### The Voting Rights Act of 1965 Suffers Another Blow

Let's start with Make America Great Again (MAGA), that siren call to backward thinking. It is a good reference point to understand the latest assault on the Voting Rights Act of 1965.

A recent ruling by a panel of federal judges is threatening to pull the nation back to an earlier era, to a time when not everyone could readily exercise their right to vote.

Make America Great Again harkens to such a time in the past.

It's a motto, a refrain, a political slogan

displayed on a red baseball cap. But at its core, the phrase proclaims that "back then" was better than it is now, at least for some. Black people, Latinos and Native Americans not so much.

Think about how poll taxes, literacy tests and gerrymandered districts worked for decades to keep non-White people from coalescing around candidates who looked like them, or who might look out for their interests if elected.

Back then, when people of color were targeted by racist practices and laws, most had few avenues to complain about the mistreatment, not realistically anyway, not in a polling place and most certainly not before a judge.

At least not until the passage of the Voting Rights Act of 1965.

Guess what? In November, a panel of federal judges in St. Louis essentially ruled that those yesteryears weren't so bad.

Two judges argued (and one dissented) that no private individual or advocacy group has a right to sue for alleged violations of voting rights under what's known as Section 2 of the Voting Rights Act of 1965. The two judges opined that only the federal government, through a US attorney general, can file such lawsuits.

In effect, they argued in favor of the MAGA mantra.

Because few voting rights claims are brought by the federal government, most are filed by advocacy groups like the ACLU or

NAACP.

The case originated with the Arkansas State Conference of the NAACP and the Arkansas Public Policy Panel. Those entities argued that newly drawn state house districts unfairly limited the voting power of the state's Black residents.

The judicial panel didn't weigh the truth of the charge, but affirmed a lower court's dismissal of the case in arguing that only the federal government has the right to bring such a suit.

The ruling from the US Court of Appeals for the Eighth Circuit will most certainly be challenged in the US Supreme Court.

It's anyone's guess how the Supreme Court might rule.

The court's conservative leaning is a clue, but previous rulings have both upheld and undercut aspects of the original Voting Rights Act.

For instance, there has been some peeling away at provisions that created extra hurdles for minorities who have suffered racist practices at the polls.

A contingent of vocal conservative politicians has argued that the Voting Rights Act's time is past due, and that today's America is far less discriminatory than in the past, and that there is little need for many of the protections outlined in the landmark legislation.

And those politicians have a ringleader. The incessant barking of former presi-

dent Donald Trump and his Republican cronies who amplify his crazy claims is the backdrop to the recent decision in St. Louis. Trump, without proof, continues to tell lies, decrying his "stolen election" and non-existent voter fraud.

Here's what did happen: Trump encouraged an insurrection, the heinous violence of Jan. 6 at the US Capitol, in a bid to keep President Joe Biden from taking office.

A Colorado state court judge recently ruled that Trump incited the insurrection.

Unless he's stopped by the weight of his legal troubles or by a GOP that suddenly acquires a backbone, there is a real possibility that Trump could wind up as the Republican presidential candidate for 2024.

If he is, there should be no doubt of the need for the Voting Rights Act to ensure a fair election.

This is a moment to lean into our well-established standards, to stick with our safeguards to guarantee the right of every eligible American citizen to have their vote count.

To do anything less is to bow to those who see past eras of racist gerrymandering and other tricks at the polls as ideal.

That was not a time when America was greater.

Mary Sanchez is a syndicated columnist for Tribune Content Agency, formerly with the *Kansas City Star*.

Email [msanchezcolumn@gmail.com](mailto:msanchezcolumn@gmail.com) and follow on Twitter @msanchezcolumn.

### Charlie Peters and the Odyssey of Neoliberalism

The uses of small magazines in the battle of ideas

By ROBERT KUTTNER

Charles Peters, the founder and longtime editor of the *Washington Monthly*, died on Thanksgiving at the age of 96. I have a certain affinity for founding editors of small magazines with large influence, especially ones that seek to challenge the conventional wisdom.

Peters, universally known as Charlie, was a superb editor and contrarian, as well as a lovely human being. At the *Monthly*, he launched the careers of an exceptional generation of journalists, including James Fallows, Nick Lemann, Suzannah Lessard, Taylor Branch, Katherine Boo, David Ignatius, and numerous others. He hailed from West Virginia where he served in the legislature. He worked for JFK's election in 1960 and came to Washington to serve in the Kennedy administration's Peace Corps.

Our paths crossed in many ways. We were friendly rivals, institutionally and ideologically. I was present at the founding meeting of the *Monthly* in 1968, where Charlie proposed to compensate writers partly in the magazine's stock. He published a long piece of mine in the *Monthly*'s second issue in 1969, dealing with the bureaucratic struggles to make affirmative action work, a classic topic for policy wonkery and deep reporting on what it takes to make

government work. It went through several drafts.

Where Peters's contrarianism went astray was in his fervent embrace of what he named neoliberalism. And Peters's use of the term, as opposed to its meaning in economics, is the source of untold confusion.

For economists, going back to Friedrich Hayek and then Milton Friedman, neoliberalism is the idea that despite what seemed to be the lessons of the Great Depression as informed by the insights of John Maynard Keynes, free markets were perfectly efficient after all if government would just leave them alone. The 1980s were the heyday of those beliefs in the academy and in public policy.

For Peters, who published "A Neoliberal's Manifesto" in 1982, initially as a *Washington Post* piece and later expanded into a book, neoliberalism meant a less bureaucratic form of liberalism, true to verities but willing to challenge old orthodoxies. He held the labor movement to blame for wage-driven inflation. He was willing to add income tests to Social Security.

Given the tendency of government to get captured by special interests, the idea of a less bureaucratic form of liberalism had its appeals. But one problem for Peters's version was timing. By the time Peters wrote his manifesto, Reagan was in the White House and it was open season on all forms of liberalism. And Peters's ideas ended up giving aid and comfort to those Democrats who thought that they should move right with the times.

It was that premise that *The American Prospect* was founded to challenge. To regain credibility and power, we argued then and now, Democrats and progressives needed to be better updated New Dealers, not a second center-right party.

These arguments antedated and informed the creation

of the *Prospect*. In May 1985, *Mother Jones* published a cover piece titled, "But Charlie ... 'Now Bob ...,' Charles Peters & Robert Kuttner Battle for the Soul of Liberalism," featuring the two of us as representatives of two dueling concepts of how to revive American liberalism.

With the ascendancy of "New Democrats" and the presidency of Bill Clinton, the two rather different meanings of neoliberalism had an unfortunate convergence. Clinton both embraced the Peters critique of statism and implemented aspects of the neoliberal economic formula, such as deregulation and free trade.

In recent years, as both forms of neoliberalism have proven a debacle for working Americans and the Democratic Party, the *Washington Monthly* has moved away from either brand of neoliberalism. Under its skilled editor since 2001, Paul Glasstris, the *Monthly* reads rather more like much of the *Prospect*. About a decade ago, the two magazines even had preliminary discussions of a possible merger, but we ultimately decided that our respective DNA was too different.

Charlie Peters was everything one prizes in an editor, even when we disagreed on issues. He was both exacting and kind, willing to take a chance on young writers, a rock of integrity and decency, open-minded while sticking to his own core convictions. He treated a magazine as a broad community of writers and readers and a place to have interesting arguments. It was those traits that engendered such fierce affection and loyalty.

Robert Kuttner is co-editor of *The American Prospect* ([prospect.org](http://prospect.org)) and professor at Brandeis University's Heller School. Like him on [facebook.com/RobertKuttner](https://www.facebook.com/RobertKuttner) and/or follow him at [twitter.com/rkuttner](https://twitter.com/rkuttner).

### The Poignant Path to Despotism

By MARC G. RATCLIFF

January 21, 2024, will mark the 100th anniversary of Vladimir Lenin's death. Aristocrat, lawyer, revolutionary, philosopher, and political leader. These are a few of Lenin's roles during his relatively short life. He was born in 1870 in Ulyanovsk, Russia. His father was a Russian aristocrat who rose in the ranks of the Tzarist educational bureaucracy to the nobility. He attended university, albeit not without difficulties because of his radical beliefs, and received an education that any son of a Russian aristocrat would. He eventually graduated with a law degree. The turning point in Lenin's life was when he witnessed his brother's hanging for his participation in a failed scheme to assassinate the Tzar.

By 1893, when Lenin moved to St. Petersburg, he was a full-time revolutionary. Tzarist Russia was difficult for the proletariat and peasantry, and Lenin had their ear. There was terrific wealth separation in the Russian realm. In the following years, he would write and publish many revolution-

ary publications. His most remembered work historically is *What are the Friends of the People and How Do They Fight against Social-Democracy?* Published after his arrest and exile to Siberia.

A Marxist movement had gained momentum in Russia. It began to industrialize, urbanize, and grow a working class to fuel the growth. The revolutionaries wanted a bourgeois revolution that included industrialization, modernization, and Westernization, altering Russia into a democratic republic. One caveat existed, looming significant in hindsight. Lenin believed that intellectuals should ultimately guide the working class. Somewhat confusing, Lenin wanted the proletariat to dominate, being the utmost revolutionary class. He always considered intellectual contribution to be more critical. It is problematic, to say the least, in a society based on equality and opportunity for all.

The turn of the 19th century was a historical powder keg. A World War would start, a pandemic would break out, and the Russian Revolution would occur. This scratches the surface. Much like today, turmoil seemed to be confronting people at every turn. It seems the ruling status quo was in jeopardy.

In 1903 the Russian Marxists split—

Lenin with the Bolsheviks and Martov with the Mensheviks, or the minority group. The failed 1905 revolution caught Lenin off guard as he could only return toward the end after living in Europe for several years. After 1905, Lenin asked his followers to prepare for an armed conflict. Returning to Europe, Lenin was shocked by the European socialists' favoring their country's participation in World War I. At this point, he decided against being a social democrat and termed communism. While in Switzerland again, he was surprised by the political upheaval in Russia. The tsarist government fell, and Lenin made plans to return in his famed sealed train through Germany to fill the vacuum. Lenin's political savvy lay in handling growing frustration with the provisional government. A liberal-elected government was taken over after the Tsar fell. They had planned another military offensive in the World War and failed to pass land reform or hold elections. On Oct. 25, 1917, Lenin and the Bolsheviks took the reins of government and declared Soviet rule. After a failed assassination attempt in Aug. 1918, the Cheka, a Soviet police organization, brought on such a period of Red Terror with arrests, murders, etc., that a civil war ensued. The Civil War claimed 8 million lives in total and drained the country

of resources in many areas.

Lenin thought, in agreement with Marx, that Socialism was irreversible. He admired the toughness of the Russian working class but was disappointed in its backwardness. Marx always thought that Socialism would succeed first in a Westernized country. Lenin hoped establishing his Soviet government would spawn European revolutions and see communism grow.

Lenin died of complications of a stroke on Jan. 21, 1924, and was succeeded by someone he considered unfit for the position, Joseph Stalin. Some historians commented that Lenin showed little compassion for people, especially those lost in the civil war. He was often characterized as a humorless fanatic. Pundits have described Lenin as someone willing to sacrifice millions of people for the hubris of the intellectual and their ideological, impractical brand of government. It would do us good to remember that Lenin's system of government was a model to not only Joseph Stalin but also Benito Mussolini, Adolf Hitler, and Mao Tse Tung.

Democracy is a fragile thing that must always be guarded. We are free to think, create, and foster our ideas here in the United States. FDR was not a communist,

*Continued on page 14*



# If Democrats Ran Red States, Fewer People Would Die

*It shouldn't surprise us that a political party that swears its first allegiance to billionaires and giant multinational corporations would choose money and profits over health and life...*

By THOM HARTMANN

Something terrible and deadly is happening here in the United States, and House Speaker Mike Johnson just announced that he wants to double down on it. More on that in a moment.

If you were born and live in Japan, you can expect to live to 85 years old. For South Korea average lifespan is 83, as are Norway, Switzerland, Iceland, Israel, and Australia.

It's 82 for Italy, Spain, Ireland, France, Finland, and New Zealand.

Cuba (!) and Panama are 79; Uruguay and Croatia are 78.

A total of 61 countries have average lifespans of 78 years or older, ranging from Singapore's 84 to Estonia's 78.

And then there's the United States. Our average lifespan comes in at a paltry 77 years, along with Iran, Tunisia and Morocco.

And it's entirely because of Republican policies.

That's the main conclusion of a new study published in PLOS One, one of the world's leading publications of peer-reviewed science across a wide variety of fields.

The report, rigorously scientific, was funded by the National Institute on Aging (NIA), a division of the United States' National Institutes of Health (NIH).

They concluded that if, in 2019, "liberals" (Democrats) had run all the Red states, then 171,030 fewer Americans would have died that year. On the other hand, if "conservatives" (Republicans) had succeeded in imposing their healthcare, tax, labor, and gun policies on the Blue states, there would have been an additional 217,635 dead Americans.

This follows the Brookings Institution study published two years ago that concluded Republican anti-mask and pro-snake-oil (hydroxychloroquine, ivermectin, etc.) policies unnecessarily killed 400,000 Americans during the first year of the pandemic.

That study, along with a report from Congress detailing Trump's incompetent/malicious response to the pandemic, provoked psychologist Mary Trump to refer to her uncle as a "mass murderer."

Add to that the Republican anti-vax propaganda and, as the *New York Times* reports, GOP policies are continuing to kill Americans:

"Since Dec. 1, when health officials announced the first Omicron case in the United States, the share of Americans who have been killed by the coronavirus is at least 63 percent higher than in any of these other large, wealthy nations, according to a *New York Times* analysis of mortality figures."

And the majority of those dying are Republican followers. Not the Republican politicians and multimillionaire TV commentators, who are all well-vaccinated (Fox required vaccination for all employees), but the people who listen to them, watch them on television, and believe their lies about vaccines and masks.

None of this is new and none should be surprising.

In 2014 the *International Journal of Epidemiology* published a report titled "US Infant Mortality and the President's Party" looking at the years between 1965 and 2010. They concluded:

"Across all nine presidential administrations, infant mortality rates were below trend when the President was a Democrat and above trend when the President was a Republican. ... Republican administrations were characterized by infant mortality rates that were, on average, 3% higher than Democratic administrations."

The results were, they wrote, solid. Very solid, in fact:

"Conclusions: We found a robust, quantitatively important association between net of trend US infant mortality rates and the party affiliation of the president."

It turns out it's not just American conservatives whose policies kill their own people.

Back in 2002, researchers looked at 100 years of data from Australia and England in a paper for the *Journal of Epidemiological Public Health (JEHP)* titled "Mortality

and Political Climate: How Suicide Rates have Risen During Periods of Conservative Government, 1901-2000."

They controlled the study for years of both war and drought, and concluded that more people kill themselves when conservatives are in power — in both countries, even at different times — than when liberals control the government. The subtitle of an editorial in the *JEHP* about their paper, in fact, was: "Do conservative governments make people want to die?"

The answer, according to the data, is yes. Noting an excess death rate of around 17% among the 238,431 suicides during years of conservative rule, the final sentence of that editorial was:

"[R]oughly 35,000 of these people would not have died had these Conservative governments not been in government. This is one suicide for every day of the century, or more appropriately, two for every day that the Conservatives ruled."

Drenching the country in blood seems to be a popular sport for conservatives and Republican politicians.

— United Republican opposition to negotiating drug prices is why here in the United States we're paying \$38,398 for an anti-cancer shot that costs \$260 in the United Kingdom.

— Twelve Red states still refuse to offer Medicaid to their low-income workers, even though the federal government pays 90% of the cost. But while you can't get healthcare in Red states, you sure can get a weapon of war.

— And with 120 guns for every 100 citizens, these deadly weapons — whose sole purpose is to kill humans — have become the leading cause of death for American children, a horror not found in any other country in the world.

— By the end of last year, fully half of American states abandoned all meaningful gun regulations, allowing permit-less carry, further increasing the carnage as the *New York Times* documented in heartbreaking detail.

— Republican advocacy for fossil fuels and lies about climate change are also killing Americans. An estimated 32,000 deaths a year come about just because of tailpipe and smokestack pollution.

— This doesn't begin to measure the people who've died from extreme weather events causing wildfires across the West, derechos and flooding across the Midwest and South, and warming-amplified hurricanes in Mexico and the American South-

east. Or the people who've simply lost everything when their homes and jobs are wiped out.

Instead of doing anything about these issues, Republicans in Congress and state houses vote in a block to support the fossil fuel billionaires who fund their campaigns rather than supporting their states' citizens who are getting whacked by the carbon pollution that industry lied to us about for over six decades.

And now House Speaker Mike Johnson wants to gut Social Security, Medicare, and Medicaid because "we're drowning in debt." What he fails to mention is that 100% of our nation's \$34 trillion debt was caused by Reagan, Bush, and Trump tax cuts along with the \$10 billion in illegal wages George W. Bush and Dick Cheney lied us into.

As my colleague Chauncey DeVega points out:

"Social demographers have repeatedly shown that there is actually more early death, suicide, murder, criminality, poverty, prescription drug abuse and other forms of human misery and suffering — on a per capita basis — in 'red State' America than in more cosmopolitan, progressive, affluent and dynamic 'blue' cities and regions."

While all this is shocking in aggregate, it shouldn't surprise us that a political party that swears its first allegiance to billionaires and giant multinational corporations would choose money and profits over health and life.

The Republican Party, as I noted last year, has ceased to be a legitimate political party with actual policy positions and become, instead, a loose collection of Nazis, cult-based "Christians," antisemites, predatory hustlers, misogynists, gun nuts, bigots, and government haters, all funded by billionaires who don't want to pay their taxes.

This is not Dwight Eisenhower's Republican Party; it's barely Nixon's anymore.

America can do better, but first we must overcome the billions that are being spent right now to put the GOP back in charge of the White House and Senate.

And that means we all have to do everything we can to wake people up and get out the vote.

*Thom Hartmann is a progressive radio talk-show host and the author of "The Hidden History of American Oligarchy" and more than 30 other books in print. He is a writing fellow at the Independent Media Institute. This appeared at hartmannreport.com.*

# Russian Fate: A Memoir I'll Never Write

*From the archives and files of Stephen F. Cohen.*

By KATRINA VANDEN HEUVEL

Dear Gena and Friends,  
I wish I could be with you tonight as you remember Steve. I will visit Moscow soon.

The world is a less interesting, less dynamic place without Steve. He would be outraged by the savagery of the wars engulfing our world, and the senseless deaths of young and old.

Steve lived his own way, by his own rules. He was a maverick, a great and courageous scholar. Charismatic, a rebel, self-styled provocateur, a revisionist, with strong democratic convictions—a small-town boy who always understood there were alternatives. After all, he grew up a Jew in the south, in Kentucky! He knew life was complex—not black and white but rather gray or multicolored.

He was a loving friend to all of you gathered tonight. He was truly and always interested in your lives and thinking—and I always loved that he—and then we—had such truly eclectic friends.

I know how very sad he would be to learn that Tonia has left us. She was always so kind to us, loving to me, Steve, Nika. Spirited ... May Misha and Kirill keep her memory strong.

Anna Larina, Bukharin's widow, was Steve's mother; the Bukharin family—Yuri, Nadya, Misha, Kolya, Eka, Kirill—his family. And all of you were his family in different ways; he followed you—your lives, your work, your families—he was there to assist and learn as needed. And of course, he was always grateful for all of your friendships.

His relationship with Gorbachev was a cornerstone of his professional and personal life. After all, for more than a decade Steve had believed a great reformer would emerge—in a system that was reformable.

He loved Andy and Dusty, and our beloved Nika. He was there for all her big events—from preschool to law school, and though he missed her beautiful wedding, his strong presence was felt!

There was a reason *The Chronicle of Higher Education* called Steve "the most controversial Russia expert in America."

He understood that dissent had its price. And in that spirit, Steve wanted someday to write his memoirs—he filed away in boxes and even parts of our apartment's rooms! Materials and papers he would some day use to write about his life—and fate. Sadly, Steve never had time to fulfill his plan, his intention. But this book, which Gena has devoted extraordinary time and attention to, is "a memoir of a kind."

Deeply grateful for it, Gena. And for continuing Airo's contributions to Russia and its history and fate. I wish to pay special thanks to Dima Muratov for organizing this and previous dinners; Ira for her superb translation of archive materials; and of course Steve's great friend Tanya Baeva; and his friends Ira Kliochnikova, Katia Egorova, and Leonid Dobrokhov. And

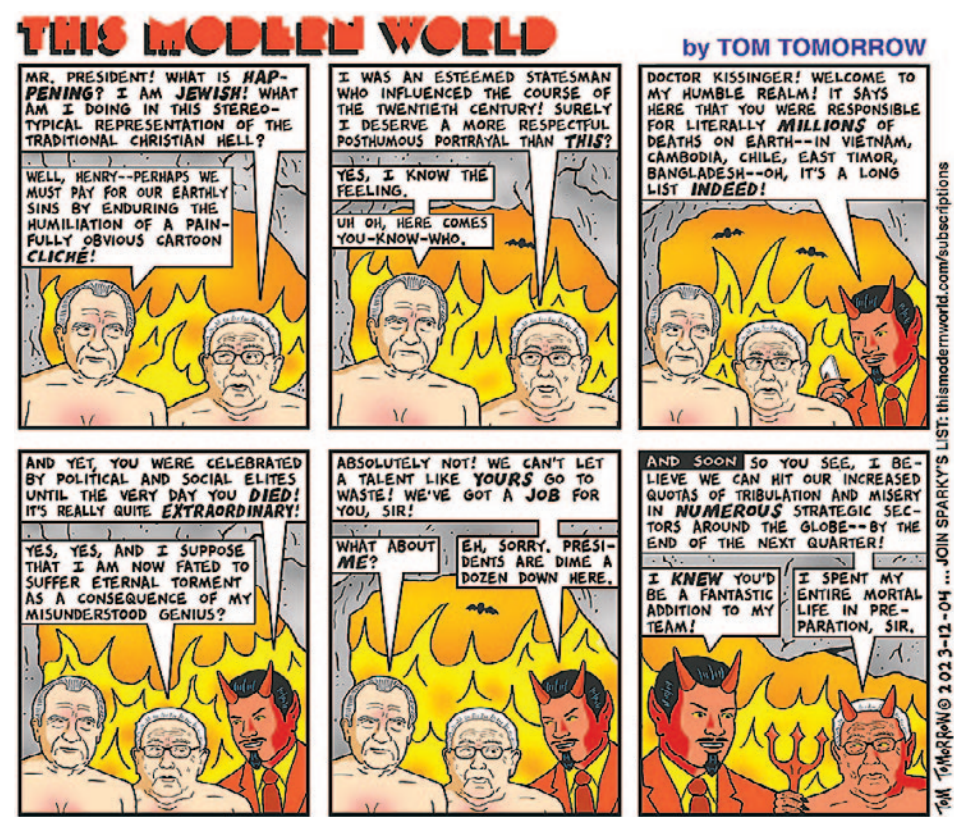
thanks to Alan Kasaev and Lev Dyugaev and Vladimir Lukin and Aleksandr Gelman.

Let me close with a few words about Steve's afterlife—and keeping his work and stance alive. He always valued mentoring young students and those of all ages; he was often too generous with his time and advice.

Indiana University will next year establish an endowed professorship in Steve's

name in history and Russian studies, and five fellowships in Steve's name are set up at NYU. Through ASEES, there are six annual fellowships—and also through ASEES, the Tucker-Cohen Dissertation Prize

*Katrina vanden Heuvel is editorial director and publisher of The Nation. She served as editor of the magazine from 1995 to 2019. Follow @KatrinaNation.*





# Scraping Away the Anti-Worker, Anti-Racial Equity Vestiges of the Reagan Era

*The Biden administration aims to undo contracting policy holdovers from the 1980s to boost public investment benefits for workers and their communities.*

By SARAH ANDERSON

Ronald Reagan left highly visible marks on our capital city. The president who believed trees cause pollution now has his name carved into an edifice housing EPA offices. The infamous buster of the air traffic controllers union has an eponymous airport.

Even more disturbing? Vestiges of the Reagan era that are nearly invisible but continue to undermine progress towards a more equitable and sustainable economy.

Case in point: an obscure OMB policy dubbed the “Uniform Guidance” that sets out rules for state and local governments when they use federal funds to pay private contractors. Republican officials in the Reagan administration seized on this policy as a weapon for blocking sub-federal actions they didn’t like.

What, in particular, had the Reaganites so rankled? This was the 1980s, the era of a growing global movement to divest from

Apartheid South Africa. Some US cities and states wanted to join universities, churches, and other investors in refusing to do business with corporations that were profiting off the racist regime.

A report by Jobs to Move America and the Center for Media and Democracy delves into this history in depth, documenting the Reagan administration’s crusade to elevate contracting “efficiency” and “fair and open competition” above other interests, from fighting Apartheid to creating family-supporting jobs for those who need them most.

## Reagan-era rules reinforced historic racial and economic inequities

That Reagan officials lumped these issues together should come as no surprise. The Apartheid system itself was both racist and anti-union, designed to protect the privileges of a White elite class. And while the Republicans couched their arguments in free market rhetoric, the impact of their changes to OMB regulations reinforced our own country’s deeply embedded racial and economic inequities.

Despite zero empirical evidence that an “efficiency above all” approach would improve contracting outcomes, the Reaganites succeeded in making it difficult for states and cities to attach labor and equity standards to contracts, for fear they would lose federal funding.

The revisions also explicitly banned local hire programs, despite significant research dispelling the myth that such programs are anti-competitive and demonstrating positive benefits for disadvantaged workers and local

economies. The Reagan-imposed ban meant, for example, that a largely Black city with high unemployment rooted in historic racism would have little power to prevent a contractor from bringing in an all-White, non-local engineering crew for an infrastructure project in their municipality.

We should’ve gotten rid of these Reagan-era restrictions long ago, but doing so now is more important than ever, with massive new federal funds in the pipeline for infrastructure and climate projects. Public funds are precious, and we all have an interest in ensuring that the benefits of these investments are equitably shared.

## Biden administration proposals for undoing these 1980s holdovers

Fortunately, Joe Biden’s OMB is moving in this direction with recently issued proposals for updating the Uniform Guidance. In a detailed public comment letter, nearly 150 unions and other members of the Local Opportunities Coalition commend the administration for positive improvements in 11 areas. Top on their list: the welcome removal of the ban on local hire policies.

The coalition also highlights changes to allow the use of scoring mechanisms to give companies a leg up in bidding competitions if they commit to creating specific numbers and types of jobs, with minimum levels of compensation and benefits. They also note positive steps to explicitly allow hiring preferences for disadvantaged communities, the use of project labor agreements between employers and workers and other pre-hire

collective bargaining agreements, bans on the use of contract funds for union-busting, and protections against employers misclassifying workers as “independent contractors” to skirt labor laws.

## How the administration could go further to ensure public investments benefit workers and communities

The Local Opportunities Coalition also recommends a few key ways the Biden administration could strengthen their proposals. For instance, they could explicitly allow states and cities to require that contractors (and their subcontractors) pay living wages and clarify that local hire policies can apply to both infrastructure and service contracts.

In a separate comment letter, several pro-worker and Wall Street accountability groups also applauded the Biden administration’s progress while suggesting that OMB officials also make explicit that state and local officials have the flexibility to consider additional equity factors to ensure public funds actually help workers instead of lining the pockets of wealthy executives and shareholders.

Specifically, they urge support for procurement policies that give preference to companies that refrain from wasteful spending on stock buybacks, excessive CEO pay, and private equity-driven leveraged buyouts and drastic cost-cutting.

“Discouraging these practices will help ensure that corporate recipients of public

*Continued on page 15*

## ROBERT REICH



The US suicide rate has reached its highest level since 1941. Maybe anxiety and depression are rational responses to society becoming more disordered.

## America’s Anxiety Disorder

### How can we best remedy it?

Today I want to talk with you about an uncomfortable topic that needs much more open discussion than it’s receiving: America’s extraordinarily high level of anxiety.

A panel of medical experts has recommended that doctors screen all patients under 65, including children and teenagers, for what the panel calls “anxiety disorders.”

Lori Pbert, a clinical psychologist and professor at the University of Massachusetts Chan Medical School, who serves on the panel, calls mental health disorders “a crisis in this country.”

Nearly 50,000 people in the US lost their lives to suicide last year, according to a new provisional tally from the National Center for Health Statistics. (The agency said the final count would likely be higher.)

The suicide rate of 14.3 deaths per 100,000 Americans has reached its highest level since 1941, when America entered World War II.

Men 75 and older had the highest suicide rate last year, at nearly 44 per 100,000 people, double the rate of people 15-24. While women have consistently been found to have suicidal thoughts more commonly, men are four times as likely to die by suicide.

Suicide rates for American Indians and Alaska Natives are almost double the rates for other Americans.

(Some good news: Suicide rates for children 10 to 14 declined by 18%, and for those between 15 and 24 by 9%, bringing suicide rates in those groups back to pre-pandemic levels.)

What’s going on?

Maybe the widespread anxiety and depression, along with the near record rate of suicide, should not be seen as personal disorders.

Maybe they should be seen — in many cases — as rational responses to a society that’s becoming ever more disordered.

After all, who’s not concerned by the rising costs of housing and the growing insecurity of jobs and incomes?

Who (apart from Trump supporters) isn’t terrified by Trump’s attacks on democracy, and the possibility of another Trump presidency?

Who doesn’t worry about mass shootings at their children’s or grandchildren’s schools?

Who isn’t affected by the climate crisis?

Add in increasingly brutal racism. Mounting misogyny. Anti-abortion laws. Homophobia and transphobia. Attacks on Asian Americans, Hispanic Americans, and Jews. And the growing coarseness and ugliness of what we see and read in social media.

Consider all this and you’d be nuts if you weren’t anxious, stressed, and often depressed.

Studies show that women have nearly double the risk of depression as men. Black people also have higher stress levels — from 2014 to 2019, the suicide rate among Black Americans increased by 30%.

Are women and Black people suffering from a “disorder?” Or are they responding to reality? Or both?

White men without college degrees are particularly vulnerable to deaths from suicide, overdoses, and alcoholic liver diseases, with contributions from the cardiovascular effects of rising obesity.

Are they suffering from a “disorder,” or are they responding to a fundamental change in American society? Or both?

In their book “Deaths of Despair and the Future of Capitalism,” economists Anne Case and Angus Deaton argue that “the deaths of despair among whites would not have happened, or would not have been so severe, without the destruction of the white working class...”

Part of the problem, they say, is that the less educated are often underpaid and disrespected, and feel that the system is rigged against them.

Even if we had far more mental health professionals, what would they do against these formidable foes? Prescribe more pills? If anything, Americans are already over-

medicated.

Don’t get me wrong, I’m not arguing against better access to mental health care. In fact, quite the opposite. Increased staffing and improved access to mental health care are very much needed.

Mental health care is harder to find now than before the pandemic. About half of people in the U.S. live in an area without a mental health professional, federal data shows, and some 8,500 more such professionals would be needed to fill the gap. Most people rely on family doctors for mental health care.

Officials are trying to widen familiarity with a national Suicide and Crisis Lifeline that last year received a nationwide number, 988.

But in addition to providing more and better access to mental health care, and a suicide and crisis hotline, shouldn’t we try to make our society healthier?

Americans experience the least economic security of the inhabitants of any advanced nation. A healthy society needs more job security and stronger safety nets.

The distribution of income and wealth in America is the most unequal of any other advanced nation. A healthy society ensures that no one working full time is poor, and levies high taxes on the wealthy to help pay for what society needs.

Guns and assault weapons are easier to buy in America than in any other advanced nation. A healthy society bans assault weapons and makes it difficult to buy guns.

A lower percentage of Americans has access to affordable medical care than in

any other advanced nation. A healthy society keeps its people healthy.

America puts more carbon dioxide into the air per capita than almost any other advanced nation. A healthy society better protects the environment.

Big money plays a larger role in American politics than it does in almost any other advanced nation. A healthy society does not allow big money to buy politicians.

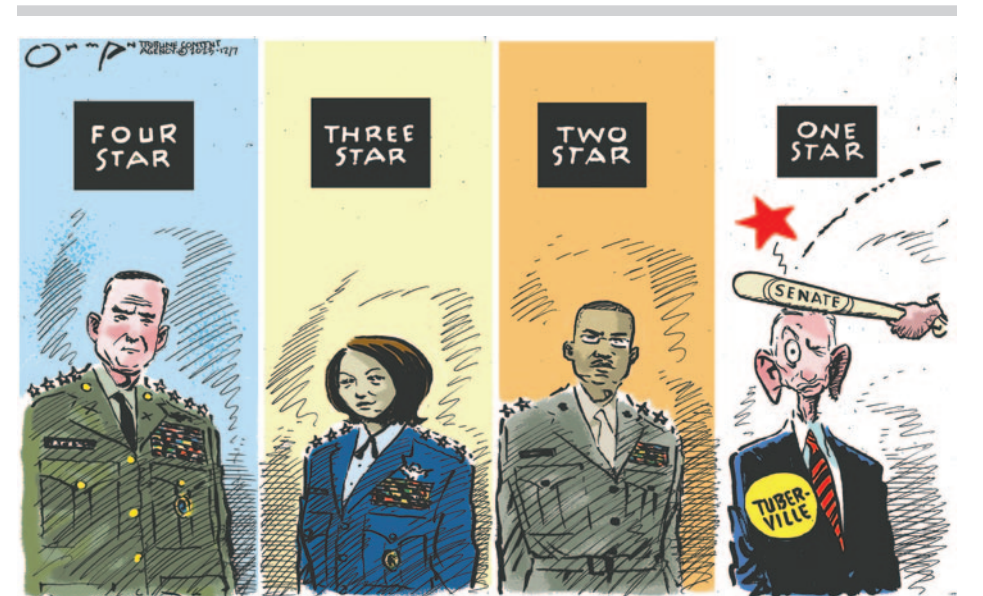
Some American politicians — like Donald Trump — gain power by stirring up racism, xenophobia, and homophobia. A healthy society does not elect these sorts of people.

The list could be much longer, but you get the point. The anxiety disorders suffered by Americans are real, and they apparently are growing. But instead of regarding them solely as personal disorders maybe we need to understand them at least partly as social disorders — and get to work remedying them as a society.

Granted, it would be difficult to achieve any of these criteria for a healthy society.

But without seeking to achieve them, no number of mental health professionals, and no amount of medications or hotlines, will be enough to substantially reduce the stress, anxiety, depression, and suicidal thoughts that so many Americans are now experiencing.

Robert Reich, former secretary of labor during the Clinton administration, is professor of public policy at the University of California at Berkeley. His latest book is “The System: Who Rigged It, How We Fix It.” He blogs at [www.robertreich.substack.com](http://www.robertreich.substack.com).





## JESSE JACKSON



The violence heaped on Palestinians in Gaza cannot be justified, despite Hamas attacks that killed over 1,400 in Israel, including women and children.

### The Humanitarian Disaster in Gaza

The horror now being inflicted in Gaza is a humanitarian disaster, a strategic debacle, and a political nightmare. President Joe Biden has embraced the Israeli government of Benjamin Netanyahu, while urging more consideration for civilian casualties, murmurs that have largely been ignored.

The violence heaped on the Palestinians in Gaza cannot be justified. Yes, this current round of violence was triggered by the criminal terrorist Hamas attacks on Israeli citizens, which killed over 1,400 people, including many women and children. Israeli retaliation – and the desire to eliminate Hamas – is understandable. But now

that retaliation has left 15,000 dead and counting, including over 6,000 children. Nearly 70% of the Palestinians in Gaza have been displaced from their homes. The cutoff of food, fuel and water, the bombing of hospitals, the blocking of anything close to adequate humanitarian relief has spread hunger, disease and growing casualties. The “pause” that allowed the release of some hostages and the increase in some humanitarian relief was too short and too limited. Now Israel is bombing in the south, the very area that they told Gazans to evacuate to. If Israel’s retaliation is understandable, its strategy has been unspeakable and indefensible.

The humanitarian disaster is a strategic debacle for Israel and for the United States standing at its side. Peoples across the world are taking to the streets, appalled at the violence. Israel and the US stand virtually alone in the United Nations in refusing the call for a ceasefire. The countries in the region are under increasing pressure to intervene. Israel has squandered the sympathy and support that came from Hamas brutal terrorism. The US has moved aircraft carriers into the region and is taking down drones and rockets in an effort to keep the war from expanding. The US too will share in the condemnation and isolation.

This is a political nightmare for President Biden. The moral outrage will grow as the horror continues. Protests will spread.

Efforts to suppress the protests will lead more to join them.

More and more Americans – particularly the young, people of color, and increasingly women – will grow appalled and ashamed at the administration’s support of the horror.

Biden and his aides regularly call on Israel to respect the laws of war, even as they oppose a ceasefire. Calling for restraint while shipping 2000 pound bombs to be dropped on one of the most crowded places on the earth makes the administration look foolish or dishonest.

The political cost in this country is growing. Donald Trump, the likely Republican nominee, now leads Biden in early polls, even as his rants disclose his authoritarian plans. Americans must be roused once more to defeat the threat posed by Trump in the election. That will take a major mobilization and big turnout particularly among the young, people of color and women – the very constituencies most outraged by Gaza. The longer the violence lasts, the greater the toll in dead and wounded, the more citizens will join in demanding a ceasefire and peace.

I am old enough to remember 1968. Lyndon Johnson, heartsick over Vietnam and the way the war was destroying his Great Society, chose not to run for re-election. Hubert Humphrey, LBJ’s vice president, stumped for the nomination, while

refusing to call for an end to the war.

Richard Nixon grabbed the opportunity to present himself as the peace candidate, claiming to have a secret initiative that would end the war. After the brutal beating of demonstrators in Chicago to protest the Democratic Convention, many young people and people of conscience flocked to support the insurgent candidates, Eugene McCarthy and Bobby Kennedy. When Humphrey won the nomination anyway, many stayed home, refusing to vote for him.

Humphrey lost the election in 1968 by less than 500,000 votes. He lost by the measure of our despair. If the violence continues in Gaza, Joe Biden too will face the same despair.

It is time for citizens across the country to demand a ceasefire, and to demand that the administration tell the Israelis to stop the bombing, open Gaza up to humanitarian assistance, and negotiate about how to bring a broader peace to the region. The Palestinians in Gaza have paid a terrible price for the terror attack orchestrated by Hamas. Now it is time to stop the violence and begin the search for peace.

*Rev. Jesse Jackson led the Rainbow PUSH Coalition for 51 years, but he can still be reached c/o the Coalition, 930 E 50th St., Chicago, IL 60615.*

*Email [jjackson@rainbowpush.org](mailto:jjackson@rainbowpush.org). Follow him on Twitter @RevJJackson.*

## Keeping the Line To Heaven

*In Navajo land’s Monument Valley, the people look to Father Sun for harmony, something often hard to find on a reservation*

By JOSEPH B. ATKINS

MONUMENT VALLEY, Navajo Nation, Utah – Navajo guide, philosopher, mystic, musician Duffy Holiday points to the ground and then stretches his hands toward the sky as he explains Navajo thinking to the eight non-Indians standing around his makeshift guide truck.

“We are connected,” he tells them. “At the end of our toes, we have these swirls, and that is how we are connected to the Earth.” Then he opens the palms of his hands—“See these swirls?”—and reaches toward the sky. “We are connected to the heavens like that. So when we are standing, we are standing to the east.”

My wife Suzanne and I met Duffy Holiday during a recent 17-day, 4,400-mile road trip across the Great American West. We traveled from Oxford, Mississippi, across the Mississippi River and Arkansas into the Great Plains of Oklahoma and Kansas, stopping in Pawhuska, Oklahoma, at the museum dedicated to the great Western character actor Ben Johnson, and on to a wedding in Golden, Colorado, where we also visited Buffalo Bill’s gravesite.

Then we traveled through the Arches, the Painted Desert, Monument Valley, the north rim of the Grand Canyon, and Zion National Park in Utah and Arizona before stopping to visit friends in Mesquite, Ne-

vada. Through the Mohave Desert, we drove en route to Los Angeles and Palm Springs. On the road back through Arizona, New Mexico, Texas, and Oklahoma, we took every chance we got to drive Route 66, the Mother Road of the Joads, Tod and Buz, Jack Kerouac, Bobby Troup, Nat King Cole, and the Rolling Stones.

The beauty of the Great American West is breathtaking, and amid the vastness and seeming emptiness of all those mountains, mesas, buttes, bluffs, plateaus, and deserts you find not only millions of years of earthen history but a very important history of the these United States as well.

Some of that history is etched in Duffy Holiday’s sun-darkened face. The grandson of one of the Navajo tribe’s legendary code-talkers (who developed a secret code of communication during World War II that the Japanese could not break), he’s a proud man who makes a point to contrast the Navajo sense of family and community with Western man’s strident individualism.

Also speaking to that history are the small communities that dot the Navajo Nation—a reservation the size of West Virginia that stretches across Utah, Arizona, and New Mexico. In an overall population of 400,000, 160,000 of whom live on the reservation, the Navajo Nation has 13,500 reservation families who live without electricity—and thus no lights and no refrigeration—and 17,000 homes have no running water.

These and other grim statistics, reported by journalist Elyse Wild in a recent edition of the *Navajo-Hopi Observer*, are reminders of centuries-old greed and lack of concern toward the American Indian. The unemployment rate on the reservation is 50%. Half of all adult Navajos suffers from Type 2 diabetes. Their mortality rate—fueled by heart disease—is 31% higher than that of the rest of the nation.

With such statistics, of course, come drugs, suicide, domestic violence, crime,

and the other ills that always attach themselves to poverty.

“Lack of electricity exacerbates disparities that have long had a foothold in Indian Country,” Wild writes, “driven by a federal legacy of forced removal and assimilation, the US government’s neglect of treaty agreements, and systemic apathy for Native Americans living on reservations.”

The sordid trail of broken agreements with American Indians by the US government is a shameful national legacy that continues today in our nation’s foreign relations—witness the empty boasts of protecting democracy as the CIA supported dictatorial coups in Latin America, the broken promises to Russia not to expand NATO eastward that led to the current war in Ukraine.

The Navajos are resilient, however, a point of pride for Duffy Holiday and his people. “In Navajo, we have this kinship,” Navajo Tribal Utility Authority (NTUA) official Deenise Becenti told Wild. “We are related to one another through these clan systems. A lot of people I am related to and people that I know don’t have electricity. That is part of what keeps me here.”

A four-year-old “Light Up Navajo” program has brought electricity to 662 families thus far, including 159 just this past summer. Light Up Navajo is a joint operation between the NTUA and a coalition of non-profit, community-owned utilities called the American Public Power Association. Electrical workers from across the country volunteer to travel to Navajo Nation to help build lines that can finally bring electricity and refrigeration to families on the reservation.

When Franklin D. Roosevelt pushed through the Rural Electrification Act of 1936 to help the poor in regions such as Appalachia, it excluded Indian tribes. Even today, political resistance to Navajo pleas for such basics as water rights can be fierce, particularly in Republican-dominated Ari-

zona, which requires a maze of bureaucratic hurdles to be crossed.

At a time in the United States when newspapers everywhere have either died or shrunk to near worthlessness, this old journalist found two worthy newspapers in Navajo Nation—the *Navajo-Hopi Observer* and *Navajo Times*. In the editions I read were well-written, well-researched, long-form stories that delved deep into the issues that affect Navajos today, stories also with a keen sense of history.

For example, Wild’s story on efforts to bring electricity to residents of Monument Valley included a poignant reminder of a past that included the forced migration in 1863 of 10,000 Navajos from their home in the Canyon de Chelly to Fort Sumner some 300 miles away in what is today New Mexico. In what writer Nicky Leach has called “the first concentration camp on American soil,” these Navajo were held in slave-like conditions without clean water, provisions, or proper shelter. Many died before a public outcry forced the US government to allow them to return home in 1868.

As I scanned the vast and mystical beauty of this amazing landscape—made famous in all those John Ford Westerns starring John Wayne and Ben Johnson—I pondered the story of our American nation and of the Navajo Nation. It’s a sweeping story of courage, resilience, and sacrifice, but also one of the suffering, sadness, and tragedy that violence, selfishness, racism, and greed make inevitable.

*Joseph B. Atkins is a veteran journalist and professor emeritus of journalism at the University of Mississippi. Among his books are “Covering for the Bosses: Labor and the Southern Press” (University Press of Mississippi, 2008), and the novel “Casey’s Last Chance” (Sartoris Literary Group, 2015). His blog is <http://www.laborssouth.blogspot.com> and he can be reached at [jbatkins3@gmail.com](mailto:jbatkins3@gmail.com).*

## Rep. James Comer’s Newest ‘Smoking Gun’ Debunked in Record Time

By WALTER EINENKEL

Rep. James Comer (R-Ky.) put a considerable amount of product in his hair Dec. 4 before recording a video claiming to have new smoking-gun evidence of President Joe Biden’s corruption. Comer, who chairs the House Oversight Committee, dramatically announced that “Hunter Biden’s legal team and the White House’s media allies claim Hunter’s corporate entities never

made payments directly to Joe Biden. We can officially add this latest talking point to the list of lies. The House Oversight Committee released subpoenaed bank records that showed Hunter Biden’s business entity, Owasco PC, made direct monthly payments to Joe Biden.”

Sounds devastating. Right-wing media outlets excitedly pushed out the details, specifically that Hunter Biden set up “recurring payments” of \$1,380 in late 2018. Besides being an extraordinarily small amount of money in the grand scheme of alleged corruption, the thinnest digging revealed that Joe Biden was not president in 2018. In fact, deeper investigation reveals that Biden wasn’t even in any political office at the time!

Receipts were then posted that revealed Hunter Biden was paying his father back for

helping to cover car payments while Hunter was in between jobs. The three monthly payments totaled \$4,140.

Selling out our country for three monthly payments of \$1,380, eh? Comer’s list of embarrassments and Ohio Rep. Jim Jordan’s disastrous failure of an impeachment inquiry continues to float about as high as a whoopee cushion filled with water. In fact, every single smoking gun these guys announce seems to prove that President Joe Biden has been a very supportive father. He sure hasn’t helped his son-in-law get \$2 billion in Saudi money, but we all can’t be that good at “winning.”

*Walter Eimenkel is a writer for Daily Kos, where this appeared.*

## Ratcliff..

*Continued from page 11*

Richard Nixon was a crook, and this country doesn’t need to be threatened and divided to scare us to vote for one political opponent or another. Let us use the anniversary of Lenin’s death to remind us of what the alternatives to Democracy are and how terrible they could be. On Guard.

*Marc G. Ratcliff is a freelance writer in Forney, Texas. He is a graduate of Texas A&M University at Commerce, Texas, with a B.S. Degree in Technology and History. Email [marcratcliff59@gmail.com](mailto:marcratcliff59@gmail.com).*



## Dangerous Ideas Need Stifling

Oh for a scythe for the political garden, to weed out the dangerous ideas that are spreading, much like kudzu spreads in our yards! A minority of government-hating, or people who profess to hate government (they are not ceding their home interest deductions, their Medicare, their public schools) are glomming onto ideas that we should stifle, before they take root. Dangerous ideas do take root, subtly, inexorably. Think of Nazism, which started in a 1923 Munich beer hall, cheered on by angry drinkers.

Here are three awful ideas that will yield only misery.

First, dropping Obamacare, a.k.a. the Affordable Care Act. Obamacare has not been the overwhelming success of Medicare. It does not cover everybody, leaves key coverage decisions to states. But today swatches of the country, thanks to Obamacare, with its attendant reliance on states to expand Medicaid, have insurance. Critics may criticize that Obamacare is not perfect, does not cover everybody, penalizes the obese and smokers, does not cover abortion, has co-pays, is expensive ... but criticizing is the purview of critics. And the statistics of coverage merit praise. Ninety-two percent of the US population was insured in 2022, up

from 84.4% in 2010, when Obama signed the Affordable Care Act into law.

But coverage varies dramatically by states. The Affordable Care Act yielded some decisions to the states; and here states — blue and red — have shown their stuff. The freedom-preaching, government-hating states leave far more people without insurance than their blue counterparts. South Carolina, former Governor Niki Haley's domain, has 9% uninsured; Florida, the domain of Governor DeSantis, has 11.2% uninsured. Texas ranks the highest in uninsured, at 16.6%. The states with the fewest uninsured are Massachusetts at 2.4%, Hawaii at 3.6% and Vermont at 3.9%. Their not-so-secret secret: activist governors and legislators who expanded Medicaid to fill the gap left by Obamacare. We could scrap Obamacare — the rallying cry of former President Donald Trump. That would leave a lot of Americans uninsured. Why in the name of insane zealotry would anybody want to do that?

Next, dropping compulsory childhood vaccinations. Childhood vaccinations have long been accepted, starting with the polio vaccine. Years ago, when children were dying, ending up in iron lungs, or paralyzed, families welcomed the vaccines. There was, and is, no cure for polio, a contagious virus that doesn't heed the usual safeguards of sanitation or nutrition. Why would we want to eliminate the need for compulsory vaccination, knowing that one unvaccinated child, from zealously "anti-vac" parents, might spread the disease to other children? We know about herd immunity, where a small minority of unvaccinated people will still be protected. But do we want to risk that? To put others at risk? Ditto for pneumonia, measles (no cure, but a statistical chance of damage), diphtheria, typhoid ...

Vegan diets, Bible study, fresh air — all may help children live happier lives, but will not protect them from infectious diseases as effectively as vaccines.

Finally, encouraging the use of fossil fuels. "The 'climate deniers' reason: today is OK, probably tomorrow, so why fear catastrophe when the oil wells are gushing, our cars are running, the lights are on, and the economy depends on fossil fuels? Presidential candidate Vivek Ramaswamy calls climate change a "hoax." Trump suggests that the ocean will rise by 1/100th of an inch over the next 350 years — giving some lucky landowners more seafront property. Florida Governor DeSantis wants to expand the production of fossil fuels (and wants to eliminate mandates for electric vehicles). Former Indiana Governor Pence warned of "radical environmentalists."

Discount the politically expedient rhetoric. "Climate change," global warming, "rising sea levels" are real, a verifiable truth for scientists. And public health researchers have linked the mercurial shifts in temperature to increased cases of asthma, lung disease, food and water-borne illnesses, and pest diseases like Lyme disease and West Nile virus. Fortunately, many politicians concede the reality; e.g. Chris Christie and Nikki Haley both concede the planet is warming, and that we must act, though they and other politicians disagree on the urgency. When the "climate-hoaxers" overpower the voices of reason, however, we will suffer.

Awful ideas are hard to stifle. They spread because the complacent among us ignore the dangers.

*Joan Retsinas is a sociologist who writes about health care in Providence, R.I. Email joan.retsinas@gmail.com.*

## Congress Finally Agrees on George Santos

By SAM URETSKY

POLITICIAN, n. An eel on the fundamental mud upon which the superstructure of organized society is reared

POLITICS, n. strife of interests masquerading as a contest of principles. The conduct of public affairs for private advantage.

— Ambrose Bierce ("The Devil's Dictionary")

The *New York Times* began its report, "The expulsion of George Santos from the House on Friday, Dec. 1, after a year shaped by audacious lies and outright frauds, ended his 11-month congressional tenure."

Mr. Santos, a New York Republican, is scheduled to stand trial next year on charges that he defrauded donors, lied to election officials and stole unemployment benefits. The list of charges is impressive, to the point where the decision to expel Mr. Santos is one of the few bipartisan bills passed by the House of Representatives this year, taking its place with:

- H.R. 4755, the Privacy Enhancing

Technology Research Act: This bill directs the National Science Foundation to establish a program to support research on privacy-enhancing technologies.

- H.R. 4877, the Abandoned Well Remediation Research and Development Act: This bill establishes a program to support research on the remediation of abandoned oil and gas wells.

- H.R. 3915, the Aviation Weather Improvement Act: This bill directs the Federal Aviation Administration to develop a plan to improve the accuracy and timeliness of aviation weather forecasts.

There are more. We should not forget H.R. 6245, "Holding Iranian Leaders Accountable Act." This bill would require the President to report on the assets of certain Iranian government officials and terrorist leaders and requires the publication of those assets in a report. Also H.R. 6370, the "OFAC Licensure for Investigators Act." This bill requires the Treasury to develop a pilot program, administered by OFAC, that partners with private-sector firms such as blockchain analytics firms and financial intelligence units within banks." It's not clear what that means, but you could look it up.

There is a saying, frequently attributed to Mark Twain: "Everybody talked about the weather, nobody seemed to do anything about it." Now we know that an activist House of Representatives is doing something,

or at least telling the FAA to improve forecasting.

Mr. Santos is a New York Republican, who ran as a fantasy offering a biography that would fit a Marvel comic book hero. It wasn't fair to his constituents. New Yorkers, along with New Englanders, believe in politics as an honorable occupation. Other regions have a more realistic view of politics and politicians, and are rarely embarrassed by their convictions, or those they elect.

It's interesting to look at the politicians running for the Democratic nomination — sort of. President Biden has been a good president, probably better than we deserve, but his polling is disappointing: approval 38.2%, disapproval 58.8%. This is discouraging. He is in his eighth decade, and shows it, but more than that, he has served in difficult times, in a divided nation.

Still, he seems likely to win nomination. Robert F. Kennedy Jr. started out to contest the nomination, but is now running as an independent. A Harvard-CAPS Harris survey found that 52% of respondents said they have a favorable opinion of Kennedy, while 27% had an unfavorable opinion of him. Kennedy had the highest favorability rating of 25 points. He is running on the ghosts of his father and uncle — and more likely, of the memory of Ralph Nader.

Third parties don't do well in a two-party system. The Annenberg Public Policy Center

has a three-part series about Mr. Kennedy's claim that vaccines are harmful. While Mr. Kennedy claims that he is not anti-vaccine, the report seems well documented.

Gavin Newsom, Governor of California, is a candidate in waiting. He claims he supports President Biden, and perhaps is waiting for the President to find an excuse to withdraw. On the other hand, he debated Florida Governor Ron DeSantis, and took a trip to Iowa, which is something done by presidential hopefuls and farm equipment salesmen.

Dean Phillips, a Democratic representative from Minnesota is officially running for the nomination. From his web site he seems like a good representative and is on a mission to restore Americans' faith in government. He seems like a good guy, if anyone outside of Minnesota knows whom he is.

Another declared candidate in the Democratic primary is Marianne Williamson, a writer and former preacher in the Unity Church who has never held elective office, although she ran for Congress in California as an independent in 2014 and finished fourth. She ran for president in 2020 as a Democrat and eventually dropped out, endorsing Bernie Sanders. She is perhaps best known as a frequent guest on Oprah Winfrey's talk show.

*Sam Uretsky is a writer and pharmacist living in Louisville, Ky.*

*Email sam.uretsky@gmail.com*

## Climate Conference Offers Little Hope

By FRANK LINGO

A climate conference set in a country whose vast wealth is entirely from oil starts with one strike against it. Add 1,300 participating fossil fuel lobbyists and that's strike two.

I'm not saying the COP28 gathering in Dubai will strike out on its climate at-bat but with another week to go (as of this writing on Dec. 5), batters who tried to get a hit off Mariano Rivera (greatest relief pitcher in baseball history) had a better chance.

Three decades after this annual United Nations-sponsored event began, results have been mediocre at best. A plethora of pledges and promises have often gone unfulfilled. Even if affluent countries like France, Germany and the United States are sincere in their intentions to cut emissions and compensate poor countries which suffer the worst effects of climate chaos, the wealthy nations chronically fall short of both goals. And we're short of time to be short of goals.

Conference of the Parties was a poor title for the convention from the outset. They could change it to Climate of the Planet and keep the same initials. There are 170 countries represented, and most of them will be

victims of the climate crisis without being beneficiaries of its destruction like Dubai with prodigious profits.

The conference president, Sultan Al-Jaber, also heads up Abu Dhabi National Oil Company (ADNOC). Please insert joke here. OK, I'll make one. You know about putting the fox in charge of the hen house? This is like putting all the hens in the fox house.

Global Witness, a London-based watch group, says the Sultan's company made a teensy mistake in its official pollution figures last year. It seems that their 650 million barrels of oil and 40 billion cubic meters of natural gas sold in 2022 produced 14 TIMES more carbon emissions than they reported. So sure, let's put THAT guy in charge of achieving the world's wish of cutting emissions.

"Fossil fuels account for 90% of the carbon emissions that are heating the planet and inflicting misery and loss on millions of people," said Patrick Galey of Global Witness. "While conceding publicly that a livable future means cutting all emissions, Al-Jaber's firm is refusing to acknowledge the vast majority of its product emissions as its own."

Adding insult to injury, the BBC reported that Sultan Al-Jaber planned to use the climate summit to make fossil fuel deals with at least 15 nations.

"These allegations are false, not true, incorrect and not accurate," said Al-Jaber.

Wow, a quadruple negative! If a double negative means a positive in grammar, then a quad must be absolute affirmation.

The BBC also noted that the Director of the International Energy Agency called the conference a "moment of truth" for the oil companies, and that they must choose between being part of the problem or part of the solution. Seems like they're choosing a moment of untruth because those fossil fools were responsible for only 1% of global investment in renewable energy last year, despite copious commercials on cable to greenwash their image.

Most attendees to COP28 are deeply devoted to sustainable solutions of the climate crisis. Even Pope Francis was planning

### Anderson...

*Continued from page 13*

funds provide high-quality services with broadly shared benefits," notes the letter, signed by Americans for Financial Reform Education Fund, the Institute for Policy Studies, Communications Workers of America, Jobs to Move America, Take on Wall Street, and United for Respect.

The OMB is expected to finalized changes to the Uniform Guidance in early 2024.

Back in the 1980s, Reagan's efforts to crush the anti-Apartheid divestment move-

ment ultimately failed. With demands for sanctions mounting, Congress passed a law in 1986 that gave cover to this effective means of solidarity with the South African trade unionists and others who successfully brought down the racist regime.

By scrapping the remnants of Reagan's ideologically driven contracting standards, the Biden administration can build on this proud history of using the public purse for the greater good.

Now to get a climate victory, it's gonna take a grand slam with two outs and two strikes in the bottom of the ninth. I wouldn't bet on a homer but I hope I'm wrong.

*Frank Lingo, based in Lawrence, Kansas, is a former columnist for the Kansas City Star and author of the novel "Earth Vote."*

*Email: lingofrank@gmail.com*

*See his website: Greenbeat.world*

Sarah Anderson directs the *Global Economy Project* and co-edits *Inequality.org* at the *Institute for Policy Studies*.



## WAYNE O'LEARY

# Refugee Roulette in Israel

As the latest Arab-Israeli bloodletting wends its way toward what will almost certainly be an unsatisfactory conclusion, the war's principal collateral damage, the Gaza populace trapped under relentless bombardment in Israel's "open-air prison," have generally been treated as incidental to the conflict. Who they are and why they exist in a kind of political netherworld are questions that need to be addressed.

Gaza, or more properly, the Gaza Strip, is a slim, mostly desert piece of land 25 miles long and 7.5 miles wide, fronting the Mediterranean Sea on the west, Egypt on the south and Israel proper on the north and east. Within this narrow space reside slightly over two million Palestinians, roughly half of the Arab population living under occupation inside the broad confines of Israel. The remaining half, another two million, reside on the so-called West Bank (of the Jordan River), bordering the Kingdom of Jordan.

Altogether, these subjects of forced occupation make up two-thirds of Israel's total Palestinian population. The other third is comprised of Arabs who hold a tenuous Israeli citizenship. These Arab Israelis can vote, but have limited landholding rights and no open-ended "right of return" from abroad, as do Jewish citizens.

According to a *New York Times* report (10/12/23), an overwhelming majority of the Gazan Palestinians are people who ei-

ther are, or are descended from, those dispossessed and expelled from their lands, homes and villages during the war of Israel's founding in 1948. They mostly live in eight large refugee camps consisting of makeshift buildings scattered throughout Gaza, where they've been effectively interned for more than two generations. Much the same is true of the West Bank Palestinians, though they exist under less dire circumstances in terms of crowding and poverty.

Gaza itself was originally Egyptian, a result of the peace settlement ending the 1948 war. It was then seized and occupied by Israel, along with the Jordanian West Bank, during the 1967 Six Day War pitting Israelis against their Arab neighbors. Israel continued to occupy these conquered territories in defiance of United Nations Resolution 242 (calling for a reversion to the pre-war status quo), but in 2005 it did grant Gaza, a resource-poor and almost worthless piece of real estate, limited self-government.

Under purported self-rule, Gaza continued to resemble an occupied colonial possession rather than an independent state, characterized as it was (and is) by a restrictive separation wall replete with Israeli checkpoints, limited permissible contact with the outside world, and a total lack of economic or diplomatic autonomy. In 2006, visiting ex-President Jimmy Carter described Gaza as being effectively "strangled." This was the Eden-like garden in which Hamas blossomed after winning localized power in 2007.

Gaza was the end of the line (along with the West Bank) for Palestinian refugees, whose trek into political purgatory began with the *Nakba* (catastrophe) of 1948, when 60% of Palestinians fled, or were expelled from, their former homes. In recent years, a generation of "revisionist" Israeli historians far enough removed from actual events has been able to look beyond the celebratory romanticism surrounding the founding of the Jewish state and objec-

tively examine the roots of the Arab refugee story that lays at the heart of today's Middle East problem.

Especially valuable is the work of Benny Morris ("The Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem, 1947-1949," 1987) and Tom Segev ("One Palestine, Complete: Jews and Arabs Under the British Mandate," 1999). The essence of their findings is that Israel's refugee dilemma derives from a deliberate policy choice made by its pioneering Zionist leaders well before established statehood. Further, it was based on mythology — that the land of Palestine was essentially empty, a neglected, underdeveloped patrimony awaiting "secular redemption," as the Zionist ideal phrased it.

If Palestine was not, in fact, empty — there were over 1.2 million Arabs inhabiting it in 1947, the year before Israel's creation — it would be made empty to accommodate incoming Jewish settlers, especially (after 1945) Holocaust survivors. Starting as early as the 1930s, the notion of "disappearing" the Arabs from the land (Segev's wording) began to percolate; the process would be carried out gently at first (through aggressive purchase of native property), then more forcibly, and in the end violently.

Though Arabs and Jews had lived together in Palestine since the initial arrival of Zionist settlers in the late 19th century (many towns and cities had mixed populations), elements of the Jewish Agency, the Zionist government-in-waiting, sought by the 1940s a demographically homogeneous state via "Judaization" of the mostly agricultural Arab lands.

Initially, it was thought, territorial monopoly would serve to make any proposed UN partition of Palestine unnecessary and irrelevant; the Arabs would be gone. Later on, an eventual return of displaced Palestinians (such as that proposed by UN Resolution 194 in December 1948) would be rendered impractical or impossible by "facts

on the ground" — an approach still used on the West Bank.

This was the controversial concept of "transfer" endorsed by the Jewish Agency Executive, including such eminent leaders as David Ben-Gurion, Israel's future first president. Morris quotes one of them as affirming "there is no room in the country for both peoples." If the British wouldn't carry out a transfer or expulsion policy under the Balfour Declaration, the new Jewish state would. The 1948 war establishing Israel allowed this to happen as a by-product.

Sanctioned tactics of removal employed by the official Israeli militia the Haganah (predecessor to the IDF) under so-called Plan D included starving out Arab urban centers, levelling captured Arab villages (350 in all, or a third of the total), and inducing the flight of resident populations through fear and intimidation. Less official means included outright terror tactics adopted by such organizations as future Prime Minister Menachem Begin's Irgun, made infamous by its deliberate massacre of an entire Arab village, Deir Yassin, containing 250 inhabitants, in April 1948.

The end result was a mass exodus of Palestinian Arabs out of territory earmarked for the new Israel and their conversion into refugees, which most remain. (Numbers vary, but Morris accepts a 1949 British Foreign Office estimate of 760,000 total exiles.) Israel's next step, implemented with conspicuously little American objection, was to reject every postwar UN demand for a Palestinian right-of-return, thereby blocking refugee repatriation and making Palestinian banishment and marginalization permanent.

This is where things stand today, awaiting the righting of a historical wrong.

*Wayne O'Leary is a writer in Orono, Maine, specializing in political economy. He holds a doctorate in American history and is the author of two prizewinning books.*

## Kissinger Made the Biggest Mistakes in US History

By JOEL D. JOSEPH

Secretary of State Henry Kissinger was one of the biggest failures in US history. His actions as Secretary of State undermined the strength of the United States and violated the laws of this nation. Kissinger made China the world power that it is today. In 1972 China was a weak agricultural nation with 9% of the GDP of the United States. Now China rivals the US in economic and military power. In 1972 we did not trade with China. By opening the door to Chinese trade, China, with its cheap labor, has transferred wealth from America's middle class to China. By eliminating five million manufacturing jobs from us, China hollowed out American society. We were told that trading with China would make China more democratic—that was the big lie. China is more autocratic than ever, and more powerful than ever.

Henry Kissinger threatened to sue me in 1992. I was publisher of "The Men We Left Behind: Henry Kissinger, the Politics of Deceit and the Tragic Fate of POWs After the Vietnam War," by Mark Sauter and Jim Sanders. Before the book was published, I sent Secretary Kissinger a copy of the book and asked if he disputed any of the factual material in it. Kissinger, without specifying his objections, said that if I published the book that he would file suit. I published that book, it received rave reviews and Secretary Kissinger did not file suit. The main thrust of the book claims that Kissinger knowingly left American POWs behind in Vietnam.

The full tragedy of the POW-MIA cover-up was revealed in the book. This exposed details that the Senate Committee left buried in the rubble of the investigation: the Nixon Administration knowingly abandoned American POWs, Dick Cheney, Brent Scowcroft, Henry Kissinger and George H.W. Bush had all played roles in hiding the truth.

Despite countless denials by American officials, the authors provide new evidence

that Vietnam War MIAs were smuggled out of the Asian jungles and taken to live out their lives in Siberian exile in Russia.

In 1991, the Senate Select Committee on POW-MIA Affairs heard from more than 60 witnesses and released reams of documents, many of them had been previously classified as top secret. This is where Henry Kissinger comes in. As President Nixon's secret negotiator, Kissinger was the chief architect of America's most controversial peace agreement, the one that ended the Vietnam War.

Since that agreement was signed in January 1973, the German-born immigrant has never ceased being the villain for critics, both on the right and on the left. Many thought that Kissinger sold out America and its fighting men in the field. For Kissinger, the proud winner of a Nobel Peace Prize for the Vietnam accord, this was too much to bear.

Senator John Kerry, undeterred, shot back that it wasn't his committee, but two members of the Nixon administration, former defense secretaries James Schlesinger and Melvin Laird, who made the most damning accusations against their former colleagues. Both men testified before Kerry's committee that top Nixon administration officials, including Henry Kissinger, had strong reason to believe, if not hard evidence, that American prisoners were left behind in Laos and probably Vietnam in 1973.

The committee based its conclusions on these indicators:

- Intelligence reports of Americans known to be held in captivity before the repatriation but were not among the 591 returnees.

- Claims until recently by officials of the Pathet Lao, the Hanoi-linked communist rulers of Laos, that they were holding American prisoners.

- A Pentagon estimate before repatriation that 40 Americans were held in Laos. Twelve were returned.

- The debriefing of returnees, who identified more than 70 fellow prisoners who were not repatriated.

The Senate report laid much of the blame for the claimed abandonment of POWs on former President Nixon, who signed the peace treaty that ended the U.S.

involvement in the war and led to the return of the 591 American prisoners. Among these were Sen. John McCain, R-Ariz., who was on the Senate panel.

The report notes found that Nixon was told by his national security adviser, Henry Kissinger, that U.S. intelligence officers believed the list of American POWs provided by Laos shortly before the prisoner exchange was incomplete, but ordered the POW swap to go ahead anyway.

For the first time in the history of the Peace Prize, two members resigned from the Nobel Committee in protest. Tho, Vietnam's leader, rejected the award, telling Kissinger that peace had not been restored in South Vietnam. Kissinger wrote to the Nobel Committee that he accepted the award "with humility," and donated the entire proceeds to the children of American service members killed or missing in action in Indochina. After the fall of Saigon in 1975, Kissinger attempted to return the Nobel Peace Prize.

Kissinger's dirty work went far beyond Southeast Asia. Along with Nixon, he backed the brutal effort of the military government of the former West Pakistan to suppress Bengali nationalists in the former East Pakistan, in what is now Bangladesh. A study estimated the death toll in that conflict at 269,000 people, with millions of refugees pushed into neighboring India. Writing for *The Atlantic*, the historian Gary J. Bass wrote that Kissinger ignored a congressional prohibition against sending arms to Pakistan. Kissinger brushed aside warnings from White House aides and lawyers at the State Department and the Pentagon that it would be illegal to transfer weapons to Pakistan. In 1971, with Attorney General John Mitchell present, Nixon asked Kissinger, "Is it really so much against our law?" Kissinger admitted that it was. Not bothering to concoct a legal theory about executive power, Nixon and Kissinger simply went ahead and did it anyway. "Hell," Nixon said, "we've done worse."

*Joel D. Joseph is a lawyer, economist and author of 15 books, including "Black Mondays: Worst Decisions of the Supreme Court" and "Inequality in America: 10 Causes and 10 Cures." Email joeldjoseph@gmail.com.*

## Hey House GOP, Keep Hands Off Social Security and Medicare!

**House Speaker Mike Johnson knows how important Social Security is to hard-working Americans, so he has devised an accountability-free way to gut it.**

By JAN SCHAKOWSKY

Over a decade ago, I served on the National Commission on Fiscal Responsibility and Reform, better known as the Bowles-Simpson Commission. That commission failed, but not before its cochairs tried to make deep cuts to the American people's hard-earned Social Security and Medicare benefits.

Now, House Speaker Mike Johnson (R-La.) is digging up the old playbook and wants to create a new commission modeled after Bowles-Simpson. This week, the House Budget Committee will hold its second hearing in two months on this idea.

Johnson is demanding a commission designed to slash the entire federal budget, including Social Security—even though Social Security doesn't add even a penny to the deficit. It is legally excluded from the federal budget, self-funded, and can only pay benefits if it has sufficient revenue to cover the cost.

The White House has called the commission idea a death panel for Social Security. The AARP, AFL-CIO, Strengthen Social Security Coalition, National Organization for Women, and over 100 other organizations agree. What's more, Speaker Johnson happily agrees. That's why the commission that Johnson and the Budget Committee are considering would vote on

*Continued on next page*



# Palestinian-Israeli Leader Mansour Abbas Calls for Nonviolent Struggle

## Says Hamas's Oct. 7 Atrocity Blasphemed Against Islamic Values

By JUAN COLE

ANN ARBOR – They don't often get a lot of attention in the US media, but the 2.1 million Israeli citizens of Palestinian heritage, 21% of the population, have also been victims of Hamas's October 7 atrocities and of the subsequent political fallout. They are furious and outraged at Hamas, whose terror gangs harmed members of their community, as well. They also feel, however, an increased surveillance and restrictions by the Israeli state.

Most of what I call Palestinian-Israelis (on the model of "Italian-Americans") are relatively secular-minded people. The community produces a disproportionate number of medical and other professionals. Some estimates suggest that 47% of Israeli physicians are of Palestinian heritage, 48% of pharmacists, and 17% of nurses. There is also a Muslim fundamentalist current, exemplified in the Israeli parliament by the United Arab List, led by former dentist Mansour Abbas. Although many of its members can trace their intellectual heritage to the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood, they have no formal ties with it and are autonomous. (Hamas also started out, in 1987, as an offshoot of the Brotherhood, but it has veered toward an idiosyncratic form of radicalism.)

The United Arab List is the only Palestinian-Israeli party that has been allowed to serve in an Israeli government. The Israeli

channel i24 reported that Mansour Abbas said, "I and the rest of the party members condemned the horrific massacre in the south from the first moment. There is not and will never be a place among our ranks for any party that denies or downplays the seriousness of deeds that contradict our values and our Islamic religion. The United List strongly opposes targeting innocent people regardless of their identity, Arabs or Jews alike." When one member of his party questioned allegations that Hamas guerrillas had slaughtered children and raped women, Abbas ripped the bark off her in public and asked her to resign. The member, Iman Khatib Yasin, apologized profusely.

In mid-November Abbas gave a BBC interview laying out his position, denouncing Oct. 7 as a crime against civilians and as a horrible mistake. He called for an about-face: "Even though it is impossible to bring back the civilians who were killed, then at least return the civilians who were kidnapped, especially children, women and the elderly."

He said he recognized that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict had been going on for decades and that the issue had been ignored under the Netanyahu-led governments of Israel, but said that the long duration of the struggle was no justification for murdering innocents.

The leader of the United Arab List, the BBC reported, called on Palestinian factions to reevaluate their performance and the path they had chosen. He said that what happened on Oct. 7 constituted a major blow that harmed the justice of the Palestinian cause and even "put the entire Palestinian people into great danger, the price of which the children of Gaza are now paying."

Abbas argued that the Palestinians inside Israel, who speak both Hebrew and Arabic, are best positioned to proffer wisdom on possible future solutions to the conflict.

Abbas has consistently called for a ceasefire and political negotiations.

On Nov. 30, Mansour Abbas sat down for an interview with CNN's Wolf Blitzer, in which he called on Palestinians to give up the model of armed struggle, which he said has brought catastrophe to Gaza. He called on the fighters in Gaza to throw down their arms and to seek peaceful and political means of joining with the PLO to achieve a Palestinian state side by side with Israel. (Although the PLO recognized Israel in the 1993 Oslo Accords, Hamas has never done so.) He reiterated that the butchery of Oct. 7 contradicted basic Islamic values. (Muslim jurists do not allow the killing of innocent noncombatants in warfare.) He said violence by Palestinian armed groups had failed, and that the Palestinian people had been sacrificed as a result.

Abbas's position provoked heated exchanges and controversy on Arab social media.

As Israel began bombing again on Dec. 1, Abbas posted to his Facebook page, "Sadly, the truce is over and the war has returned and civilians of children and women will pay a heavy price. In the past days and weeks we have had dialogues with several local, regional and international political and media parties aimed at conveying an essential message, to urge and invite the different parties to launch a real political vision and initiative, addressing the demand for a ceasefire, an end to the conflict and peace between Israelis and Palestinians. It is wrong to continue conversations and whispers about future solutions in closed rooms. Instead, it is necessary to put forward political initiatives that address the complex situation and give practical and realistic solutions to the war situation and the demand for peace. The Israeli leadership must propose a political path alternative to war, even if it insists on its same declared goals. This is a moral demand and also in the interest of Israel at the level of international public opinion. It is also the duty of the Palestinian leadership and the duty of the faction leaders to set out their vision clear and move from the reaction stage to the initiated po-

litical action, which carries out its moral and national responsibilities. The Palestinian people have paid and are paying a very high price in the lives of their children and women, further away from their ambition of independence and peace with Israel."

Abbas, however, seems to be pretty representative in this regard of the Palestinian-Israelis. Asked in a recent poll if they feel part of Israel, 70% of Palestinian-Israelis answered with a resounding "yes!" This percentage was an over 20-point increase from last May, when only 48% felt that way. If offered citizenship in another country, 60% of Palestinian-Israelis replied that they would reject it to continue to live in Israel. The number of Israelis who want to leave has fallen to about 20%, down from 30% in some earlier polls. That there is only a 10% to 20% spread on this issue between Palestinian-Israelis and Jewish Israelis is pretty surprising.

If the extremist Netanyahu government had united the Palestinians across borders by its attacks on the al-Aqsa mosque complex during the past two Ramadans, Hamas has driven a massive wedge between them. Or maybe it is more accurate to say that Hamas, by its adoption of brutal ISIL-type tactics, has driven a wedge between its militants and ordinary Palestinians everywhere, including in Gaza, where people are desperate for a new leadership. They are hobbled from working toward one by Israel's campaign of ethnic cleansing, displacement, and indiscriminate bombardment, all of which strengthen Hamas.

*Juan Cole is the founder and chief editor of Informed Comment. He is Richard P. Mitchell Professor of History at the University of Michigan. He is author of, among many other books, "Muhammad: Prophet of Peace amid the Clash of Empires" and "Engaging the Muslim World." He blogs at juancole.com, follow him at @jricole or the Informed Comment Facebook Page.*

## Second Cold War Will Have No Winners, Except Arms Makers

By JASON SIBERT

Now that our country is in a second Cold War with the Russia/China orbit, our security depends on a realization of a fact - an unconstrained arms race has no real winners.

Writer Daryl Kimball of the Arms Control Association suggested that "leaders in Beijing, Moscow, and Washington need to engage in nuclear risk reduction talks, negotiate sensible and verifiable reductions of their arsenals, and refrain from building new destabilizing types of weapons rather than proceed down the dangerous path of unconstrained nuclear competition," in his story "We Must Reject Calls for a US Nuclear Buildup."

The final report of the Congressional Commission on the Strategic Posture of the United States suggested that, in response to Russia's nuclear and military behavior and the expected growth of China's nuclear arsenal, the U.S. arsenal should be an arsenal capable of balancing both Russia and China. The bipartisan commission, which

consists of 12 national security insiders, advised that the United States "must be ready to deter and defeat" both adversaries in simultaneous wars, enhance its missile defense capabilities, and significantly bolster its nuclear weapons capabilities, including with new theater-range weapons.

Kimball rightly said that if there is a military conflict between nuclear-armed states, deterrence will have failed, and there will be no "winners." Once nuclear weapons are used in a war between adversaries, there is no guarantee that a nuclear war could be contained. Any decision to increase the number of deployed US strategic nuclear weapons higher than the levels of the New Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty might trigger a dangerous power balancing cycle. As Kimball stated, "It would not enhance deterrence in the face of China's growing nuclear capabilities or Russia's existing capabilities. In response, China could deploy more nuclear weapons on an even wider array of delivery systems, and Russia would seek to match any increases in the U.S. nuclear force."

The U.S. nuclear arsenal includes roughly 1,800 deliverable strategic warheads, 150 sub-strategic warheads, and thousands of warheads in reserve. It goes beyond what is necessary to hold our ad-

versaries in check. U.S. National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan said that "the United States does not need to increase our nuclear forces to outnumber the combined total of our competitors to effectively deter them."

Increasing the number of nuclear weapons or adding new types of nuclear weapons to the U.S. arsenal would also be very expensive - a Congressional Budget Office report in July estimated that the existing U.S. nuclear modernization program would cost a staggering \$756 billion from 2023 to 2032. The commission's recommendations, if pursued, would require hundreds of billions of dollars more.

The commission's report generally supported US efforts to engage China and Russia in nuclear arms control, but it doesn't pay enough attention to the importance of strong US leadership on arms control, as it's a critical element of an effective national security strategy, said Kimball. The Biden administration's 2022 Nuclear Posture Review states that "mutual, verifiable nuclear arms control offers the most effective, durable, and responsible path to reduce the role of nuclear weapons in our strategy and prevent their use in preventing an unconstrained nuclear arms race."

According to National Security Advi-

sor Jake Sullivan, the United States is ready to engage in nuclear arms control diplomacy with Russia and other nuclear-armed members of the nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty. He emphasized that "rather than waiting to resolve all of our bilateral differences, the United States is ready to engage Russia now to manage nuclear risks and develop a post-2026 arms control framework."

Kimball stated a desired plan for the Cold War currently raging: "New bilateral nuclear arms control limits with Russia may be difficult to achieve as long as Russia's war on Ukraine rages. Even so, the United States could seek an executive agreement, or a reciprocal unilateral arrangement verified with national technical means of intelligence that commits Russia and the United States to respect New START's central limits on strategic arsenals until a more permanent, comprehensive nuclear arms control arrangement is concluded."

Let's hope the Cold War between the US orbit and the Chinese/Russian orbit can be contained and that the conflict can be kept out of the nuclear realm via arms control.

*Jason Sibert of St. Louis, Mo., is the Lead Writer of the Peace Economy Project.*

## Schakowsky...

*Continued from previous page*

final proposals, including gutting this incredibly popular program, the week after the 2024 election. The speaker knows how important Social Security is to hard-working Americans, so he has devised an accountability-free way to gut it.

Again, we don't have to guess that this is what will happen, because Republicans have tried this before. During discussions on forming Bowles-Simpson in 2010, Senator Max Baucus (D-Mont.) astutely pointed out that "The Chairman and Ranking Republican Member of the Budget Committee have painted a big red bull's eye on Social Security. Their commission is a Social Security-cutting machine."

Sen. Baucus was right. The commission's co-chairs put forward a proposal which slashed Social Security. I strongly opposed this proposal and put forth my own alternative which would have reduced the deficit by \$441 billion in 2015 without cutting essential programs. Thankfully, the co-chairs' recommendations failed to achieve the support needed to have them fast-tracked through Congress. After the failure of Bowles-Simpson, Republicans tried again to cut Social Security and Medicare behind closed doors through another fast-tracked process known as the Supercommittee. It was no more successful than Bowles-Simpson.

The bottom line is that a fiscal commission is political pandering, plain and simple. If Republicans were serious about addressing the deficit, they would use the

reconciliation process, which is designed specifically to rein in federal spending. If Republicans cared about improving our fiscal position, they would demand the rich pay their fair share. If Republicans wanted to actually solve our budget challenges, they would robustly fund tax enforcement to ensure corporations are complying with laws already on the books.

But Republicans aren't serious about the deficit. They aren't even serious about governing. They are serious about only one thing, and that's ripping away Social Security from seniors behind closed doors.

Democrats stand ready to prevent this from happening. President Joe Biden ran for office on a plan to protect and expand Social Security, and Members of Congress, including me, have introduced legislation that

restores Social Security to long-range balance while expanding benefits with no cuts.

Instead of hiding behind a commission, Republicans should put their own plans for Social Security's future on the table. When and if they do, I will debate both approaches in the light of day. I and my fellow Democrats stand ready to address our deficit and preserve the future of Social Security, and I invite Republicans to openly offer their proposals and give the American people a say.

*Jan Schakowsky is the Democratic representative for Illinois' 9th Congressional District. This appeared at CommonDreams.org.*

**Remember The Progressive Populist in your will.**



# Haley Best to Vie vs. Trump — And Biden

By JAMIE STIEHM

Nikki Haley is the dark horse in the Republican presidential race that Democrats should watch closely as she gains ground by the day, hair flying with the wind.

Brace for a “Hail Nikki” surge while former President Donald Trump’s troubles with the law mount and his grip on reality loosens and leads to more demagogic rants. Many fear for the future of the country, but I have more faith. Trump lost the popular vote twice and his violence against democracy failed. I was there Jan. 6.

The telegenic former South Carolina governor could pose the most potent threat to two old men: Trump and President Joe Biden. She just picked up a huge vote of confidence and cash from the arch-conservative Koch network, which will give her run millions of dollars.

Calling Haley “birdbrain,” street-smart Trump shows his nerves.

Haley may soon outpace Gov. Ron De-

Santis of Florida, another Southerner, as second to Trump going into 2024. It’s clear as sky that she’s a better speaker on the stump — and in the Dec. 6 debate — than the sour DeSantis, master of the nasal monotone.

“DeSantis, on the other hand, has done surprisingly little to appeal to the voters who dislike Mr. Trump,” the *New York Times* observed.

Expect more relentless attacks on Vice President Kamala Harris if Haley emerges as a front-runner. And they will hurt.

Each is a woman of color in her 50s, of Indian heritage, which means Harris can’t respond on grounds of racism or sexism when Haley zeroes in on her. “Anybody is better than President Kamala Harris” doubles as a reminder of Biden’s vulnerable age, 81.

Haley reaches people well, concealing her harsh abortion views by saying she “respects” the other side of reproductive rights. A savvy statement, given the body blow that the Supreme Court dealt the Republican party by striking down those rights for women and girls.

Don’t forget, Haley worked for Trump as ambassador to the United Nations. She made no friends and mended no fences representing his xenophobic foreign policy. She threatened she’d be “taking names” of nations who voted against moving the

American embassy in Israel from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem, a serious shift in Mideast diplomacy and a break in U.S. policy.

Bragging about being an “accountant” coming after Medicare, Social Security and government experts, Haley is first in class when it comes to aggressive Republican women. (Georgia Rep. Marjorie Taylor Greene just got kicked out of class.)

Cutting social programs is no small deal, especially by Haley’s plan to raise the retirement age. Cutting taxes for the wealthy also colors her vision when at least a thousand billionaires pay no income tax at all.

In short, she’s barely different from the rest of the field. We want a president with a lion heart like Biden, not a mean-spirited number cruncher. Awesome American presidents appeal to our best selves.

Never give Haley that. We know who she is.

This is a governor who let the Confederate flag fly over the statehouse until nine Black churchgoers were murdered in a mass shooting in Charleston. Nine victims of a White supremacist fell in a historic Black Church in 2015.

That’s what it took for Haley to finally take the hateful symbol down. She was praised for doing it. That was just a sur-render to common decency.

Out on the campaign trail, DeSantis

has concentrated on Iowa, with a fair chance of winning the first contest. Then comes the New Hampshire primary, a test of strength on Jan. 23.

“The idea that Ms. Haley might win New Hampshire might seem far-fetched but, historically, much crazier things have happened,” says Nate Cohn, polling expert for the *New York Times*.

New Hampshire voters are proud of their rugged independence in knowing presidential timber. Haley, a woman of sass and spirit, is up their alley.

If Trump loses the first two engagements while facing four criminal trials, that’s ugly. Also, Hillary Clinton cleared some mind space for accepting a woman as a major party nominee.

Paging Steve Schmidt, George Conway, Peter Wehner and The Bulwark writers:

If these avowed “Never Trumpers” who cling to saving the Republican ship are smart — and they are — then their strategic move is to back Haley.

*Jamie Stiehm is a former assignment editor at CBS News in London, reporter at The Hill, metro reporter at the Baltimore Sun and public policy scholar at the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars. She is author of a new play, “Across the River,” on Aaron Burr. See JamieStiehm.com.*

## If Biden Were Trump

By BARRY FRIEDMAN

To hear Trump supporters tell it, to read their tweets and posts (and you’ll want to keep the Pepcid close by when you do), the supposed warts of Donald Trump, including his convictions, bankruptcies, bigotry, fines, and indictments are — if not completely fabricated by an out-of-control leftist cabal that controls the media and the courts and wants to cancel you for your patriotism and reassign the gender of your children — mild offenses that are exaggerated by the same leftist cabal.

So, imagine ...

Biden paid \$25 million to settle lawsuits because his now-defunct Biden University defrauded students.

Biden conceded he used contributions to the Joseph R. Biden Charitable Foundation, including funds destined for the United Negro College Fund and the US Holocaust Memorial, for personal and political purposes.

Biden referred to Poland and Hungary as “sh\*thole countries,” adding, “Why do we need more Poles?” and then issued travel bans against predominantly-White European nations for being predominantly White European nations.

Biden, before he was president, was forced to place ads in newspapers that read “Welcome Christians” because the Biden Real Estate Organization, which he and his father owned, refused to rent to them.

Biden told MSNBC’s Lawrence O’Donnell that his message to Jews is, “We love you, we want to work with you, we want you to practice vigilance, we know that if you know a lot, in many cases, we want you to turn in the bad ones.”

Biden declared bankruptcy six times, including at three casinos in Atlantic City, one of which was the Biden Taj Mahal six months after it opened.

Biden asked his White House chief of staff, whose son died in combat, why he had to meet a soldier in a wheelchair. “Why do you bring people like that here? No one wants to see that, the wounded,” and added, “Never let [the soldier] appear in public again,” and told his same chief of staff that military cemeteries are “filled with losers.”

Biden gave \$130,000 to a porn actress so she wouldn’t divulge sleeping with him while his third wife was pregnant with his fifth child.

Biden, in a conversation about foreign aid with Volodymyr Zelenskyy, intimated to the Ukrainian president that financial assistance might be forthcoming if he worked with Biden’s private lawyer (who was not a government official) to get information on the business dealings of Donald Trump Jr.

Biden took out a full-page ad in the *New York Times* calling for the death of five White teens for raping a Black jogger in New York City (they didn’t) and never apologized when they were exonerated.

Biden tweeted, “Wonderful Evangelicals are far more appreciative of my record on Israel than the people of the Jewish faith, especially those living in the U.S.” and that “U.S. Jews have to get their act together and appreciate what they have in Israel — before it is too late!”

Biden described a mob in Charlottesville, Virginia — holding Tiki torches, throwing Molotov cocktails, screaming about replacement theory, and terrorizing residents — by saying it included some “very fine people,” adding, “There were people protesting very quietly taking down the statue of Robert E. Lee.”

Biden released a video on the evening of Jan. 6, 2021, after rioters had stormed the Capitol in which he said, “We love you, you’re very special.”

Biden refused to accept the election results in 2016 and 2020 unless he won and promised he wouldn’t accept them in 2024 either, unless he won.

Biden asked the Russians to spy on Trump’s campaign in 2016, revealed a crucial source of intelligence on ISIS to Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov and Ambassador Sergey Kislyak while he was president, and gave nuclear-submarine secrets to an Australian businessman when he wasn’t.

Biden threatened to imprison Trump and his family, and promised to go after “radical right lunatics” in the media after the 2024 election.

Biden supported a plan that, if he is re-elected, would let him strip tens of thousands of federal workers of their civil-service protections and fire them at will.

Biden defended Russian President Vladimir Putin to MSNBC’s Rachel Maddow: “There are a lot of killers. We’ve got a lot of killers. What do you think? Our country’s so innocent?”

Biden crowed that he received “love letters” from Kim Jong-un and congratulated the North Korean dictator for being elected to the executive board of the World Health Organization.

Biden encouraged his top health officials to study the injection of bleach into the human body as a means of fighting COVID.

Biden faced a total of 91 charges across four criminal cases, including 44 federal charges and 47 state charges, all of them felonies, including, as one of the indictments stated, “unlawful means of discounting legitimate votes and subverting the results of the presidential election that he lost.”

Now, imagine all that, imagine Biden supporters not caring about or taking any of the above seriously, and imagine Democrats preparing to nominate him to be president of the United States ... again. Were that to happen, Trump supporters would post photos of their own gray brain matter splattered on Facebook, Twitter/X, and other social media platforms and buy surface to air missiles to prepare for the next Trumpian-led coup.

Trump’s warts would be Biden’s metastatic lesions.

But Biden didn’t do any of those things — he’s not Trump.

That’s the point. Or should be.

Come November, if we haven’t lost our souls in America (not a sure bet), that will matter.

*Barry Friedman is an essayist, political columnist, petroleum geology reporter and comedian living in Tulsa, Okla. His latest book is “Jack Sh\*t: Volume One: Voluptuous Bagels and other Concerns of Jack Friedman.” The follow-up, “Jack Sh\*t, Volume 2: Wait For The Movie. It’s In Color” is scheduled to be released in February 2024. In addition, he is the author of “Road Comic,” “Funny You Should Mention It,” “Four Days and a Year Later,” “The Joke Was On Me,” and a novel, “Jacob Fishman’s Marriages.” See [barrysfriedman.com](http://barrysfriedman.com) and [friedmanoftheplains.com](http://friedmanoftheplains.com).*

## The Pentagon Just Can’t Pass an Audit

**Conservative lawmakers calling for cuts should start with the agency that can’t account for \$1.9 trillion — not the programs Americans rely on.**

By LINDSAY KOSGHARIAN

The Pentagon just failed its audit — again. For the sixth time in a row, the agency that accounts for half the money Congress approves each year can’t figure out what it did with all that money.

For a brief recap, the Pentagon has never passed an audit. Until 2018, it had

never even completed one.

Since then, the Pentagon has done an audit every year and given itself a participation prize each time. Yet despite this year’s triumphant press release — titled “DOD Makes Incremental Progress Towards Clean Audit” — it has failed every time.

In its most recent audit, the Pentagon was able to account for just half of its \$3.8 trillion in assets (including equipment, facilities, etc). That means \$1.9 trillion is unaccounted for — more than the entire budget Congress agreed to for the current fiscal year.

No other federal agency could get away with this. There would be congressional hearings. There would be demands to remove agency leaders, or to defund those agencies. Every other major federal agency has passed an audit, proving that it knows where taxpayer dollars it is entrusted with are going.

Yet Congress is poised to approve an-

other \$840 billion for the Pentagon despite its failures.

In fact, by my count Congress has approved \$3.9 trillion in Pentagon spending since the first failed audit in 2018. Tens of billions have gone through the Pentagon to fund wars in Afghanistan, Ukraine, and now Israel. Accountability for those “assets” — including weapons and equipment — is also in question.

At this point, lawmakers surely know those funds may never be accounted for. And year after year, half of the Pentagon budget goes to corporate weapons contractors and other corporations who profiteer from this lack of accountability.

There is an entity whose job it is to prevent this sort of abuse: Congress. With each failure at the Pentagon, Congress is failing, too. Every year that members of Congress vote to boost Pentagon spending with no strings attached, they choose to spend untold billions on weapons and war with no accountability.

Meanwhile, all those other agencies that have passed their audits could put those funds to much better use serving the public. Too many Americans are struggling to afford necessities like housing, heat, health care, and child care, and meanwhile our country is grappling with homelessness, the opioid epidemic, and increasingly common catastrophic weather events.

With another government shutdown debate looming in early 2024, you’ll hear lawmakers say we need to cut those already inadequate investments in working families. But if they’re worried about spending, they should start with the agency that has somehow lost track of nearly \$2 trillion worth of publicly funded resources.

*Federal budgeting expert Lindsay Kosgharian directs the National Priorities Project (NPP) at the Institute for Policy Studies. This op-ed was distributed by OtherWords.org.*



## Israeli Government's Mass Terrorism Fortified by Biden and Congress

A letter to President Joe Biden, dated Oct. 24, 2023, on the Israel-Hamas war by international law specialist, Bruce Fein and me, prompted this form letter Biden response (available via the online version).

Apart from the usual saying one thing and doing the opposite (e.g., standing for the protection of civilians and a two-state solution while fully arming and backing Israel's genocidal destruction of everything in Gaza—children make up nearly half the population of Gaza) — Biden's letter completely ignores key issues in our letter.

We asked why he wants Congress to make US taxpayers pay another \$14.3 billion for a prosperous country's colossal military and intelligence operations, especially since Israel's leadership failed to protect its people on October 7th.

We cited David Ben-Gurion, Israel's

first prime minister, who said: "If I were an Arab leader, I would never sign an agreement with Israel. It is normal; we have taken their country.' ... Why would they accept that?"

In response to Biden's repeated urging that Israel comply with the "laws of war" we described how Benjamin Netanyahu and his regime are doing just the opposite with its brutal terror campaign against defenseless Palestinian civilians and their critical public support structures.

Biden knows that the Israeli government is implementing what its ministers ordered on Oct. 8 — a total siege with no food, no water, no electricity, no fuel, and no medicine which meets the definition of the crime of genocide under the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide. Israeli videos provide the grisly evidence of over 20,000 bombs and mis-

than we are, with national health care and subsidized college tuition. They don't have oil. Every time they murder a Palestinian, the bullet or the bomb is stamped "Made in USA" — which makes us a target for Islamist terrorism. Our relationship with Israel is an alliance, not a marriage, so we never promised "for better, or for worse." But even if we had, so what? You're surely allowed to run out the door when your partner is draining your bank account, ruining your reputation and dragging you into fights. If he's turning violently insane, you should split.

Israel's war in Gaza makes one thing clear: Israel has lost its mind. It's time to cut them loose before they suck us down their maelstrom of madness.

According to military historians, the ferocious war Israel is waging against the innocent civilian population of the Gaza Strip is being waged at a scale unheard of in human history. According to the *New York Times*, Israel has killed more people in Gaza over the past two months than have died in two years of fighting between Russia and Ukraine. And that's in a tiny space that's 1/1,500th of the area of the Russo-Ukrainian front. Proportionally, the Palestinian death rate in Gaza is 20,000 times higher than in Ukraine.

Casualties are sky high and soaring because Israel, unlike most combatants, refuses to open Gaza's borders in order to allow refugees to escape the carnage. Israel doesn't even allow boats to flee via the Mediterranean. Also unique to Israel's efficiently bloodthirsty assault is its subjecting of a population to both siege warfare and bombing, simultaneously denying food, water, fuel and medical supplies to 2.3 million people at the same time missiles are raining down upon them.

Moreover, the *Times* reports, Israel is using big bombs to kill flies. "Israel's liberal use of very large weapons in dense urban

sites striking homes, apartment buildings, schools, markets, water mains, bread bakeries, hospitals, clinics, ambulances and places of worship. After many days, the terror-stricken civilians, fleeing from one place to another in Gaza while being attacked, are also dying of disease, hunger, thirst, and a lack of critical medicines, such as insulin, with the bodies of infants and children still under the rubble in numbers too many to be counted.

Israel's extremist right-wing politicians use words such as "human animals," "annihilation" and "extermination" as declared objectives of their mass terrorism. (See, Amy Goodman's interview with Yuval Abraham Friday, Dec. 1, on Democracy Now!).

Biden can get more humanitarian aid trucks into Gaza simply by enveloping them with the American flag and daring Israel to delay, obstruct or destroy these carriers of live-saving food, water, fuel and medicine. But he is too weak and too cowardly to put strong US leverage behind his sugarcoating wishes for saving the civilian mothers, fathers and children of Gaza.

He has made the US a co-belligerent by unconditionally supplying abundant weapons, military intelligence and political cover, including vetoes of United Nations resolutions.

Biden has another apprehension —

areas, including U.S.-made 2,000-pound bombs that can flatten an apartment tower, is surprising, some experts say. ... In fighting during this century, by contrast, U.S. military officials often believed that the most common American aerial bomb — a 500-pound weapon — was *far too large* [emphasis mine] for most targets when battling the Islamic State in urban areas like Mosul, Iraq, and Raqqa, Syria."

A 2,000-pound bomb is a devastating weapon. Military experts say that the minimum safe distance away on the ground from the detonation of a standard US-made 2,000-pounder of the kind being used by Israel in Gaza is over half a mile; a plane dropping such ordinance should fly at least 4,000 feet in altitude to avoid being damaged by flying debris from the blast. Israel has dropped at least 20,000 bombs, each with a blast radius of 1 square mile, enough to flatten the whole territory more than 100 times over.

"They are using extremely large weapons in extremely densely populated areas," Brian Castner, a weapons investigator for Amnesty International and a former explosive ordnance disposal officer in the Air Force, told the *Times*.

Israel has carried out numerous atrocities over the past 50 years, including a bombing campaign and ground invasion of Gaza in 2014. The brutality and scale of the 2023 conflict, coupled with the racist and genocidal rhetoric of Israeli political and military leaders, is so extreme that it's no longer possible to ignore.

Even the United Nations is disgusted. "We have in a few days in Gaza thousands and thousands of children killed, which means there is also something clearly wrong in the way military operations are being done," Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said.

So are many others, including nations

near total control of Congress by the "Israel's government can do no wrong" lobby. The indentured rubber-stamping Senators and Representatives have no problem supporting Israel's violent repression and land dispossession in what is left of the original Palestine and its five million encircled Palestinians. Would these politicians deploy such eagerness in helping poor American children and their families in our country?

These callous legislators know little of this history, and little of Prime Minister Netanyahu's long support for funding of Hamas to break up any two-state solution with the Palestinian Authority. Moreover, they and their predecessors have blocked any Congressional public hearings featuring prominent Israeli and Palestinian peace advocates. Congress is importing censorship of those who wish to wage peace. (For the full list of our letters to Joe Biden, see [nader.org](http://nader.org)).

*Ralph Nader is a consumer advocate, lawyer and author. His books include "Wrecking America: How Trump's Lawbreaking and Lies Betray All," with Mark Green. Contact Nader c/o PO Box 19312, Washington, DC 20036 or email [info@nader.org](mailto:info@nader.org). See [www.nader.org](http://www.nader.org), [facebook.com/ralphnader](https://facebook.com/ralphnader) or follow him on Twitter @Ralph\_Nader.*

with close relations with Israel. "These babies, these ladies, these old people are bombed and killed. So there is no reason for that and no legitimacy," added French President Emmanuel Macron. Jordan, Bahrain, Chad, Turkey, Colombia and Chile have recalled their ambassadors from Israel to protest the bloodshed. South Africa, a long-time ally of Israel dating to the apartheid period, has severed diplomatic relations with Israel.

Israel has nearly exhausted the world's patience. The amount of time that it can continue to wage war against Gaza without being isolated as a pariah state is measured in months, perhaps weeks. More embassy closings are coming. Sanctions will follow.

The United States should prepare itself for the next step: cutting Israel loose. This means cutting off military aid and logistical assistance, no more blank checks for its actions against Palestine. In just two months, American domestic public opinion has reversed, with a majority of young Americans now opposed to further assistance to Israel. Older voters are not far behind.

Getting back to the question raised at the beginning of this essay: If we were considering the question anew, free of the burden of history, would we embrace Israel as it looks and acts today? Would we supply them with weapons to bomb Gaza? Of course not.

We may or may not be able to stop Israel from its reckless and murderous carpet-bombing of Gaza. We certainly don't have to be joined at the hip as they commit war crimes. Our alliance with Israel has outlived its usefulness.

*Ted Rall, political cartoonist, columnist and graphic novelist, co-hosts the left-us-right DMZ America podcast with fellow cartoonist Scott Stantis. Write him c/o his website ([rall.com](http://rall.com)), Twitter @tedrall*

## TED RALL

### Cut Israel Loose

It is useful when you feel stumped to step back and ask yourself: What if I were coming to this person/situation/decision fresh, without precedents or historical baggage?

Inertia is a powerful and insidious force. How many times, working in an office, when you ask why something is done a certain way, do you get the circular answer that it's because it's always been done that way?

About that friend you've had since you were both kids: Sure, you've known each other for decades. If you met the guy now, for the first time, though, would you still want to hang out?

What about your job? It may have been a good fit when you first took it. Is your workplace still better than what's available now?

If your answer is no, perhaps you're due for a rethink — and possibly a radical change.

America is long overdue for a rethink of its toxic relationship with Israel.

We've been in deep with Israel since its creation. Supporting the creation of the Jewish state helped Harry Truman win a close election in 1948. Israel served as a bulwark against Soviet influence in neighboring Egypt and Syria during the Cold War. But we aren't afraid of the commies anymore. Israel is no longer pretending to be a democracy.

Why are we still together?

It's not like we're getting much out of this romance. We pay Israel nearly \$4 billion a year even though they are living better

compared with 35,000 workers in October.

Meanwhile, service-providing employers added 117,000 new hires in November. Goods-producing firms lost 14,000 jobs in November. Those numbers accord with a long-running trend of employment in the US, due in no small part to misnamed free-trade deals that have harmed the American working class.

Annual median wage growth (half above and half below) for job-stayers rose 5.6% in November compared with October's 5.7% increase, according to ADP. The median annual pay of job-stayers was \$58,500 in November compared with October's \$57,800.

"Job-changers, too," according to ADP, "saw slowing pay growth, posting pay gains of 8.3%, the smallest year-over-year increase since June 2021. The premium for switching jobs is at its smallest in three years of data."

When the supply of workers exceeds available employment, pay gains tend to drop. When the opposite dynamic prevails, all things equal, wages and salaries rise. Supply and demand of employment is in a constant state of flux.

In November's ADP report on pay growth and gender, female workers' earnings continue to lead their male counterparts in all age groups, from 16-24 to, 25-34, 35-

54 and 55-84, the case in October, according to ADP. November registered the biggest male-female gap in the 16-24 category, where workers lack experience compared with seasoned employees.

Mid-sized companies with 50-249 employees led the way in November with 71,000 new hires versus October's 96,000. Large employers of 550-plus employees ranked second in November's payroll growth, with 33,000 new hires compared with October's 18,000.

In changes of regional employment, the Northeast grabbed the top spot for November, adding 59,000 new hires versus October's 21,000. The South, historically hostile to labor unions, nearly lead the way in job creation for the second straight month, adding 58,000 new hires in November compared with October's 64,000.

Employers in the West cut 10,000 payroll jobs in November after adding 46,000 new hires in October. Finally, Midwest employers had 2,000 new hires in November after they shed 13,000 jobs in October.

*Seth Sandronsky lives and works in Sacramento. He is a journalist and member of the Pacific Media Workers Guild. Email [sethsandronsky@gmail.com](mailto:sethsandronsky@gmail.com).*

## Private Employers Hire 103,000 New Workers in November; Pay Growth Decelerates

By SETH SANDRONSKY

US private-sector employers added 103,000 new hires in November versus 106,000 workers in October, according to Nov.'s ADP® National Employment Report, a collaboration with the Stanford Digital Economy Lab. Consider what is occurring in a slice of service sector employment.

"Restaurants and hotels were the biggest job creators during the post-pandemic recovery," said Nela Richardson, ADP's chief economist, said in a statement. "But that boost is behind us, and the return to trend in leisure and hospitality suggests the economy as a whole will see more moderate hiring and wage growth in 2024."

We turn to leisure and hospitality employers, hit hard during the coronavirus pandemic. They shed 7,000 payroll jobs in November vs. adding 17,000 workers in October. Trade, transportation and utilities employers led the way for job creation in November, adding 55,000 new hires,



# Outrage in Wyoming Erupts Over Public Land Auction

By SAVANNAH ROSE

There's a 640-acre parcel of magnificent, state-owned public land in Wyoming that's set for auction unless the state changes its mind.

Simply put, this small inholding, known as the "Kelly Parcel," should never be privatized—never. It is one of the most awe-inspiring and important pieces of open space remaining in America.

Within Grand Teton National Park, its borders include the National Elk Refuge and Bridger-Teton National Forest. Its value was appraised in 2022 at \$62.4 million. However, the director of the Office of State Lands and Investment just recommended a starting bid of \$80 million.

But its real value isn't about money: The land is a vital migration corridor for elk, moose, big horn sheep antelope, pronghorn and mule deer travelling into and out of the national park. It also hosts 87 other "Species

of Greatest Conservation Need."

And the annual, 200-mile-long migration corridor known as the Path of the Pronghorn—from Grand Teton National Park to the upper Green River Basin—passes right through the Kelly Parcel at the crux of what's recognized as the longest mammalian migration in the contiguous United States.

Wyomingites have been resolute in their opposition to selling the state-owned parcel. Publicity generated by the Jackson Hole Conservation Alliance collected more than 2,600 comments from people opposed to an auction, and hundreds of opponents turned out at each of four public hearings in November. Many others contacted the state directly for a total of more than 10,000 people opposed to a state auction.

Yet in December the Wyoming State Board of Land Commissioners was to decide whether a private owner gets to do whatever they want with the Kelly Parcel once they bid highest at auction—fence it, subdivide it, certainly road it.

With its iconic views of the Tetons and natural beauty that's surrounded by public land—plus sporting one of the most coveted zip codes in the country—the Kelly Parcel

will most likely be snatched up at auction by a billionaire with development and dollar signs in their eyes.

"The people of Wyoming would not want to be part of a legacy where this land fell into a private developer's hands and see that beautiful landscape dotted with a few select starter castles," said John Turner, former director of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, at one of the hearings.

There is no rush to dispose of the Kelly Parcel, no deadline to cash in before the bank forecloses or a buyer backs out. But an auction changes everything, in a way that can never be undone.

That is why Dave Sollitt, executive director of the Jackson Hole Conservation Alliance, is asking The State Board of Land Commissioners to put a stop to this auction and focus on working with state legislators to find a way to sell the Kelly Parcel to Grand Teton National Park, where it belongs.

"National parks are heralded as 'America's best idea,' and auctioning off public land within Grand Teton National Park would stand out as Wyoming's worst idea," Sollitt said. "If they go to auction, the state and everyone loses control. That's how auc-

tions work."

Though money generated from auctioning the Kelly Parcel to the highest bidder would contribute some \$4 million annually to the support of public schools, the windfall to the state would also come at an immeasurable cost to wildlife.

There is a better approach. Selling the parcel to the National Park Service—as Wyoming did with its other three parcels within the park—is projected to generate up to \$120 million over 30 years. The National Park Service tried to buy the Kelly Parcel in 2015, but the agency lacked enough money to make the deal then and now.

Establishing ourselves as the first state to auction off public land within a national park is likely to blight Wyoming's reputation beyond recovery. It should be clear: Privatizing an irreplaceable area within a national park for short-term gain is a foolish and destructive move.

*Savannah Rose is a contributor to Writers on the Range, [writersontherange.org](http://writersontherange.org), an independent nonprofit dedicated to spurring lively conversation about the West. She lives in Jackson, Wyoming, and is a wildlife photographer who cares about keeping ecosystems intact.*

# Finally Sold on Reading Ebooks

By ROB PATTERSON

Are you an avid reader like I am? It's one of my favorite activities, a way to chill yet stimulate the mind, travel to other places and realms, meet interesting people, learn new things and enjoy engaging and interesting stories.

I grew up in a home where both parents read. Our living room had a wall with built-in bookshelves stuffed full of hardcover volumes. I loved going to the nearby library and roaming the stacks looking for book that struck my interest. A visit to the central library downtown, an elegant old building with a large central atrium, was like entering a magical realm. Is it any wonder that I became a writer and editor?

So, naturally, I love the tactile experience of reading an actual book. Hence it took me a while to warm up to ebooks. But since I started subscribing to Amazon's Kindle Unlimited service my perspective has changed.

The precipitating factor was acquiring an iPad. It soon became where I would read news at times during the day, especially as I lay in bed in the evening.

Then I got an email from Amazon — I'm a Prime member — offering me a two-month trial for Kindle Unlimited, which fea-

tures deals on ebooks and magazines. Plus access to 20 selected free books at a time. I figured, what the hey, I'll give it a shot.

Pretty soon, I was off to the races, adding all kinds of titles that interested me. For the past three months prior to when I wrote this I wound up reading a slew of the offerings.

Admittedly, the free offerings are a widely mixed bag in terms of quality, from superb, well-reviewed books to stuff that might best be called guilty pleasures. Yet reading all has been a pleasure, and I love the immediacy and convenience of it.

One of the first that I read was a memoir by record producer John Simon, who helmed a number of pivotal albums over my years of listening The Band's *Music From Big Pink* debut and its eponymous follow-up plus their *Last Waltz* live recording; *Cheap Thrills* by Big Brother & The Holding Company with Janis Joplin and the first records by Leonard Cohen and Blood, Sweat & Tears. His book is smart, breezy and insight — a delight to read.

Kindle Unlimited has also allowed me to indulge my interest in the Mafia. In "Frank Sinatra and the Mafia Murders," two English journalist gather from a number of sources to show that the singer who I revere as a musical talent was a rather vile person, behaving like a scumbag mobster and consorting with such throughout his career. Another one I read for background on a screenplay I am writing is "The Genovese Mafia Crime Family." Soon I will dig into

"Five Families: The Rise, Decline, and Resurgence of America's Most Powerful Mafia Empires" by mob expert Selwyn Raab and "Vegas and the Chicago Outfit: The Skimming of Las Vegas" — a city I loathe.

I'm currently in the midst of an oral history about the Fillmore East, and "Monkee Business: The Revolutionary Made-For-TV Band" managed with its detailed and perceptive account to inspire an upcoming column.

Kindle also has a series called "Hourly History," with compact biographies of notable and notorious figures such as one I've downloaded on Joseph Goebbels, who made an evil art of the big lies as well as rabble-rousing hatred, prejudices and calls to violence that poison our current American politics. Also on tap from the series is a biography of Roy Orbison, who I not only interviewed but also spent delightful time socially backstage at a show with him and his father. Hence I can learn a bit more about both of them.

Also cued up for my consumption are David Halberstam's Pulitzer Prize-winning cultural history "The Fifties," which I've intended to read for some time as it's the decade into which I was born. And after being wowed by the movie "Oppenheimer," I will soon read "109 East Palace: Robert Oppenheimer and the Secret City of Los Alamos."

From seriously fun light reading to serious literature, it's all available on Kindle Unlimited, for which I now pay \$11.99

monthly — well worth it to me. And now that the right yet horribly wrong wing is on a book-banning crusade that lessens so many municipal and school libraries, let's be thankful to digital technology and the internet for keeping precious books available to read.

## Populist Picks

**TV SERIES:** "Classic Albums" — What prompted me to download John Simon's ebook mentioned above was his sage commentary in the episode on *The Band*, one of 51 recordings where participants and commentators parse and discuss the recording of notable musical benchmarks. Endlessly fascinating and revelatory for a music buff like me.

**TV DOCUMENTARY:** "Born in Chicago" — In the early 1960s, young White Chicago musicians like Paul Butterfield and Mike Bloomfield and others learned their lessons in the blues from the city's community of iconic Black bluesman. With Dan Ackroyd narrating and observations by Bob Dylan, Eric Burdon, Steve Miller, Chess Records scion Marshall Chess and others, it details the transfer of a musical and cultural tradition to a new generation.

*Rob Patterson is a music and entertainment writer in Austin, Texas. Email [robpatterson054@gmail.com](mailto:robpatterson054@gmail.com).*

# The Passion of George Santos

By ALEXANDRA PETRI

"George Santos is the Mary Magdalene of the United States Congress."  
— George Santos

And it was foretold that there would come unto Congress a man who would be sore beset on every side, and they would call his name George Santos, and also they would call him the Mary Magdalene of Congress, and one or two other aliases, or possibly even more than that. And lo did he go unto Congress from New York, and then after he did go, it was revealed unto them that he was not who he said he was, not even to a small degree, and this was the first miracle wrought by George Santos. And everyone marveled and said, "Who is this man?" And then they said, "No, for real, who is this man? We do not know who this man is." For the George Santos they did send unto Congress had played volleyball at Baruch, and had worked for Goldman Sachs, and George Santos had done neither of those things.

And lo they did speak against him in the halls of Congress and in the newspapers and on the shows and even in the streets of his district. And they did say unto one an-

other, "Who is this man George Santos, who is come to represent us? For we thought we knew him, but he is not even Jew-ish, as he did claim." And then George Santos wrought the second of many miracles, for his mother, who had died in the events of 9/11, lo, she was alive until 2016, and indeed she was not even in the United States on the occasion of 9/11. And all who heard it marveled and said, she who was dead was alive again, and she who was in one place was translated a great distance. And they began to say, "Who is this man whose mother was dead yet is alive, and whose money came from one place and then it came from another and then it came from yet a third and then we are still not sure from whom it cometh." And lo they did look unto his list of donors, and none of them could be found, and their names were not the names of persons who existed. And this was another miracle that George Santos wrought!

And they did bring unto George Santos a dog belonging unto a veteran, asking him to heal the dog, and George Santos said he would, and he did transform that dog's illness into a great deal of money for himself, which was indeed a miracle, but not the miracle they wanted. And George Santos did say unto them, "Do not worry about it, but give unto me money, and see what other wonders I shall accomplish."

George Santos then did go unto Congress and they did say "Lo, the bar is here, but he has slid beneath even that bar, for in addition to engaging in election denial, he has also done other frauds that we have not done, at least not so ineptly and publicly."

And, after he did enter the nation's capital, he did obtain much Botox and to OnlyFans did he subscribe. And the Lord said "This is good and right, for George Santos ought to have access to OnlyFans and Botox, as is my will, for thereby shall the economy thrive, and furthermore who hast given of their money unto George Santos expecting that anything else will happen?"

"And anyhow," said the Lord, "what didst thou expect, come on now?" And George Santos did receive donations and miraculously did translate them into gambling and also into Hermes.

And many miracles did George Santos bring to pass. First he did transform himself so that no man might say they knew him. And, at one time, he did appear in drag and, at another time, his campaign staffer did pretend to be a Kevin McCarthy staffer, and other such miracles did many see. Once he did briefly grasp a baby and none knew whence the baby did come nor whither it went. And many such things did George Santos wreak.

And lo the Lord said unto George Santos, "Behold my beloved son with whom I

am well pleased. Ye shall receive great abundance, and by ye shall be carried briefly a baby whose identity is uncertain and no one shall know what is going on with that child, and ye shall shout a great deal, and consternation shall ensue." And furthermore he did yell and say that they acted as though they were sitting in ivory towers in white hats while they voted drunk and had orgies and that he was Mary Magdalene, and everyone did say, "All right then, George, okay."

And it came to pass in those days, another resolution to expel George Santos from Congress. Which George Santos had known was coming, because as he did say, "I've done the math." Which he said was fine, because he wanted to leave anyway, because everyone in Congress was too corrupt and he was done with them. But it was okay, because the Lord did say, "He shall not be appreciated in his own time, nor in Washington." And then he was translated on high and all did worship him, for he was God's favorite. And all this was according to George Santos.

*Alexandra Petri is a Washington Post columnist offering a lighter take on the news and opinions of the day. She is the author of "AP's US History: Important American Documents (I Made Up)."*



## FILM REVIEW/ED RAMPPELL

# Polynesian Happiness on the Soccer Field of Dreams

*'Next Goal Wins' is part of a global racial and cultural reckoning in ethnic representation in cinema.*

Film fans are familiar with sports pictures about down on their luck coaches who redeem themselves by turning around losing teams and making these underdogs competitive. "Hoosiers" is a case in point, with Gene Hackman as a coach with a past and Dennis Hopper as the town drunk who sobers up to become assistant coach, together guiding their players to the state basketball championship. Co-writer/director Taika Waititi's "Next Goal Wins" is in this tried-and-true tradition of ballgame movies — but with huge differences.

Waititi's "Goal" is a comedy, not a drama; it has an extremely strong transsexual athlete angle; and instead of Indiana, this work by the first Polynesian to win an Academy Award for screenwriting is set in American Samoa, which is located 2,500 miles south of Hawaii and has been a U.S. territory since 1900. Margaret Mead did her anthropological field work there in the 1920s, which resulted in her groundbreaking book "Coming of Age in Samoa." Less famously, American Samoa was home of FIFA's worst soccer team, which humiliatingly lost 31-0 to Australia in 2001. ("Next Goal Wins" is inspired by a true story and adapts a 2014 British documentary of the same name by Mike Brett and Steve Jamison, who are also producers of Waititi's feature version.) As the World Cup qualifiers near, the desperate head of the American Samoa Football Federation, Tavita (Oscar Kightley, who played in Waititi's charming 2016 "Hunt for the Wilderpeople" and Disney's 2016 "Moana"),

seeks an experienced off-island coach — not to make the players champions, but, more humbly, so the disorganized sportsmen can score at least one goal on the field.

After he's been fired by several soccer teams for his angry antics and outbursts, Dutch-American coach Thomas Rongen (two-time Oscar nominee Michael Fassbender) has a choice: unemployment or training American Samoa's challenged team.

Rongen reluctantly flies to the South Seas to helm the not-ready-for-prime-time players. "Goal" is a classic fish-out-of-water story, with the high-strung coach confronted by happy-go-lucky footballers imbued with their fa'afai lemu (take it easy) ethos and extended family-oriented Pacific Islander communal customs. Rongen, the palagi (Caucasian), is simply astonished that training comes to a complete halt during the daily sa — a period of religious reflection and meditation enforced in this society where chiefs, clergymen (one of whom is comically portrayed by Waititi) and missionaries still hold sway. Likewise, Rongen is flabbergasted that nobody plays sports on Sundays, which is set aside for church, making him doubt that his Samoan athletes are serious about winning.

The final straw is after Jaiyah (Kaimana), the team's longhaired striker, repeatedly disregards his instructions and the fuming coach asks why the teammate even bothers to play. Jaiyah's jaunty response is not to win, but rather because soccer is "fun." While Rongen may be the movie's protagonist, Jaiyah — who refuses to be

called "Johnny" by the soccer skipper — is "Goal's" most interesting and most complex character. It turns out that Jaiyah is a fa'afafine, Polynesia's age-old so-called "third sex," males who perform traditional female roles. As this is the 21st century, Jaiyah is in the process of transitioning, but because the striker is still technically of the gender the athlete was assigned at birth, the rules permit Jaiyah to continue on the field with all-male players.

According to press notes, "Fa'afafine in American Samoan culture are people who have fluid genders that move between male and female worlds, showing two spirits in one person that coexist." Explains Waititi: "It is a sacred part of their culture, it is just accepted." At a time when transgender competitors are under attack for participating in sports in the so-called "civilized" USA, with bathroom hysteria generated by right-wing culture warriors, Jaiyah's teammates casually accept Jaiyah — who eventually becomes their captain — as one of the team. However, when the American Samoan footballers square off against others seeking to qualify for the World Cup, Jaiyah is cruelly taunted. The captain's soccer comrades stand by Jaiyah, as does the coach, who puts his faith in the talented fa'afafine in a simple act of solidarity, unconcerned by issues of gender identity and preference.

In this cross-cultural comedy, as Rongen whips his wannabe champs into shape, the Polynesians likewise work their magic on the manic coach. The Amsterdam-born Rongen also learns much from his island hosts, in particular that winning isn't everything, along with the value and virtue of happiness. When, early on, the coach, blowing his top, gripes that "it's torture coaching this team!" Tavita tells the newcomer that if he's not happy, he should leave American Samoa. "Unhappiness is a curse that I would not wish on anyone," Tavita says with sage aplomb.

Later, when Rongen makes an attempt at a rabble-raising locker room speech to rally the players to victory, someone quips that he should spare them the "Any Given Sunday" sermon, like that delivered by Al

Pacino's coach in the 1999 Oliver Stone football movie.

The beautiful "Goal" is in the tradition of South Seas Cinema, the film genre depicting Pacific Islanders and their islands, such as various versions of the "Mutiny on the Bounty" saga. Motion pictures began being made in the Pacific in 1898, when a Thomas Edison camera crew filmed actuality in Oahu (where "Goal" was also lensed on location). The genre's first classic was likely Robert Flaherty's 1926 documentary-like "Moana of the South Seas," which was made next door to American Samoa in what is now the independent nation of Samoa (Disney probably derived the title for its 2016 animated feature "Moana" from Flaherty's documentary-like production).

However, "Next Goal Wins" is part of a distinct development in South Seas Cinema. As Taika Waititi is part New Zealand Maori (part Jewish, too), the Native is literally flipping the script, writing the screenplay (along with co-writer Iain Morris) and working behind the camera, and instead of telling the story from the palagi perspective of dominant white majority filmmakers, we are now privy to the Indigenous point of view.

"Goal's" attitudes toward gender, the meaning of life, the purpose of spirituality, the power of happiness, are very Polynesian. As such, it is part of the racial reckoning now sweeping the screen globally, injecting a much-needed Polynesian frame of mind into Hollywood discourse. In its final frames, this delightful movie perfectly captures and encapsulates the best of Polynesian culture when, in front of the team, the Samoan Tavita tells the palagi Rongen that he'll always have a home on their island and that they love him. Viewers are likely to feel the same about the movie, which is in national theatrical release.

*Ed Rampell is a film historian and critic based in Los Angeles. Rampell is the author of "Progressive Hollywood, A People's Film History of the United States" and he co-authored "The Hawaii Movie and Television Book," now in its third edition. This article was originally published at Truthdig.com.*

## EDGE OF SPORTS/DAVE ZIRIN

# How Zionism Feeds Antisemitism

*Our best hope against antisemitism is to defeat Israel's dual campaign to raze Gaza and bind our fate as Jews to that insidious project.*

The cynicism of House Resolution 894 "strongly condemning and denouncing the drastic rise of antisemitism in the United States and around the world" is boundless. Put forward by two Jewish Republicans, Representatives David Kustoff and Max Miller, it states that the official view of the US Congress is that "anti-Zionism is antisemitism." This is unserious, inane, and dangerous.

Democratic US Representative Jerry Nadler, also Jewish, replied to HR 894, by saying: "With this resolution, the GOP has shown themselves fundamentally unserious about combatting antisemitism. ... its authors carefully avoided mentioning any of the obvious instances of antisemitism coming from their own leaders. ... For example, the resolution implicitly compares some peaceful protesters with the January 6th rioters and insurrectionists. ... More problematically, the resolution suggests that ALL anti-Zionism—it states that all anti-Zionism is antisemitism. That is either intellectually disingenuous or just factually wrong. ... the authors, if they were at all familiar with Jewish history and culture should know about Jewish anti-Zionism that was and is expressly NOT anti-Semitic."

Good for Nadler for speaking truth in the face of Orwellian absurdity. But it's not enough. This bill is part of a larger movement to make people feel unsafe to say that they oppose Israel's war crimes in Gaza. If you think it is a coincidence that we are getting this "resolution" as the temporary cease-fire ends and as Israel is expanding its killing campaign into the south of Gaza, then, as

my Bubbe would say, I have this bridge in Brooklyn you just have to buy. If you think that the rash of stories last month where Israeli police were releasing "new information" about the Hamas killings of Oct. 7 just as the bombings move south were also a coincidence, then maybe I could throw in the Manhattan Bridge for free.

This is a bill that will receive near-unanimous support from antisemitic Republicans and Christian Zionists like Speaker of the House Mike Johnson: the people who love Israel and hate Jews. That any Democrat would link arms, or in Chuck Schumer's case hold hands, with these people is a mark of shame.

But that's not the only reason to oppose HR 894. We must stand against condemning anti-Zionism as antisemitism, because it will only feed the existing hate against the Jewish community, much of which is already afraid. While it's true, as I wrote in October and as Nadler affirms, that anti-Zionism and antisemitism should never be conflated, it is also true that this kind of ham-fisted, coercive defense of Israel aids and abets antisemitism — an antisemitism that then becomes exploited and weaponized to support Benjamin Netanyahu's martial agenda.

What Netanyahu, Jonathan Greenblatt of the Anti-Defamation League, and Hollywood amplifiers like Juliana Margulies (three people who seem to be trying to "out-racist" one another) push is the idea that criticism and protests against Israel's policies are inherently antisemitic and therefore need to be silenced by the state. Their logic threatens Jews everywhere. If politically con-

fronting Israel is branded as antisemitic, then for people new to this movement, it may stand to reason that to be Jewish is to be a Zionist. Netanyahu has devoted his life to binding the fate of all Jews to the furtherance of the Israeli state. This is rank antisemitism: the assumption that to be Jewish is to support Israel's crimes. To be clear: Anyone who attempts to fasten a 5,000-year-old religion to a 150-year-old colonial project is guilty of antisemitism. They are pushing the idea that my family, merely because of our religion, supports war crimes abroad and the crackdown on critics at home.

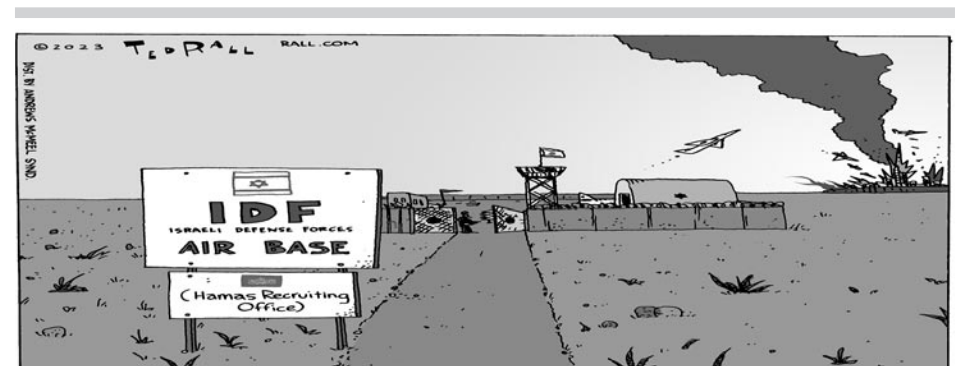
It is naïve to think that this won't create blowback against Jews. We are already seeing an increasing number of disturbing protests at Jewish institutions throughout the world. If the GOP and many Democrats push the idea that being Jewish means supporting Zionism and its current agenda, then the consequences will fall on the shoulders of Jews outside Israel's borders. As leftists, we must forcefully oppose the idea of collective guilt or collective punishment of Jews for Israel's crimes. If Israel believed the same logic about Palestinians, then thousands more kids would be alive today.

It can't be surprising that the GOP would be insensitive to the fallout of these kinds of declarations. Their right-wing base is a cauldron of antisemitism, and their presidential candidate Donald Trump met with avowed Nazis while president. Netanyahu and Greenblatt have never minded this, be-

cause Trump has reserved most of his violent ire for "liberal Jews," a group that many Zionists also hold in great contempt. With every anti-Jewish attack stoked by Trump, from Charlottesville to Pittsburgh, Netanyahu steps in to thank Trump and say that this is proof that Jews need their own ethno-state for protection. The opposite is true. What Jews need is a mass left resistance to antisemitism, and that resistance also needs to be against Zionism and for Palestinian liberation. If antisemitism is "the socialism of fools," then Zionism is Judaism for reactionaries.

As a left, we need to fight against any hint of antisemitism in our ranks. But riding the struggle of this scourge is our job, not the job of a Congress trying to squelch protest and dissent. Every day I hear from people whose employment is being threatened over Instagram posts or surreptitiously taped classroom lectures. HR 894 will fuel this suffocating reaction. We need to say no to the war on Gaza and no to the brazen neo-McCarthyism aimed at silencing critics. As Jews, we also need to be aware that our best hope against antisemitism lies in defeating Israel's dual campaign to raze Gaza and bind our fate to those war crimes.

*Dave Zirin is the sports editor at The Nation. He is the author of 11 books on the politics of sports. He is also the coproducer and writer of the new documentary "Behind the Shield: The Power and Politics of the NFL." Email edgeofsports@gmail.com*





## AMY GOODMAN



The decision to have the head of an oil company running the climate change negotiations has been called Orwellian.

## Carbon Colonialism, COP28 and the Climate Crisis

Dubai, UAE – More than 100,000 people have descended on the United Nations climate summit here in Dubai, making it the largest ever. The goal of COP28, the 28th annual “Conference of Parties” to the climate negotiations, is to halt catastrophic climate change. As the impacts of the climate emergency become increasingly frequent and destructive, from droughts, hurricanes and typhoons, wildfires, melting polar ice caps, rising sea levels and more, problems with the UN’s climate negotiation process itself become magnified; oil and gas producing nations and corporations that profit from fossil fuels dominate, delaying meaningful progress.

Exhibit One: COP28 is being hosted by the United Arab Emirates, the seventh largest oil producing nation on the planet, and the COP Presidency is currently held by Sultan Ahmed Al Jaber, the CEO of the UAE’s state-owned Abu Dhabi National Oil Company.

The decision to have the head of an oil company running the climate change negotiations has been called Orwellian. *The Guardian* reported on comments Al Jaber made on Nov. 21 during a live, online event hosted by Mary Robinson, the former president of Ireland and the former UN Special Envoy on Climate Change.

Robinson asked Al Jaber if he would call not for a “phase down” of fossil fuels, but for a complete “phase out,” which science says is needed to limit the global temperature rise over pre-industrial levels to 1.5 degrees Celsius (2.7 degrees Fahrenheit). Al Jaber testily replied,

“There is no science out there or no scenario out there that says that the phase-out of fossil fuel is what’s going to achieve 1.5 ... Show me a roadmap for a phaseout of fossil fuel that will allow for sustainable socioeconomic development, unless you want to take the world back into caves.”

The *Guardian* story came on the heels of another from the Centre for Climate Reporting based on leaked documents containing background briefs on officials from several countries coming to COP28, to help the UAE secure oil and gas deals from them.

Fueling criticisms of COP28, The Kick Big Polluters Out coalition of environmental groups released an analysis revealing

that close to 2,500 fossil fuel lobbyists have flooded COP28, outnumbering all but two national delegations.

“You wouldn’t invite arms dealers to a peace conference,” said David Tong of Oil Change International. Pacific Climate Warrior Drue Slatter of Fiji added, “It’s because they’re scared. There’s more of them [lobbyists] here because they know that the age of fossil fuels is coming to an end.”

While lobbyists enjoy virtually unlimited access to COP28, climate activists say they are having a more difficult time getting credentialed than in previous years. Add to that the United Arab Emirates authoritarian, strictly enforced ban on protests and the UN climate summit looks more like what climate scientist Kevin Anderson wrote on social media, “a Cabal of Oil Producers not a climate COP.”

Beyond the expansive, air-conditioned summit venue, the planet continues to heat. The European Union said Dec. 6 that this year will be the warmest ever recorded. A scientific study on ecological tipping points from a team of 200 researchers warned, “Without urgent action to halt the climate and ecological crisis, societies will be overwhelmed as the natural world comes apart.”

One “urgent action” being debated at COP28 is developing so-called “carbon markets.” A consortium of organizations released a report, “The Africa Carbon Markets Initiative: A Wolf in Sheep’s Clothing,” detailing extensive problems with these markets, which involve buying and selling carbon credits. When a government protects a tract of forest, for example, it obtains credits which it can then sell. The buyer can

then pollute elsewhere, offsetting the pollution with those credits.

“Carbon credits are just permits to pollute,” said Mohamed Adow, director of the climate think tank Power Shift Africa, on the *Democracy Now!* news hour.

Among the nations buying up those African land rights for carbon credits is the COP28 host, the United Arab Emirates. To date, a private firm called Blue Carbon, owned by Sheikh Ahmed bin Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum of Dubai’s ruling royal family, has acquired land rights to 10% of Liberia, 8% of Tanzania, 10% of Zambia and 20% of Zimbabwe, plus “millions of hectares” in Kenya. While these deals might protect undeveloped land, it could also force indigenous people off their land or lose their rights to use it.

“Sixty years ago, African countries attained their independence. We were able to kick colonizers out of our land. What they’re doing now is basically introducing this new form of colonialism,” Mohamed Adow said.

Carbon colonialism only ensures worsening climate disasters. The science and climate activists around the world agree: what’s needed is a fast, full, fair, and funded phase out of all fossil fuels.

*Denis Moynihan cowrote this column. Amy Goodman is the host of Democracy Now!, a daily international TV/radio news hour airing on more than 1,400 radio and TV stations. Her sixth book, co-authored with Moynihan and David Goodman, is “Democracy Now!: Twenty Years Covering the Movements Changing America.”*

## Remember Who Christmas Traditions Are Really For: The Kids

By BONNIE JEAN FELDKAMP

As a single mom, I’ve spent Christmas alone while my daughter visited with her father’s family for the holiday. I’ve also celebrated Christmas morning as a blended family with my daughter, new husband and stepdaughter. Holidays can be challenging with so many moving parts and so many players who have emotional stakes in the day. I’m here to tell you to take the pressure off. Christmas isn’t about you.

The complexities of the season tend to take on even larger dimensions when people are newly separated and when two different families are newly brought together — blended — into one. It takes some adjusting and some letting go. You don’t want the hol-

iday season to stoke a new fury with your ex-spouse or partner. Be the calm in your child’s holiday storm and make a plan with the purpose of trying to see everything from the point of view of your children. They’re making memories, after all.

Put your traditions into perspective. One day is not a holiday, it’s what you make of it. Don’t walk into things stubbornly holding to your traditions. For example, don’t focus on the fact that Christmas dinner is always at 2 p.m. Instead, adjust your train of thought to ask, “How is this going to work for my kids?”

In a blended family with children merging from both sides, flexibility becomes even more important. Layers of stepparents, ex-spouses, in-laws and ex-in-laws are all valid participants in your child’s holiday experience.

When I first divorced, I knew my ex-in-laws could give my daughter a more experiential Christmas than I could as a single mom in a tiny apartment. So, I negotiated my parenting time to be for New Year’s instead of Christmas. That’s when we would

travel to Texas to visit my mom. My Christmas days were simple, and I had a day to myself. I could eat Chinese food and go to the movies if I wanted to. Or read that book I’ve been saving for when I had the time. It’s just a day. One. Day. Kids deserve the chance to spend time with the rest of their family.

We’re all adults here. Your ex is your partner in parenting. This is a person who should be a part of important things for your child. Sometimes that’s a hard reality to confront. The wounds from a divorce are real and tangible. But you have to set those aside and focus on the children. They love you both. I know it’s not always easy and we all make mistakes. But a child knowing their family — all of them — is good for them.

After a divorce (or breakup), parents have a business relationship with the other parent of that child. You’re together in the business of raising a child. When negotiating for holiday time and for how that visitation and family time will take place, you must work within the realm of that business.

This isn’t the time to bring up the past and fight. It’s not a time to badmouth your ex in front of the kids. Children are well aware of their parents’ shortcomings without your biting comments. That’s not appropriate in a professional setting. If you can use professionalism as a guiding philosophy, the framework for your communication, things won’t get out of hand. Even if the other person isn’t playing by the same guiding principles, you must. The conversation revolves around the needs of the children.

Keep your ego out of it, give yourself grace and remember to focus your energy on the children with the goal of making the holiday a good one. It’s the best gift you can offer them, and I know you can do it.

*Bonnie Jean Feldkamp is a wife, mother and award-winning columnist in Louisville, Ky. She is the media director of the National Society of Newspaper Columnists. Find her on social media @WriterBonnie, or email her at Bonnie@WriterBonnie.com. Check out her weekly YouTube videos at <https://www.youtube.com/bonniejeanfeldkamp>.*

## Dispatches ...

Continued from page 5

ernors sent a letter to President Joe Biden urging the administration to push the Drug Enforcement Administration to “reschedule” marijuana as a less dangerous Class III drug by the end of the year, a move that could be one of the biggest changes in federal drug policy in decades, Charles Jay noted at Daily Kos (12/7). The letter, sent Dec. 5, was signed by Govs. Jared Polis of Colorado, Kathy Hochul of New York, J.B. Pritzker of Illinois, Wes Moore of Maryland, Jon Bel Edwards of Louisiana, and Phil Murphy of New Jersey.

With Republicans lining up in opposition to any rescheduling, marijuana policy could become an issue in the 2024 presidential election if the DEA moves to change the drug’s classification. That could prove a boost to the Biden campaign’s efforts to boost flagging support among young voters.

In October 2022, Biden asked the secretary of Health and Human Services “to review expeditiously how marijuana is scheduled under federal law.” Biden also issued a pardon for all those convicted on federal charges of simple possession of marijuana and urged state governors to do the same.

“Too many lives have been upended because of our failed approach to marijuana. It’s time that we right these wrongs,” Biden said in his White House statement.

The DEA currently classifies marijuana under Schedule 1 of the Controlled Substances Act, the classification meant for the most dangerous substances such as heroin and LSD, considered to have a high likelihood of abuse and no medical uses.

Biden’s request initiated an official review process. The Food and Drug Administration conducted the review, which was then sent to the National Institute on Drug Abuse and HHS. In late August, HHS recommended that the DEA move marijuana from Schedule I to Schedule III, which would significantly loosen federal restrictions on the drug. Politico reported. DEA has the option of rejecting the recommendation. Schedule III includes such substances as ketamine and testosterone which are categorized as having “moderate to low potential for physical and psychological dependence.”

The DEA has yet to act on HHS’s recommendation. The governors wrote that federal law has failed to keep pace with the huge changes over the past decade in state cannabis policies and public opinion. They wrote:

“We hope that DEA will follow suit and reschedule cannabis to Schedule III this year, given that 88 percent of Americans are in favor of legalization for medical or recreational use,” the governors wrote. “Rescheduling cannabis aligns with a safe, regulated product that Americans can trust.” ...

The governors said that rescheduling marijuana will increase public health and

safety, and is a “big win for states, especially helpful for the 38 states that have some form of state-regulated cannabis policies in place, which represent 72% of the population.”

The biggest impact of rescheduling would be to remove financial and legal barriers to the emerging marijuana industry. Since marijuana is a Category I substance, cannabis businesses are not federally legal, and are prohibited from taking typical tax exemptions for business expenses. Businesses also have difficulties accessing banking services and raising cash.

Gov. Jared Polis, who led the governors’ letter initiative, said federal rescheduling would allow cannabis-related businesses to take ordinary tax deductions, like any other business. The cannabis industry generated an estimated \$30 billion dollars in sales revenue in 2022 and is estimated to generate over \$71 billion by 2030. Rescheduling cannabis will not only alleviate financial and safety concerns for businesses but allow a thriving industry to play a full role in the American business environment.

**RURAL JOBS GREW IN SEPTEMBER, BUT THEY’RE STILL LAGGING.** Rural America added more than 200,000 jobs over the past year but is still below pre-pandemic employment levels, according to a Daily Yonder analysis by Sarah Melotte (12/6).

The failure to reach full recovery three and a half years after the start of the pandemic is related to larger trends, including an aging pop-

ulation, lack of childcare, and lower levels of formal education, according to an economist.

Rural employment grew to 20.4 million in September 2023, the latest month for which county-level jobs data is available from the Bureau of Labor Statistics. That’s an increase of 1% from last year. But rural America still has 64,000 fewer jobs this year than it did the same time in 2019, before the pandemic.

Meanwhile, metropolitan counties have gained back more jobs than they lost during the pandemic.

“Rural areas took a hit,” said Elizabeth Davis, Ph.D., professor of applied economics at the University of Minnesota.

Rural counties haven’t fully recovered from the 2008 financial crisis, much less the drop in employment brought on by the pandemic, Davis said.

At the start of the pandemic in early 2020, rural counties initially didn’t suffer as much job loss as urban counties. Employment dropped 13% in April 2020 compared to 2019, while urban counties had a 15% decrease for the same period.

By May 2020, employment nationwide began to recover. Rural counties were actually ahead of urban ones in employment recovery for the first year of the pandemic. After that, urban gains eclipsed rural gains in employment, with the gap widening noticeably in January 2022.

As of September of 2023 (the most re-

*Continued on next page*



# The Last Temptation of George Santos

By DANA MILBANK

The Great Prevaricator spent his last days in the House of Representatives in much the same way he spent the previous 11 months of his brief and inglorious congressional career. George Santos was living his best life.

There were more than 100 journalists waiting for the New York Republican when he emerged from a black Jaguar in the House driveway early Thursday morning, Nov. 30, driven there by a staffer who also happens to be a former drug dealer. Photographers swarmed Santos from the moment he stepped from the vehicle until he rested his Ferragamo-clad foot on the lectern in front of the TV cameras.

He wore studio makeup on his face - perhaps from his shopping spree at Sephora, which he billed to his campaign. NBC's Kate Santalizi asked whether the Ferragamos had been paid for by campaign donors.

Santos looked at his loafers. "These are six years old!" he protested.

The 35-year-old fabulist was about to be expelled from Congress, after a scathing Ethics Committee report found that he had swindled donors and used their funds for Botox, pornography, trips to the Hamptons and Atlantic City, and fashion shopping at Hermès. He might well wind up in prison

after his trial on 23 federal charges of campaign-finance violations, identity theft, fraud and more.

But in his final hours, he was going to do what he had always done since becoming a household name for lying about his education, his employment, his family, his religion, his charity work and virtually everything else about his life story. He was going to create more mayhem.

"Today at noon, I'm going to be introducing a privileged motion for expulsion of convicted and guilty-pleaded Congressman Jamaal Bowman," he announced, referring to the New York Democrat who pulled a fire alarm in a House building during a September vote.

Santos alleged that "many members of Congress have rap sheets" (he didn't name them) and said "I will be filing a slew of complaints in the coming hours of today and tomorrow" with the Ethics Committee against his soon-to-be-former colleagues.

And he bashed the institution that was about to oust him. "It represents chaos - chaos - because we have a House that doesn't work for the people," he said, vowing to "take that story back to the American people" of a place where "no real work is getting done."

But for himself, Santos saw boundless possibilities. Asked about his plans for after his expected expulsion on Friday, the former Brazilian drag queen who faked his way to national fame proclaimed: "The future is endless. ... You can do whatever you want next. And I'm just going to do whatever I want."

As long as he can do it from a prison cell.

It was a bravura performance by the man who had become the embodiment of this year's unparalleled dysfunction in the House. During his ludicrous tenure, he was lawless, dishonest, vindictive, attention-grabbing, ignorant, goofy and ineffective. So was the House - and this week was yet another entry in the annals of maladministration.

Santos's expulsion resolution shared the House calendar on Nov. 30 with another attempt by Rep. Marjorie Taylor Greene (R-Ga.) to force an immediate vote to impeach President Biden's Homeland Security secretary, Alejandro Mayorkas. Greene relented after House leaders assured her they would move expeditiously to impeach Mayorkas, the first such action against a Cabinet officer in nearly 150 years.

Also Nov. 30, five right-wing House Republicans, joined by a token Democrat, held an event to complain about the "deep state" concealing the truth about UFOs. Meanwhile, the Republican-created committee probing the "weaponization" of government, out of ideas, held a rerun of an earlier hearing it had, with the same witnesses.

The day before, House Republicans rolled out plans for a House vote on a formal impeachment inquiry into Biden, even though their year-long probe has failed to produce evidence of any wrongdoing.

Also Nov. 29, right wingers lashed out at their new speaker, Mike Johnson (La.), who has been on the job only for a month after many of the same right wingers ousted his predecessor. Rep. Max Miller (R-Ohio) called Johnson a "joke" who "did a 180 on

everything he believed in," telling Politico's Olivia Beavers that Johnson's tying of Israel aid to IRS cuts was "a slap in the face to every Jew" and was "f---ing dumb."

Coming to Johnson's defense was ... Santos, who told his 100-strong press contingent that "we have members with severe allegations against them having the gall ... to call the speaker a 'joke.'" Santos was referring to allegations of abuse against Miller made by his former girlfriend, Trump White House press secretary Stephanie Grisham.

"What a joke," observed Rep. Zach Nunn (R-Iowa) as he walked by the Santos circus, in remarks overheard by Punchbowl News's Mica Soellner.

Behind Santos, an Architect of the Capitol garbage truck beeped. Off to the side, behind barricades, spectators taunted him when he finished: "Hey b - ch, you ready to go back to jail? How much money did you spend on porn?"

But the joke was on them, because Santos was loving every minute of the attention. "Today is my second-year wedding anniversary, and I'm going to enjoy it and try to forget the fact that it's been one year from hell," he said, promising to schedule yet more sessions with the media on his way out.

Santos, a man of no shame, pronounced himself "proud of the work I put forward" in Congress. "I wish I could do more," he said, but "if this is it, this is it."

*Dana Milbank is a political columnist for the Washington Post, where this appeared. Follow him on Twitter @Milbank.*

## The Expanded NC Republican Seditious Caucus

By GENE NICHOL

On Dec. 4, candidate filing for the 2024 election began in North Carolina. On the same day, Black and Latinx voters sued the state for race discrimination in the construction of the new congressional districts. Republicans said they didn't do it. That's what they always say. Every time.

But here is something that hasn't always been said. Liz Cheney, the hard-right former member of Republican leadership in the US House of Representatives, said: "The Republican Party has made a choice (against) the Constitution, if (they) control the House in January 2025 it will present an existential threat to the American democracy." It "can't happen." Defeating them, and Donald Trump, according to Ch-

eney, is "the cause of our time."

Here's how her deadly accurate claim goes.

An "election denier now leads the House of Representatives." Mike Johnson, whom she describes as a former friend, is defining "dangerous" - he is "a collaborator in the overthrow of the election." She has "seen him take steps he knows to be wrong, steps not supported by the law, by the facts, by the Constitution to do Trump's bidding."

"He can't be the speaker in 2025," she adds. We cannot have "an election which is thrown into the House of Representatives which is governed by the Republican Party." Johnson and his cohort have already shown themselves to be opponents of democracy; they've "made their choice." It is now "easy to see" the democracy-denying steps they'll take. We're "numb to the truth." We are "slow walking to dictatorship."

Cheney adds that these Republican House members "have an extra role to play in the normalization of Trump's attack on democracy." They bolster and amplify it, they aren't, as they assume, just silent aiders

and abettors. You can't "defend the Constitution and support Donald Trump, they break their oaths," she said. "I don't know how they look at themselves in the mirror," she concludes. They "vote for the destruction of democracy in the United States."

Surely Republicans understand this. Every step in the chain is literally and irrefutably true. But maybe it's like historian Heather Cox Richardson says, "we get so invested in our own beliefs that we don't care what is true." And that provides fertile ground for the breeding of totalitarianism. I know this can, somehow, seem distant to North Carolina. Washington stuff. But the bulk of our Republican House of Representatives delegation has voted to support secession before. And the entire NC Republican delegation voted to elect "a collaborator in the overthrow of 2020 election" as Speaker of the House. All have now formally enrolled in the shameful secession caucus. It is surely absurd and naive and "numb" to assume any will stand on democratic principle when given the opportunity to hand the American experiment over to its first dictator.

I know a lot of us, even folks who vote for them, don't think of an array of our Republican congressmen as serious people. We've elected them because they were outrageous, or owned a gun shop, or because they hate transgender people, or because they say they're holy, or, apparently, because they are buffoonish. But now we face grim and sober business. Weighty work. In our highest calling.

North Carolina cannot afford to send a single Republican member to the United States Congress in 2024. Our very form of government, and the blood and tears shed in the long history of its sacred name, hang in the balance. As Ulysses Grant, and, I suppose, Liz Cheney, would put it: "There are but two parties now, traitors and patriots."

*Gene Nichol is Boyd Tinsley Distinguished Professor of Law at the University of North Carolina School of Law and in 2015 started the North Carolina Poverty Research Fund after the UNC Board of Governors closed the state-funded Poverty Center for publishing articles critical of the governor and General Assembly.*

## Dispatches ...

*Continued from previous page*

cent data available), urban employment recovery was 2.5 percentage points higher than rural recovery.

Davis said it can be hard to generalize about rural employment because rural areas are so different from each other. But a few demographic factors might be at play in employment recovery.

"We hear a lot of employers concerned about the lack of childcare because they can't find workers," Davis said. "They hear from their workers and their families that they can't find childcare so they can't work, or can't work full time."

A greater share of the rural population is also moving into retirement, which reduces the number of employed people.

Not only are employers having trouble finding employees of working age who can afford childcare, but lower levels of formal education in rural America can also shrink the pool of potentially employable people.

Although education levels are on the rise in small towns and rural places, they still haven't caught up with urban levels. Twenty-one percent of rural residents over the age of 25 have a bachelor's degree, up from 15% in 2000. The share of the urban population with a bachelor's degree increased from 26%

to 36% during the same time period, which widened the gap between rural and urban education levels.

**SENATE REPUBLICANS HAND PUTIN PROPAGANDA VICTORY.** Vladimir Putin's pet pundits were thrilled with Senate Republicans and their unanimous vote against advancing aid to Ukraine, as well as their efforts to extort concessions on immigration from President Joe Biden and Democrats. The delay, and possibly even the end, of US support of Ukraine means Putin's Russian allies see Russia's military victory at hand. Joan McCarter noted at Daily Kos (12/8).

Senate Republicans' performative tantrum Dec. 6, when they yelled at US officials and stormed out of a classified briefing on Ukraine, "prompted jubilation in Moscow," The Daily Beast's Julia Davis, who closely monitors Russian media, reports. "During Wednesday's broadcast of a state TV program *60 Minutes*, Evgeny Popov said Ukraine was now in 'agony' and it was 'difficult to imagine a bigger humiliation.'"

During his morning show *Full Contact* on Dec. 6, top pro-Kremlin propagandist Vladimir Solovyov joyfully noted: "[Janet] Yellen screamed, 'Don't you dare!' [Joe] Biden screamed, 'Don't you dare!' but Republicans said, 'Go to hell! We won't give your khokhols [slur for "Ukrainians"] any money.'" The segment was entitled, "No one needs Ukraine

anymore—especially the United States."

Appearing on his program, America analyst Dmitry Drobnitsky noted, "The downfall of Ukraine means the downfall of Biden! Two birds with one stone!"

The Senate voted later that day on attempting to advance Ukraine funding, and every Republican voted to block it from getting a final vote. That got the Russian pundits even more excited.

Dmitry Abzalov, director of the Kremlin-affiliated Center for Strategic Communications, crowed that "deal about additional aid has collapsed" over border issues. "It looks like [Chuck] Schumer is still trying to push it through, but it's not happening, because Republicans are presenting harsh demands," he continued. "Without a decision about the borders, even [Mitch] McConnell won't vote for the deal. None of the Republicans will vote for the deal."

**CHATTANOOGA VW WORKERS ANNOUNCE PUSH TO JOIN UAW.** Workers at Volkswagen's only US plant in Chattanooga, Tenn., announced they're launching a public organizing committee with the goal of joining the United Auto Workers, which is aiming to expand its membership to include employees at more than a dozen nonunion car companies after winning historic contracts at the Big 3, Jake Johnson reported at CommonDreams (12/7).

In less than a week, more than 1,000 workers at the Volkswagen plant signed union

authorization cards, giving the nascent union drive more than 30% support so far at the Chattanooga location.

The UAW narrowly failed to organize the plant in 2014 and 2019. But leaders of the new unionization push expressed confidence that the outcome would be different this time around as the newly emboldened UAW puts special emphasis on the South, where the unionization rate is significantly lower than in the rest of the country.

"People are standing up like never before," said Steve Cochran, a lead organizer of the Chattanooga union drive. "There are a lot of young workers in the plant now and this generation wants respect. They're not okay with mistreatment by management. They see what's happening at Starbucks and Amazon. They know that standing up to join the union is how you win fair treatment, fair pay, and a better life."

Organizers pointed to the \$184 billion in profits that Volkswagen Group has brought in over the past decade while workers' wages have stagnated or declined.

"In the last three years, we've seen VW make nearly a trillion dollars in revenue and \$78 billion in profit, but we haven't seen our fair share in Chattanooga," reads the union campaign's website. "Now we're ready to fight for a better job, a better life, and a better future."

*See more Dispatches at populist.com.*



If you are a progressive populist...  
**Don't miss an issue!**

# Subscribe to The Progressive Populist

**P**rogressive populists believe that people are more important than corporations, and that government should be of the people, by the people and for the people. Nowadays, we hear, that's a pretty radical notion.

**The corporate media failed to report** on the Republican attempts to sabotage the economic recovery after Barack Obama took office in 2009. When Donald Trump emerged to lead the teabaggers to the White House, the infotainment channels that replaced network news became even less reliable. An informed citizenry needs the independent and adversary media that was envisioned when the Founders framed the First Amendment in the Bill of Rights. *The Progressive Populist* aims to be a witness for folks on Main Street.

**A handful of corporations are consolidating their grip** on the nation's primary information sources. Megacorporations already own the major radio and TV networks, newspapers, magazines, book publishers and movie studios. Now they're moving to control the Internet. Is it any surprise that editors and news directors reflect the concerns of their corporate bosses?

**Little wonder that populism** — the theory that people are more important than corporations, and government needs to be strong enough to keep corporations in line — gets short shrift in public policy discussions, and politicians and journalists who question the power of corporate barons are dismissed as radicals. Well, there are a few of us in the Heartland of America armed with the First Amendment, access to a printing press and a newspaper with a mission: to tell the stories of working people and how we can regain control of the United States.

**We hope you enjoy this issue.** If you are not already a subscriber and would like to receive *The Progressive Populist* twice monthly, simply return the coupon below with your payment of \$45 for a full year or only \$80 if you want to subscribe for two years. If you prefer, **we offer a PDF version** delivered by email as a paper-free alternative. And for \$10 more, we also offer **The Daily Progressive Populist** five days a week, delivered by email, featuring columns we don't have the space to run in our twice-monthly edition, as well as breaking news and analysis.

**Try our Spread-the-Word discount:** If you subscribe or renew your subscription, you can also buy a gift subscription for only \$20 for six months. Help us spread the word about *The Progressive Populist*.

**Help us make *The Progressive Populist* the antidote to the monopoly daily news,** as we deflate pompous plutocrats and throw a lifeline to progressives who feel stranded in a sea of mossbacks and right-wingers. Get your twice-monthly dose of Jim Hightower, Amy Goodman and other plutocrat pluckers, such as Sarah Anderson, Juan Cole, Joe Conason, Hal Crowther, Bonnie Jean Feldkamp, Barry Friedman, Alan Guebert, Froma Harrop, Thom Hartmann, Jesse Jackson, Sonali Kolhatkar, Robert Kuttner, Gene Lyons, Margot McMillen, Dana Milbank, Ralph Nader, Wayne O'Leary, Alexandra Petri, Dick Polman, Ted Rall, Ed Rampell, Robert Reich, Joan Retsinas, Don Rollins, Mary Sanchez, Seth Sandronsky, Jen Sorensen, Rosie Sorenson, Jamie Stiehm, Tom Tomorrow, Sam Uretsky, Katrina vanden Heuvel, John Young, Dave Zirin and others you won't find in the "mainstream" press.  
**SUBSCRIBE TODAY! DON'T DELAY! Thanks.**



## Send me *The Progressive Populist!*

*The Journal from America's Heartland.*

Enclosed is:

\_\_\_ \$45 for a 1-year subscription. Add \_\_\_ \$10 for the Daily email  
\_\_\_ \$80 for 2 years. Add \_\_\_ \$20 for the Daily supplement  
\_\_\_ \$20 for 6-month introductory subscription (\$24 to renew).

My Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City/State/Zip \_\_\_\_\_

Email / Phone \_\_\_\_\_

Send Gift Subscription to:

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City/State/Zip \_\_\_\_\_

(attach another page if necessary and note email address for PDF and/or Daily Progressive Populist)

Send to:

## The Progressive Populist

P.O. Box 15786

North Hollywood, CA 91606-5786

Subscribe via our website: [prg.magserv.com](http://prg.magserv.com).

E-mail: [prgcs@magserv.com](mailto:prgcs@magserv.com)

or call

# 1-818-286-3104

(9 a.m. to 6 p.m. Central Time, Monday-Friday)

and **CHARGE IT** to  
**Visa, MasterCard,**  
**Discover or American Express**

Our subscription and fulfillment services are provided by Stark Services of North Hollywood, Calif. *The Progressive Populist* is still based in Storm Lake, Iowa, with editorial office in Manchaca, Texas.