

An Incurable Disease? The Mystery of MAGA

How is it possible that people cheer and celebrate the most transparent fraud, the most outrageous liar, the most straitjacket-ready psycho ever visited on the body politic?

By HAL CROWTHER

Like nearly every self-appointed critic of the American political system, I never imagined that I would still be typing that dread-laden five-letter word in February of 2024. The one that begins with “t” and ends with “p”, of course, and it isn’t “tulip.” I’ve prayed, I’ve fasted, I’ve made burnt offerings to the neglected god of common sense, a deity so many Americans have left behind. And still the T-word and the man who embodies all its mystery and menace persist.

Arguments against the presidential candidacy of Donald Trump are like arguments against infanticide, or microwaving kittens. When you offer one, and there must be hundreds, you can’t conceive of an objection or rebuttal. The case against this creature was closed nearly a decade ago, though more damning evidence seems to turn up every day. The *New York Times*’ Michelle Goldberg, not a writer given to heated overstatement, refers to him as a “freakish madman” and an “onrushing nightmare.” Yet indictments for 91 felonies haven’t kept him from winning Republican primaries and drawing crowds of passionate believers. One *Times* headline reads “Trump Tightens Grip on National Psyche.” And another, “Trump’s Connection With Supporters Has Little Precedent: Victory Reveals a New Depth of Devotion.”

Jaws drop, teeth grind, heads spin. How is this possible, what has lobotomized people who cheer and celebrate the most transparent fraud, the most outrageous liar, the most straitjacket-ready psycho ever visited on the body politic? I’ve never met ex-president Trump. We’re roughly the same age, and years ago when I worked in New York he was pointed out to me, across the room at some kind of media party, by a colleague who described him as a self-promoting crook, an idiot who had become the favorite laughingstock of the local disc jockeys. All I can say in his favor is that he was a relatively normal-looking younger man, not an orange-hued, top-crested, 300-pound sideshow attraction as he presents today. My love affair with New York City was never intense, but its unconditional rejection of this hometown horror—Trump

Continued on page 8



Illustration by DOLORES CULLEN

INSIDE:
**BIDEN FLOATS IN
FLOODED ZONE**

EDITORIAL, PAGE 2

FIGHT FOR FREEDOM TO LEARN
*More than ever, we need to protect
our schools, libraries and kids
from censors and book banners.*

SVANTE MYRICK, PAGE 10

CRISIS! CRISIS! OH, NEVER MIND.
*After the Supreme Court sides with Biden
over Texas putting razor wire in the Rio
Grande, GOP supports Texas secession.*

DANA MILBANK, PAGE 23

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 and ask to be "unlisted."

The Progressive Populist (ISSN 1096-5971), entire contents copyrighted 2024, 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

Biden Floats in Flooded Zone

The special counsel assigned by Attorney General Merrick Garland to investigate President Joe Biden's handling of classified documents finally produced his report that concluded "no charges are warranted" in the case. But Robert Hur, a Republican appointee in Donald Trump's Department of Justice, took the opportunity to criticize Biden's mental acuity, portraying the president as "a sympathetic, well-meaning, elderly man with a poor memory."

The slur went beyond Hur's commission, particularly since Hur is not qualified to diagnose neurological conditions, but it blew up in the media to amplify questions about the president's fitness for office at age 81.

We are expected to ignore that Biden's all-but-certain opponent in November is a sociopath and compulsive liar who not only has trouble remembering which countries foreign leaders rule — Donald Trump also has said Nikki Haley was in charge of security at the Capitol on Jan. 6, 2021, confusing his Republican rival with then-House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, and he said Jeb Bush launched the war in Iraq after 9/11, among his recent "senior moments."

Of course, Trump also faces 91 felony charges in state and federal jurisdictions and he has been found liable for rape and defamation of his sexual assault victim, as well as fraud in his financial dealings. And his evangelical Christian supporters believe he was sent by God, who apparently overlooked Trump's cheating on all three of his wives, as well as hundreds of contractors he refused to pay for work during his business career, so we guess it shouldn't bother us.

The Former Guy is desperate to get back in the White House, the wannabe dictator has threatened to ignore the United States' NATO responsibilities and let his friend, Russian President Vladimir Putin, take Ukraine and possibly Poland by force, as well as other Eastern European nations, as Putin tries to put the Soviet bloc back together.

Trump's political operation has embraced Russian-style disinformation, which uses media to produce enough distrust to ensure the public can never mobilize around a coherent narrative. "The Democrats don't matter," Trump's political strategist, Steve Bannon, said in 2018 when he outlined plans to dismantle the "deep state." "The real opposition is the media. And the way to deal with them is to flood the zone with sh*t."

The zone has been flooded ever since.

PolitiFact in January reached a milestone of 1,000 facts checked on statements made by Trump, when he claimed after his New Hampshire primary win that Democrats used the COVID-19 pandemic to "cheat" in the 2020 presidential election. The claim was rated "Pants on Fire."

PolitiFact started examining Trump's statements in 2011, when he was amplifying "birther" conspiracy theories to undermine then-President Barack Obama's eligibility. Since then, about 76% of Trump's statements examined by PolitiFact have earned ratings of Mostly False, False or Pants on Fire, which puts him in a class by himself. "It's not unusual for politicians of both parties to mislead, exaggerate or make stuff up. But American fact-checkers have never encountered a politician who shares Trump's disregard for factual accuracy," PolitiFact reported Feb. 1.

Trump's median rating of False is worse than a cross-section

of frequently checked Democratic and Republican politicians. Politicians with median ratings of Half True include Obama, Biden and Hillary Clinton; three senators who ran for president, Mitt Romney, R-Utah, Marco Rubio, R-Fla., and Bernie Sanders, I-Vt.; and two longtime congressional leaders, Sen. Mitch McConnell, R-Ky., and former House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, D-Calif.

"It's been an astounding eight years in American politics," said Jennifer Mercieca, a Texas A&M University communication professor and a historian of American political rhetoric. "He's built his entire political identity on the fact that he doesn't owe anyone the truth about anything."

PolitiFact, for all its work, can't match the Washington Post for comprehensive review of Trump's contempt for the truth. The Post's Fact Checker team recorded 30,573 "untruths" told by Trump during his presidency. The team, led by Glenn Kessler, noted on Jan. 24, 2021, "What is especially striking is how the tsunami of untruths kept rising the longer he served as president and became increasingly unmoored from the truth."

Kessler noted that the Fact Checker staff has been unable to continue that comprehensive pace, but they did review all the public statements during Biden's first 100 days, and counted 78 false or misleading statements. That compares to 511 such statements in Trump's first 100 days. Fact Checker noted that, unlike Trump, Biden generally does not repeat claims that have been fact-checked as false.

One of Trump's biggest lies was that the economy was never stronger than during his presidency. The facts: by just about any important measure, the economy under Trump was not doing as well as it did under Presidents Eisenhower, Johnson or Clinton — and, as Trump rode the economic recovery that started under Barack Obama, Trump also rode the COVID pandemic into the economic dumps. Unemployment shot up to 14.7% in April 2020. By the time Trump was turned out of the White House in January 2021, Trump left a 6.7% jobless rate, after a net loss of 2.67 million jobs.

Since then, Biden got the COVID pandemic under control, resolved supply-chain problems left over from Trump's administration, passed an economic package that helped to create more than 14 million jobs, and unemployment dropped below 4% for the past two years. However, Republicans continue to undermine public confidence in Biden's ability to manage the economy.

People who have spent time with Biden know the president is in full possession of his faculties — completely lucid, with an excellent grasp of detail, Paul Krugman noted in the New York Times. "Of course, most voters don't get to see him up close, and it's on Biden's team to address that. And yes, he speaks quietly and a bit slowly, although this is in part because of his lifetime struggle with stuttering. He also, by the way, has a sense of humor, which I think is important."

"Most important is that Biden has been a remarkably effective president. Trump spent four years claiming that a major infrastructure initiative was just around the corner, to the point that 'It's infrastructure week!' became a running joke; Biden actually got legislation passed. ... Biden's technology and climate policies — the latter passed against heavy odds — have produced a surge in manufacturing investment. His enhancement of Obamacare has brought health insurance coverage to millions.

"If you ask me, these achievements say a lot more about Biden's capacity than his occasional verbal slips," Krugman wrote. We agree. —JMC

This issue in
The Progressive
POPULIST

COVER/Hal Crowther	p. 1
An incurable disease? The mystery of MAGA	
EDITORIAL	p. 2
Biden floats in the flooded zone	
JIM HIGHTOWER	p. 3
The Right Wing's program to solve childhood obesity. The Supreme Court's six corporate sumpremacists ridge again. Just what we need — another border wall! The shameful greed of the Solano County gold rush. Rebranding CAFOs as PFOs is corporate BS. Why you were not invited to Davos.	
LETTERS TO THE EDITOR	p. 4
DON ROLLINS	p. 4
Student absenteeism: Fixes and frustrations	
RURAL ROUTES/Margot McMillen	p. 5
The race doesn't always go to the Swifties (but that's the way to bet)	
DISPATCHES	p. 5
RFK Jr.'s apology over Super Bowl ad doesn't pass sincerity test. Trump echoes Hitler final solution rhetoric. Poll: most Republicans are fine with Trump getting away with anything. Trump attacks another military family. That's who he is. Changes in child tax credit would have outsized impact on rural children ...	
FROMA HARROP	p. 6
Republicans want the border to bleed	
ART CULLEN	p. 6
Calm yourself: What would Mel Brooks do?	

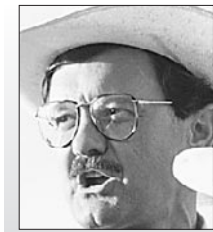
ALAN GUEBERT	p. 6
America's love/hate relationship with one of our biggest trading partners	
GENE LYONS	p. 7
If you're going to argue, at least be able to form a sentence	
CANDACE BAKER	p. 7
Lawmakers must fully fund the WIC program	
JOHN YOUNG	p. 7
Swifties are the least of GOP's problems	
JAKE JOHNSON	p. 8
'Hell no': Trump allies' plan to privatize Medicare draws alarm and outrage	
DICK POLMAN	p. 9
It's unanimous! 'Citizen Trump' is just like 'any other criminal defendant' facing federal prosecution.	
JOE CONASON	p. 9
What Taylor Swift is teaching us now	
DAVID McCALL	p. 10
Fighting for time to heal	
SVANTE MYRICK	p. 10
This Black History month, fight for the freedom to learn	
SAFIYA SIMMONS, LAURA COLLINS & SUZETTE GARDNER	p. 10
Changing the culture around paid leave starts at school	
MARY SANCHEZ	p. 11
Sorry liberals, there's something to learn from the Taylor Swift/Travis Kelce 'conspiracies'	
ROBERT KUTTNER	p. 11
Border wars	
FRANK LINGO	p. 11
Exciting ecological innovations	
THOM HARTMANN	p. 12
Do the rich dudes want the court to ban Trump or not?	

KATRINA VANDEN HEUVEL	p. 12
Why we need a 'Doug Jones' more than a Dow Jones	
SONALI KOLHATKAR	p. 13
The real reason your grocery bill is still so high	
ROBERT B. REICH	p. 13
Truth about the economy	
JESSE JACKSON	p. 14
Republicans seek to gain by dividing Americans	
GRASSROOTS/Hank Kalet	p. 14
Criminalizing the homeless again	
BOOK REVIEW/Ken Winkes	p. 14
Hard work over the decades	
HEALTH CARE/Joan Retsinas	p. 15
What would Kant do? A brake on rene-gade individualism	
SAM URETSKY	p. 15
Pets keep us young	
KATIE KLINGSPORN	p. 15
Where have all the doctors gone?	
WAYNE O'LEARY	p. 16
The corporatization of American health care	
ROBERT C. KOEHLER	p. 16
Diversity in the crosshairs	
GENE NICHOL	p. 16
Violating academic freedom, again	
JUAN COLE	p. 17
Top 3 things Biden could do instead of intensively bombing Iraq and Syria	
JOEL D. JOSEPH	p. 17
US should recognize a Palestinian state	
JASON SIBERT	p. 17
No turning back on Iran's nukes	
JAMIE STIEHM	p. 18
The woman driving Trump mad	
BARRY FRIEDMAN	p. 18
Trump's inner voice	

SATIRE/Rosie Sorenson	p. 18
Pieces of Ron	
RALPH NADER	p. 19
Provoking Trump to defeat himself Jujitsu style	
TED RALL	p. 19
What's left: We're a rich country. Let's act like it.	
LAURA PRITCHETT	p. 20
They struggle to come to America: One woman's story	
ROB PATTERSON	p. 20
Support the workers in the entertainment industry that helps us get by	
SETH SANDRONSKY	p. 20
Langston Hughes and language of human liberation	
FILM REVIEW/Ed Rampell	p. 21
A filmic feast for the eyes: The gastronomy of L'Amour	
EDGE OF SPORTS/Dave Zirin	p. 21
In the fight against antisemitism, Robert Kraft is part of the problem	
AMY GOODMAN	p. 22
Biden's support for Israel may cost him re-election	
BONNIE JEAN FELDKAMP	p. 22
Do MRIs freak you out? They used to scare me too, but then I learned this	
DANA MILBANK	p. 23
Crisis! Crisis! Crisis! Oh, never mind.	
ALEXANDRA PETRI	p. 23
Elmo experiences a dark night of the soul	

Cover illustration by Dolores Cullen
See our blog at progressivepopulist.blogspot.com
Like us at Facebook.com/ProgressivePopulist
Call the White House at 202-456-1111

JIM HIGHTOWER



In 15 states, right-wing officeholders scorned a federal program to provide food this summer for millions of children mired in poverty.

The Right Wing’s Program to Solve Childhood Obesity

This plotline could have come from one of Charles Dickens’ novels about upper-class depravity: “Miserly governors refuse to provide gruel for poverty-stricken ragamuffins.”

Unfortunately, this is not a novel, but modern-day reality taking place in 15 states, where right-wing officeholders have scorned a federal program to provide food this summer for millions of children mired in poverty.

“No!” bark these political ideologues. Seeking to *punish* poverty, they piously demonize public aid ... even for hungry children! This program hardly lavishes luxury dining on anyone, offering only \$40 per child in groceries. Not for one meal or even a week, but \$40 a *month* — about a buck-thirty a day. Feast on that!

Yet, the politicians in such deeply impoverished states as Mississippi and Louisiana have arrogantly shunned this minimal assistance their people so desperately need. Worse, so have the minging governors of super-rich states like Florida and Texas, where millions of children need this food. Also, note that these elitist governors are personally wealthy, yet they have no ethical qualms about taxpayers picking up the tab for their pricey meals.

Then there’s the pathetic duplicity of Iowa governor Kim Reynolds. She rejected the grocery benefit for her state’s children, asserting that it “does nothing to promote nutrition” and could contribute to childhood obesity. Well, gosh, Gov, providing food has actually proven to be nutritionally beneficial for children. On the other hand, she’s right that denying food to children definitely can cause them to lose weight! Thanks, Kim.

Turning down food assistance for poor children is shockingly callous, just plain mean ... and politically stupid, even for right-wing puritanical ideologues. The good news is that 35 states, five U.S. territories and four Native American tribes have welcomed the summer program. Learn more at FeedingAmerica.org.

The Supreme Court’s Six Corporate Supremacists Ridge Again

Heere they come again: The wrecking crew of Alito, Barrett, Gorsuch, Kavanaugh, Roberts and Thomas — the six plutocratic judicial supremacists determined to force their personal political biases on all of us.

The latest ploy of this right-wing cabal is to gut the ability of public agencies to issue regulations protecting people from health care rip-offs, consumer price gougers, labor abusers, toxic polluters, and other corporate profiteers. The six-person Republican majority controlling the court is about to decree that when reigning in corporate abuses, public agencies can only take specific regulatory actions that Congress puts into law.

Sounds good in theory, but in real life, Congress has no ability to itemize the ever-changing list of actions needed to stop the abuses. Thus Congress (and “We the People”) rely on the diligence and expertise of agencies to make the law work. So, the court’s sneaky maneuver is just judicial smoke and mirrors, benefitting ... well, who?

“Overregulated small businesses,” wailed the court’s six laissez-faire ideologues. Indeed, to make their legal ruling, the six had handpicked a case involving a couple of small fishing companies complaining about federal rules to prevent the overfishing of herring. But wait — look who’s steering those little fishermen’s legal boat: Charles Koch, the ultra-billionaire, anti-regulation extremist! His secretive political operation recruited the herring fishermen to be his corporate pawns and is orchestrating this judicial flimflam.

Moreover, Koch’s surreptitious network also funded and orchestrated the political placement of today’s corporate majority on the Supreme Court.

Yet, America’s corporate media establishment papers over this judicial coup. A recent AP headline, for example, meekly reports that “Conservative Interests Take Aim at Regulations.” No — Koch forces are not conservative, they’re corporate supremacists. And they’re not aiming at “regulations” — but at you and me.

Just What We Need — Another Border Wall!

In the 1980s, many Texans were alarmed that hordes of immigrants were fleeing Rust Belt states and pouring across the Red River to take our jobs. So, my friend Steve Fromholz recommended a big beautiful wall across our northern border to keep them out.

But Fromholz — a popular singer-songwriter and renown political sprite — was ahead of his time in the political sport of wall-building. Instead of steel barriers and miles of nasty razor wire, Steve proposed preventing Yankee refugees from entering the Lone Star State by planting a 10-foot high, 10-foot thick wall of jalapeno peppers along the length of the Red River. Eat your way through ... and you’d be accepted as a naturalized Texan.

I thought of Steve’s impishness when I read that Nikki Haley, Ron DeSantis and other Republicans were concocting a whole new xenophobic bugaboo to goose up their anti-immigrant demagoguery. We can’t just fear the “invasion” coming across our Southern border, they cry! Indeed, Haley wailed: “It’s the northern border, too” — adding ominously that we must “do whatever it takes to keep people out.” And then DeSantis piled on, saying we should wall off America’s Canadian border.

Meanwhile, nearly all residents living along that 5,500-mile boundary fear the political wall-mongers more than the imaginary threat of foreigners surging across illegally. “People have always been coming through Canada,” says a clerk at a general store in far-north New Hampshire. Scoffing at the silly political hype, she says: “I don’t think the residents are really worried.”

But Chicken-Little politicians won’t be shooed off by reality. After all, they still have the east, west and gulf coasts to shut off — so expect them to propose razor wire for the entire U.S. shoreline. Their ridiculousness makes Fromholz’s satire seem rational!

The Shameful Greed of the Solano County Gold Rush

Farming can be a deeply satisfying life; you’re connected directly to nature, you are your own boss, and you do work that’s real, benefitting humanity.

But then there are the pests — such as invasive bugs, monopolistic profiteers ... and a new, exceptionally destructive plague: billionaires. Yes, flocks of predatory ultra-billionaires, wanting not just to gouge farmers but to take away their farms.

The crassest example of this land grab is happening now in Solano County, California, a bucolic agricultural area just north of San Francisco. A gaggle of narcissistic Silicon Valley tech titans with maximum bank accounts and minimal ethics has arrogantly (and surreptitiously) been spending nearly a billion dollars in an investment hustle to buy out and pave over *every* farm in the county.

Led by a former Wall Street huckster literally known as “Golden Boy,” the titans

pose as altruistic futurists intending to turn this rural county into a magical technetronic haven of urban affluence and sophistication. Agriculture, they say, is the low-yield economy of yesterday, wasting valuable real estate on farming. So, farmers must sell out and get out of the way, allowing so these capitalist visionaries to grow a new “Mega-City of the Future.”

But not everyone in Solano was charmed, with many refusing to sell to Golden Boy. So, flush with self-entitlement, the Silicon Valley Money Lords are trying to muscle the uppity rural holdouts by suing them for — get this — refusing to sell their farms! The lawsuit is BS, of course, but it’s meant to crush the farmers with legal fees.

Altruistic visionaries? In a note soliciting others to invest in this thuggish thievery, one of the billionaires bluntly touted the syndicate’s real motivation, gushing that the Solano land grab can be *spectacularly profitable* for investors.

Rebranding CAFOs as PFOs Is Corporate BS

A decade ago, Oklahoma’s countryside was literally infested with 626 massively polluting CAFOs — Concentrated Animal Feeding Operations. These are nightmarish creatures of industrial agribusiness, each one caging thousands of chickens, hogs or cattle in huge concrete and steel buildings and producing rivers of excrement. Imagine living next to one!

But — Hallelujah — responding to the outrage of rural neighbors, environmentalists and animal rights advocates, Oklahoma’s political honchos have since stepped in with regulations to eliminate 90% of those CAFOs. Wow! How’d they do that?

The old-fashioned way: political fraud. At the behest of chicken lobbyists for factory farm giants like Tyson Foods, state lawmakers — hocus-pocus! — let CAFOs rebrand themselves as PFOs, “Poultry Feeding Operations.” It’s the same old stink by a new name — only worse, for the state’s PFO designation let’s corporate profiteers get away with providing fewer protections for Oklahoma communities they subject to the overwhelming stench, contamination, flies, disease and other nasties inherent in caging more than 300,000 birds at a time in one spot.

For example, merely switching a factory’s registration from a federal CAFO to a state PFO lets these industrial polluters locate right across the road from family homes, bringing such constant odor, debris and disease that people can’t open their windows or play in their yard. The PFO scheme also eliminates a requirement that neighbors have to be notified when a chicken factory proposes to locate next door, and state officials have even outlawed

legal protests against their rubber stamping of water permits for these polluters.

Here’s a solution: Require that all politicians who took chicken campaign cash and voted for the PFO scam must have one installed next to their homes. And why not put one next door to the Capitol building, too? Share the stink!

Why You Were Not Invited To Davos

Once again, my invitation to the big shindig in Davos never arrived. Davos is the posh resort village in the Swiss Alps where some 3,000 global power elites gather every January for a weeklong, corporate-funded schmooze-and-booze fest to solve the world’s problems.

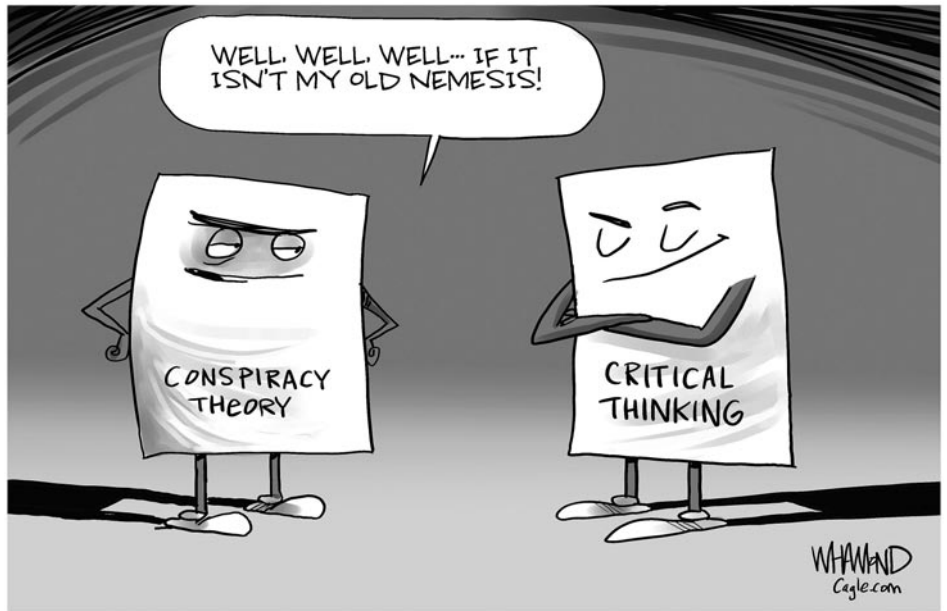
You and I are never invited to this con-fab, grandiosely titled “World Economic Forum.” That’s because (1) we’re not corporate or governmental VIPs, and (2) we might raise rude questions like, “Who the hell elected you plutocratic know-nothings and screw-ups to solve world problems — which you largely created?” See? We the People can’t be trusted to be polite.

Indeed, the theme of this year’s forum is, “How Can We Rebuild Trust?” By “we,” they mean the Davos clique itself — the Wall Street bankers, Silicon Valley speculators, various oligarchs, industrial barons, billionaire campaign donors, labor abusers, war mongers, mass polluters, high-tech futurists and other architects of ... well, the mess we’re in.

In our country, only about 10% say democracy is working for most Americans today, with the powers that be not even trying to serve what the majority believes in, wants and needs. Economic fairness, social justice and equal opportunity — our society’s fundamental, unifying values — are being trampled by the greed of moneyed elites and the fear and hatred of small-minded ideological extremists. They squabble over even keeping our government operating and fritter away their time and credibility on crap that undermines public trust.

So, no, Davos crowd, you cannot “re-build trust,” for no one can trust you. You could gain a real measure of credibility if your elite forum would do something truly significant for democracy, like pushing through a reform to take corporate money out of our politics. That would make Davos historic. Otherwise, you’re just partying ... and stroking your egos.

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 PO Box 40446, Austin, TX 78704, email info@jimhightower.com, or see 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

War of the Words

The current political atmosphere in Iowa recently plunged me into despair I've never known. Transported in time to the movie theater in little Fonda, Iowa, I cringe at the memory of my first viewing of the 1953 Hollywood film, "War of the Worlds." Am I dreaming?

A nine-year old farm girl with a vast imagination, I relished the weekly family trips "to town" where I could eagerly spend my meager allowance on either popcorn or pop (soda) and a ticket carrying me to times and places beyond our simple existence. Sometimes a film's subject matter would cause me to experience nightmares for weeks. Haunted by the then-popular newsreels ("The Eyes and Ears of the World") I occasionally dreamed of our thriving farm being overrun by Nazis. So, sitting in the dark with my little brother Mike gazing up at the big screen, I was overcome with terror the night we saw "War of the Worlds."

It wasn't the flying saucer that the young boy observed landing on a hilltop close to his house that frightened me. Nor was it the people being sucked into the ground. It was the behavior of the victims who ended up below, which included his parents and other trusted individuals. Marks on the back of their necks told the poor lad that something awful happened to them. They acted like zombies, and were no longer their reasonable, kindly selves.

Late in the film, an omnipotent talking head in the sunken spaceship proves to be the brains behind it all, controlling everything his victims say and do.

Today, it seems that so many pragmatic, honest people who populate the state where I grew up have been stricken by an orange-haired, mind-consuming talking head. One Donald Trump. Notice how when interviewed, most Iowa Republicans mimic the exact words spoken on Fox News, no matter how absurd. Not only that, there is now an aura of intolerance for anyone or anything considered an "other." What's unimaginable, is that it's all done in the pretext of being "Christians." Not the Christianity I was taught.

This relatively new development has created so much animosity, that it's become nearly impossible to hold a thoughtful conversation about anything. It's truly a war on rational discourse. Many of my trusted childhood friends and family members have bought into the big lie. I find myself looking to see if they have a mark on the back of their necks.

Like in the movie, I keep hoping to awake and find that it was all just a bad dream. But alas, that will not happen. I know I'm in the minority here, and floundering to figure out just what I can do to stop the madness. Perhaps if there are more like me, together we can find a solution.

JOAN M. THOMAS, *Le Mars, Iowa*

Building the Cult of the Virgin of Guadalupe

Re: "A Prayer to Toribio" (by Art Cullen, 2/1/24 *TPP*). Most folks agree that impoverished people, more than others, need the consolation of religion to lighten the burden of their suffering. Nevertheless, I regret that the Catholic Church prevented the masses in Mexico

from learning more than from their catechism, which could have elevated their self-worth and improved their standard of living.

The Church's practice of indoctrinating millions of Mexicans with religious myths have, in my opinion, only given them hope for a blissful afterlife, but nothing more.

To better understand our Lady of Guadalupe, let's consider two stories which explain her existence: The official Catholic version, based on church dogma which gives comfort to millions of the faithful — and the less well-known version, based on methodical scholastic investigation, which debunks the supernatural.

In colonial Mexico the name "Juan Diego" was the equivalent of today's "John Doe." Thus, historians, some of whom are also Catholic priests, have concluded that he belongs exclusively to Mexican religious folklore.

Also, the events that culminated in Bishop Francisco Juan de Zumarraga's viewing of the miraculous image imprinted on Juan Diego's cape, supposedly took place in 1531. Yet, the first recorded reference to the "miracle" didn't appear until 1556 — 25 years later! Can you imagine the miraculous appearance of the Virgin Mary happening today — and Church authorities not entering an official record of such an extraordinary event until 2049?

Another fact that contradicts the official Church record of the event is that Zumarraga wasn't yet a bishop in 1531, when he was supposed to have witnessed the miracle. Another three years passed before he became a bishop in 1534.

Moreover, there is no record of Zumarraga ever having mentioned that miracle, nor did he ever write about it. He didn't even believe in miracles! This what he wrote in a catechism in 1547:

"The Redeemer of the world doesn't want any more miracles because they are no longer necessary."

To finally unravel the mystery which surrounds the Virgin of Guadalupe, the "miraculous" image has been historically and scientifically proven to have been painted on glazed linen by a human artist. His name is recorded as Marcos Cipece de Aquino, an Aztec Indian painter who was commissioned by Alonzo de Montefur (the succeeding bishop of Mexico City after the death of Zumarraga), to paint the image.

Competent historians, including Catholic clerical historians (Miguel Olmon, for example) are convinced that the Virgin of Guadalupe is a fabrication on a grand scale. They reasoned that after Spain's conquest of Mexico, the Church needed an appealing and familiar Indian myth to convert the millions of pagan Mexican Indians.

Thus, the Church invented the Virgin of Guadalupe to replace Tonatzin, an Aztec goddess whom the Indians had worshipped for centuries. And, in a maneuver to aid the Indians' conversion from paganism to Catholicism, the Church built our Lady of Guadalupe's Basilica at Tepeyac, the very center of Tonantzin's popular cult.

The ploy worked beyond the Church's wildest dreams! Even now, centuries later, the cult of the Virgin of Guadalupe is firmly entrenched in the Mexican culture.

DAVID QUINTERO, *Monrovia, California*

Offer More than Mush

The Democrats bypassed Iowa and New Hampshire in 2024, positioning South Carolina as the launchpad for his re-election bid. As expected, Mr. Biden won going away with 96.2% of the South Carolina vote. But

wait — let's look at some other numbers to emerge from South Carolina:

- 512,418 vs. 131,286: the number of votes cast in S.C., 2020 & 2024. In this key test of Mr. Biden's ability to "get the vote out," IT DROPPED BY 74% (and it wasn't 10 below zero in S.C.).

- 262,336 vs. 126,321: Mr. Biden's vote totals in 2020 and 2024. Mr. Biden's personal support DROPPED BY MORE THAN HALF (52%).

These numbers tell a clear story: the Biden-Harris II rallying cry — "Choose Mush, Not Madness!" — will not carry the day in 2024. If South Carolina is any indication, BHII faces the dubious distinction of being only the second Democratic ticket to since 1988 to lose the popular vote (Kerry 2004).

We New Yorkers have always been a tad jealous of Iowa. You Hawkeyes meet every candidate in person; the last presidential candidate to visit Upstate NY was Robert Kennedy in 1968. This week—nearly half a century after seeing RFK—I'm going to an organizational meeting for his son. But don't worry; no matter how I vote, Biden will carry New York by over a million votes. And nationwide, Madness will likely "trump" Mush in 2024.

JEFF HÖFFMAN, *Waterloo, N.Y.*

Reorganize Political Primaries and Caucuses by Regions

A political primary is a preliminary election in which the registered voters of a political party nominate candidates for office. The key word here is preliminary. The current system allows small states such as Iowa and New Hampshire (assisted by the media) to award front-runner status to the victorious candidate.

From there the candidates travel a path determined by which states wants to "leap frog" the other by moving up their primary dates. Candidates are whisked across the country without any real ability to distinguish regional issues from national issues. Consequently, party platforms are determined by a make-it-up-as-you-go approach. If the primary process were organized on a regional basis, candidates would be able to study the regional issues, campaign to confirm those issues and then receive votes based on the solutions they propose. A regional approach would also prevent a premature selection of a front runner because success in one region certainly would not guarantee success in the next region. This would also further validate the process because each state would still have a say all the way down to the end. Finally, the number of delegates awarded in each state should be determined by the percentage of votes won by each candidate. And yes, convert the caucuses to primaries.

Accordingly, the political primaries should occur between January and June of each presidential election year. Each of the six regions would be assigned a particular month. A lottery held in June of the previous year would determine which month each region holds its primaries.

JOE BIALEK, *Cleveland, Ohio*

email us: editor@populist.com
or write PO Box 819, Manchaca, TX 78652

Student Absenteeism: Fixes and Frustrations

By DON ROLLINS

Public education in America is a complete travesty, so goes the tired and tiring narrative. Our young graduate from secondary school unprepared and uncompetitive, if they graduate at all. Standardized test scores are in irreversible free fall. Teachers don't teach, administrators don't administrate and parents don't parent. And Wokist, revisionist liberals are out to mold public schools in their own godless image.

Bottom line, say the haters: Our public schools are broken beyond repair, and we need to stop wasting resources in a vain attempt to fix them.

Research supports some, but by no means all the faults laid at the feet of America's K-12 system. While some key indicators are justifiably alarming and cry out for intervention — i.e. overall low test scores, fluctuating graduation rates, unsafe student behaviors and all-time high incidents of gun violence — the sky is not falling on every count, starting with slight upticks in math competency, reading skills and graduation rates for 2023. Such advances are modest and fragile, still they indicate resilience in the wake of a global pandemic that shuttered nearly every public school in the nation. We should give credit where credit is due.

But largely left out of simplistic arguments over the merits and minuses of today's public schools is the corrosive phenomenon of chronic student absenteeism. The most recent federal data (2021-22) indicate nearly 15 million students exceeded their districts' allotted excused days for

that school year. That's 29% of the total enrollment for the same period.

Black and Indigenous students were most likely to miss classes, as were Non-English learners, children from homes experiencing poverty, and those without stable food sources and housing. Likewise, students with identified mental health and or substance misuse challenges.

These findings suggest an educational landscape that looks a lot like the rest of socioeconomically and racially stratified America. The absenteeism demographics are nearly identical, with marginalization as the common denominator.

Woefully, these trends and statistics are yet to garner much attention where it matters most: Local school boards. This is at least in part because intransigent Republicans hold sway on thousands of local school boards across the nation - some by their own public admission influenced by conservative groupthink on everything from gender identity to textbook contents to critical race theory. It's doubtful those boards will suddenly embrace systems thinking, adopt wholistic approaches, and connect the dots between chronic absenteeism and kids with no place to sleep.

Hard-right school boards are no doubt encouraged by the overwhelming support from rank-and-file Republicans in their districts. That certainty was born out in a 2023 poll done by Pew Center, in which 70% of their fellow Republicans registered no faith whatsoever in K-12 education, including student absence programs based on anything other than punitive measures for both kids and their caregivers. (Related, Texas leads the pack in this race to out punish the adults. That state's truancy courts are empowered to fine, even jail offending caregivers for up to three days.)

The real pisser here is things don't have to be this way. Chronic student absence has been studied here and abroad

for the last two decades, yielding solid science on the importance of relationships among stakeholders (students, caregivers, educators, administrators, counselors, school boards, public assistance caseworkers) over criminalizing and weaponizing poor attendance. Instead of upping the severity of punishment for students missing the most time, models with the best outcomes divert more resources — more positive relationships — to those who struggle the hardest.

Progress is slow, even in the best performing settings. Yet the data are clear: Engaging children and youth with positive, sustained connections lowers absenteeism and dropout rates better than any other known approach.

The tools exist to lessen the impact of student absenteeism, and are getting better. But this a country besieged by insular conservatism at every turn. Relationship-based models are good for graduation rates, employability and crime statistics, but they're a hard sell when the school board president's car has a Trump 2024 sticker.

Despite the continuing plague of chronic student absence, K-12 education is not the irredeemable travesty of common lore. Far from perfect, our public schools are bent but not broken. As such, they deserve a better fate than as a catch-all for our withering political discord, or fair game for scorched earth Republicans eager to lay waste to one more institution worth the saving.

Postscript: There are a number of entities and resources dedicated to reducing chronic student absenteeism, some with hands-on strategies for change. A simple online search will yield lots of information and ideas.

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

The Race Doesn't Always Go to the Swifties (But That's the Way to Bet)



Conspiracy theorists believe football fans are mostly MAGAs following Trump. Give them a new star and they will move to the Biden camp.

By the time you read this, the Super Bowl will be history but as I write we don't know the outcome and all the conspiracy theorists are lining up on the Kansas City Chiefs' political views. And these days, where the conspiracy theorists go, there goes the media. And they take voters' brains with them. As a Missourian, I must defend the Chiefs.

The current conspiracy (subject to change at any minute, of course) is that Taylor Swift, the enormously popular female singer-songwriter pop star and girlfriend of the Chiefs' tight end Travis Kelce, is going to use her relationship to swing the Presidential election to Joe Biden. The theory is that football fans are mostly MAGAs following Trump, the reality TV star. Give them a new star, say the theorists and they will be moved to the Biden camp. And there's a subset of this theory that says the whole Travis/Taylor/Biden thing is managed by the Pentagon.

If you've watched a Chiefs' game this year—and I'm not saying you should but, as a Missourian, I'm obligated—you've seen the camera swing from a brilliant move by Travis up to Taylor's glassed-in box where she's jumping up and down and hugging someone, probably Kylie Kelce, married to Travis' brother, who plays for the Philadelphia Eagles.

If you've listened to pop radio, TV or online sources—and I'm not saying you should—you know that Taylor has the right elements to start her own genre of music. Female, breathy, pushing the envelope on what's clean enough language to get on mass media and edgy enough to attract rebellious youngsters. In fact, it can be argued that she already has her own genre. Like other genre-starters — think of pioneers in rock, hip hop, punk, New Wave or think "Elvis" — she has enough fresh sexiness to drive the old generation nuts and make kids spend their money. Her "Eras" tour, with tickets averaging \$238, is the first ever tour to make more than \$1 billion.

The MAGA fantasy is that Taylor Swift could throw the election to Biden with just a few words to her fans. The fantasy has some roots in reality. Swift has tons of Instagram followers — like 300 million — and last September she urged them to register to vote. In response, Vote.org had the biggest surge of its time. She lets her followers know that she's a voter and patriot with statements like, "We have the opportunity to choose those who will represent us for the next four years." In social media talk, her comments "go viral."

At this point, I should put in a sentence that says I'm neither football fan nor Swiftie. I think football encourages predatory behavior that I abhor and I think that any time we give our brains to an icon—any icon—we shut off the critical thinking that should always be active.

However, "Swifties" abound. David Brooks, who calls himself a conservative commentator, can quote Taylor Swift lyrics by heart. He keeps up with her extraordinary output of new albums every six months or so and calls himself an "aging fan-boy" with "maturity interruptus." Donna Brazile, who served twice as acting Chair of the Democratic National Committee admits to becoming a Swiftie, but not until the album "Midnights" came out, specifically the cut called "Karma." So, there ya go: Nuance in the Swiftie world. I was going to quote "Karma" here but you can look it up on your Google machine.

But what social media giveth, social media taketh away, and Taylor's enormous popularity has been balanced by evildoers

with Artificial Intelligence on their sides—or at least on their computers. Pornographic fake images have been entered on X, a social media platform formerly known as Twitter. It would be easy to change something like Taylor's "We have an opportunity ..." to "We don't have an opportunity ..." which might make kids even more cynical with the idea that they shouldn't bother voting.

So don't look for any big Biden push from Taylor but, whatever happens, the Taylor Swift AI controversy shines a light on some current election dilemmas. The future of AI and the media is only one looming technology fueling cynicism about information. Cynicism about democracy.

This is not to say that the media has ever been bias-free. From the Civil War to the 1980s newspapers with "Democrat" in their name existed in many cities. In St. Louis, the *Missouri Gazette and Louisiana Advertiser* changed its name to *Missouri Republican* and then to *Missouri Republic* and eventually aligned with the Democrats, then went out of business.

So while we expect newspapers and TV channels to report from above the fray, that's never happened and the sports world and entertainment can't be expected to be any different.

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: margotmcmillen@gmail.com.

DISPATCHES

RFK JR'S APOLOGY OVER SUPER BOWL AD DOESN'T PASS SINCERITY TEST. In 1960, John F. Kennedy became the first Democratic candidate to effectively use TV spot ads in a presidential race—a strategy that helped him win a close race against two-term Vice President Richard Nixon. At a time of rising Cold War tensions, Kennedy faced two major obstacles. At age 43, he was bidding to be the youngest person ever to be elected president. And he was also seeking to become the first Irish-Catholic president, Charles Jay noted at Daily Kos (2/12).

JFK's media team came up with a catchy campaign song which was then edited to create shorter TV spots. The lyrics dealt with his youth and creed: "Do you want a man for president who's seasoned through and through, but not so dog-gone seasoned that he won't try something new." And later the lyrics posed this question: "And do you deny to any man the right he's guaranteed to be elected president, no matter what his creed? It's promised in the Bill of Rights to which we must be true, so it must be true, so it's up to you."

The ad urged people to "Vote Democratic" and features photos of former presidents Franklin D. Roosevelt and Harry S. Truman as well as Eleanor Roosevelt. It seems this ad may have inspired someone else.

During the first half of the Super Bowl, the American Values 2024 super PAC supporting RFK Jr.'s campaign paid \$7 million to run a 30-second ad using an edited version of the campaign song and imagery from the 1960 campaign ad.

It almost makes for a good example of one of those "Can you spot the differences?" puzzles.

The lyrics have been changed to take a swipe at President Joe Biden's age: "Do you want a man for president who's seasoned through and through. A man who's old enough to know and young enough to do. Well it's up to you." And there is a photo of the 70-year-old Kennedy on skis to underline the message.

There are photos of Kennedy family members, but no images of other Democrats. And the message reads: "Vote Independent."

Last October, when RFK Jr. decided to run as an independent presidential candidate rather than continue a futile bid for the Democratic nomination, four of his siblings—former Maryland Lt. Gov. Kathleen Kennedy Townsend, former Rep. Joseph Kennedy II, Rory Kennedy, and Kerry Kennedy—signed a statement denouncing his plans.

"The decision of our brother Bobby to run as a third-party candidate against Joe Biden is dangerous to our country," their statement read. "Bobby might share the same name as our father, but he does not share the same values, vision or judgment. Today's announcement is deeply saddening for us. We denounce his candidacy and believe it to be perilous for our country."

And right after the Super Bowl ad ran, another Kennedy family member, his cousin Bobby Shriver, called him out in a post on X, formerly known as Twitter:

"My cousin's Super Bowl ad used our uncle's faces — and my Mother's. She would be appalled by his deadly health care views. Respect for science, vaccines, & health care equity were in her DNA. She strongly supported my health care work at @ONECampaign & @RED, which he opposes."

RFK Jr. responded that night with a post on X that read: "Bobby, I'm so sorry if that advertisement caused you pain. The ad was created and aired by the American Values Superpac

without any involvement or approvals from my campaign. Federal rules prohibit Superpacs from consulting with me or my staff. I send you and your family my sincerest apologies. God bless you."

But how sincere was that apology?

Despite his apology and claim that his campaign was not involved, the ad remained at the top of his X profile Tuesday morning (2/13), with this message:

"Our momentum is growing. It's time for an Independent President to heal the divide in our country."

American Values 2024's website declares that it is supporting Kennedy to "help restore the soul of democracy to America by taking back our political system from corporate interests."

But that also doesn't ring true because American Values is drawing donations from Trump backers. RFK Jr. is seen as a potential spoiler who might draw some Democrats away from Biden simply by playing on his family name, as was the case with the super PAC ad that ran during the Super Bowl.

NBC News reported that American Values 2024's biggest donors include Tim Mellon, a large Trump donor who gave \$15 million to the pro-Kennedy group in 2023, according to campaign finance records. FEC filings show Mellon also donated \$10 million to MAGA Inc, the main pro-Trump super PAC, last year.

DNC Rapid Response Director Alex Floyd, released this statement after the Super Bowl ad ran: "It's fitting that the first national ad promoting Robert F. Kennedy Jr.'s candidacy was bought and paid for by Donald Trump's largest donor this cycle. RFK Jr. is nothing more than a Trump stalking horse in this race."

And the last word goes to Robert Shrum, a longtime Democratic political strategist and consultant for former Senator Edward M. Kennedy wrote in a post on X:

"This RFK Jr. Super Bowl ad is a straight out plagiarism of JFK ad from 1960. What a fraud- and to quote Lloyd Bentsen with a slight amendment, "Bobby, you're no John Kennedy." Instead you are a Trump ally."

TRUMP ECHOES HITLER FINAL SOLUTION RHETORIC. Over the weekend, America was treated to one of the great spectacles that has become a tradition over decades. Not the Super Bowl—that other big American festival. The one where major media outlets fixate on some perceived flaw in a Democratic candidate to ignore a Republican threatening to bring on the end of the republic, this time with a side order of World War III, Mark Sumner noted at Daily Kos (2/12).

On Friday evening (2/9), Donald Trump spoke at an NRA event, the eighth time he has spoken to the organization. Besides bragging that during his time in the White House he "did nothing" to control guns in any way, Trump promised a door-to-door effort to sweep the nation of migrants and place them in enormous detention camps along the border "within moments" of taking office.

The speech—which included such bizarre claims as insisting that if he didn't win "they" would change Pennsylvania's name, and saying that he had personally witnessed a migrant stealing a refrigerator—ended with some of the most chilling words any American politician has ever uttered, words that make it clear that Trump has been studying hard from that book of Hitler speeches he keeps at his bedside.

The second most frightening thing may be that Trump has said it all before. Many times. The most frightening thing of all may be the complicit silence of the national press.

Trump isn't quite promising a "final solution" to the "Jewish problem." Instead, he's promising a "final battle" to "drive out globalists." Which is ... not at all different.

The idea of casting out the communists, another Hitler favorite, isn't new. Neither is that "final battle" phrase. Trump used both in his "I am your retribution" speech in March of 2023. That speech ended in much the same way as Trump's two most recent appearances.

Continued on page 22



FROMA HARROP



Senate negotiators struck deal to strengthen the border. But House GOP leaders, on Donald Trump's orders, said it was too soon for border reforms.

Republicans Want the Border to Bleed

If House Republicans succeed in sinking the strongest border enforcement bill in a generation, they can go back to playtime, impeaching Homeland Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas and spreading weird stuff about Taylor Swift being deployed for “psy ops.”

Come November, though, the voting public will remember the sinking, not the show. Americans are paying attention to

the chaos at the border. This is an issue that inflames them and that they understand.

The bipartisan deal answers the wish list for restoring order at the Southern border. The bill would provide \$20 billion to tighten border security: It would end the practice of “catch and release,” whereby migrants would cross illegally, apply for asylum and then be given hearing dates for their claims years in the future.

It expands the numbers of asylum officers, border security agents, detention beds and deportation flights. Most importantly, it gives the president emergency powers to close the border once a threshold of illegal crossings is passed.

Given recent history, that threshold is quite low. And President Joe Biden has said, yes, he will close the border when it's met.

The bill doesn't even mention normalizing the status of Dreamers, people who were brought to this country illegally as young children. That has been a Democratic priority, though polls suggest that most Republicans favor easing the lives of those who have basically grown up as Americans in America.

Donald Trump has ordered Republicans to reject the legislation for the perverse reason that it would go far in actually restoring order, thus depriving him of a potent

campaign issue. House Speaker Mike Johnson hopped to and announced that the bill was worse than he thought it would be.

Johnson is a self-proclaimed religious conservative, but one who blanks out parts of the Bible found not to be politically convenient. And he can add new things. Thus, he's come up with an 11th Commandment that goes, “Thou shalt lie in service to Donald Trump.”

As for the political stakes, no one said this better than a *Wall Street Journal* columnist with whom I disagree on nearly everything. Daniel Henninger wrote: “A Republican do-nothing decision to let the border bleed across the next 10 months” lets Democrats portray the entire party as “a reject-everything Trump-MAGA caricature, rather than a GOP capable of governing.”

Henninger does err in underestimating the hemorrhage. It would go on for more than 10 months. Even if Trump wins, he wouldn't take over until next January, which is almost a year from now. And as things now look, he's probably not going to win.

If Republicans could put through tougher immigration measures, as they claim, why not let this deal get the ball rolling? Then they can try to improve on it. That would assume, however, that they have any serious interest other than not

making Trump mad at them.

Speaking of political survival, Democrats seem to understand the importance of this issue to independents and most of their own voters. They've already taken over as the party of national security, supporting desperately needed aid for Ukraine and the imperative of hemming in Vladimir Putin.

There remain Republicans on the good side of these issues, but they're no longer in charge of their party. If Democrats become the only reliable supporters of national and now border security, many voters might well give them a House majority, maintain their Senate majority and keep President Biden.

Sometimes you wonder whether Biden's secret psy ops agent isn't Taylor Swift but Donald Trump. He's done such a good job of shaping public opinion against Republicans, not to mention helping them lose elections. What better move than trying to kill border security measures that the great American majority has been demanding?

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

Calm yourself: What Would Mel Brooks do?

By ART CULLEN

A congenital optimist, or so he claimed on social media, had turned to despair over the superficiality of our politics and civic life. I know the feeling — the despair part. The Iowa Legislature is in session. Stupid can be funny. It's something to hang onto while you get through hard times.

Such as, Republican legislators breaking out into singing the Star Spangled Banner while attempting to require every school kid to sing it every day. Beverly Sills could barely master the tune. Laura Belin, the Bleeding Heartland blogger, fought for years to gain press credentials and finally got them after suing the House clerk. So she could witness this? Imagining the scene makes me laugh.

They're so hung up about sex and sexual identities they can think of little else besides getting rid of income taxes and higher education. Conversations in the cloak room among a bunch of sexually frustrated guys with beards must be titillatingly absurd. What would Mel Brooks say? I think he already did in “Blazing Saddles” when he por-

trayed Gov. Petomane (which in French means “farting maniac”).

First, God gave us fools for laughter. So laugh.

There is much to fret about. Gov. Kim Reynolds wants to disable the Area Education Agencies. She will not give up on harassing gay and transgender people, an unhealthy obsession. Legislators are trying to undermine colleges because they teach people how to think critically. Eliminating the income tax will create big problems. Iowa has been on a rightward lurch for many years that makes International Falls look halfway attractive in February.

Take heart. Average Iowans are planting their flag — Our Liberties We Prize, Our Rights We Will Maintain — and are fighting back. Special ed moms are not to be trifled with. They organized, crowded the Capitol and overwhelmed legislators. The House threw out Reynolds's bill to gut the AEAs. The governor with a tin ear is not going quietly on the issue. That should be entertaining.

Likewise, a House committee scotched a bill that would strike civil rights protections over gender identity following intense criticism of citizens flooding the Statehouse.

Legislators noticed that the Moms for Liberty got their hats handed to them in city and school elections last fall across Iowa. We would prefer that our moral peccadilloes are not hung out by politicians. We are, at root, disturbed by book bans and dis-

torting history. The pendulum swings right and back toward center.

Reynolds is not having her undisputed way. Legislators see how weak she is, with the humiliation Ron DeSantis suffered following her endorsement. Rep. Megan Jones, R-Sioux Rapids, does not appear to be shaking in her boots over threats to primary her for standing against gay discrimination.

Also recall that Warren County voters ran off the county auditor for being an election denier. This in a county that voted heavily for Donald Trump but did not buy into the Big Lie.

If your child were gay, or in need of speech therapy, or you don't want to be a member of the Youth Brigade, you might just shake Iowa off your boots. But people are staying and fighting for their rights, and for what this state could be. They got some of the worst ideas so far killed. There are plenty more bad ideas, like restoring the death penalty. But there are cracks exposed in the right-wing architecture that are being exploited. Many Republicans understand that they might have gone too far in their culture wars.

In Washington, the House is set to reject a Senate border security compromise. It makes clear that the GOP wants to maintain a dysfunctional system in perpetuity for political purposes. Voters will come to digest that, with the help of the Biden campaign. They want solutions, not more pointless argument. The GOP could lose the

House over it, and Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell fears keeping his title because of it. Sen. Chuck Grassley, the old Republican war horse, said he wants to hold up a bipartisan bunch of tax breaks because it might help Joe Biden. It is so bald it is funny.

Embrace the absurd. The MAGA core is melting down over a woman wearing a sequined garter and a Kansas City Chiefs jacket. Who thought Taylor Swift could strike such loathing just by hugging Travis Kelce's mom in the skybox? It could swing the election if not the Super Bowl, they chatter. Great stuff. Wait 'til we get to the part when Trump attempts to deliver the inaugural address in absentia while wearing an ankle monitor. We got it all: sex, love, a neutered mob boss, a plodding attorney general, a teetering incumbent and great masses wanting someone's head on a pike.

And, we have self-correcting democracy still. So far. It is working at a certain level in Iowa where we appear to be retreating from some of our worst excesses. If you can appreciate the satire you can find your way forward, or laugh at your despair.

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.

America's Love/Hate Relationship With One of Our Biggest Trading Partners

By ALAN GUEBERT

There's a joke about my fellow Baby Boomers making the rounds that goes something like this: In the 1960s, Boomers didn't trust anyone over 30, but as soon as they reached their 60s, they didn't trust anyone under 30.

American farmers and ranchers have nearly the same dynamic with China: As long as its people and companies buy our soybeans, beef, pork, and corn, we love each and every one of them and their dollar-stuffed wallets.

When Chinese companies or citizens start buying our farmland, technology, and businesses, however, our farm leaders and politicians call them every name under the sun except “customer” or “investor.”

American farmers and ranchers aren't alone in their sometimes-sunny, oftentimes-dark view of China and its political—and possibly nefarious—role in international markets. New York University business professor and popular podcaster Scott Galloway

sees TikTok, the popular, China-based social media platform used by nearly 145 million Americans, as “the ultimate propaganda tool.”

Galloway, who has often described TikTok as the most addictive social media platform he's ever seen, adds that China “would be dumb ‘not to put their finger on the scales’” to make “the West look bad.”

Over 30 US states have that same concern; 10 have banned state employees from loading the app on state-owned electronic devices and 20-plus (the number keeps growing) are considering legislation to do so. India, the world's most populous country, banned TikTok after its user numbers nationwide hit 190 million.

Many in US agriculture see China's growing presence in our business and political arenas as even more sinister. For example, in 2023, 10 states enacted “restrictions on the ability of land purchases by foreign nationals,” according to MultiState, a lobbying firm that operates throughout the US.

While only one of those states, Alabama, enacted its law against China specifically, five other states did direct their new laws against American “adversaries such as China, North Korea, Russia, and Iran.” Presently, 19 states have “introduced some form of foreign land ownership ban ...” in their statehouses.

While all this worrying and banning

has been going on, China spent most of 2023 learning one of capitalism's biggest lessons: economic growth isn't an endless ride upward. Even though the Chinese economy did, in fact, grow last year, its rise was the smallest since 1990, noted the *Wall Street Journal*.

Leading the slowdown was real estate. Sales, as measured by square footage, were down a calamitous 23% in 2023. Worse, in mid-January a Chinese court ordered Evergrande, one of China's largest real estate developers, to liquidate its crumbling \$300 billion “debt mountain.”

Additionally, more signs of coming weakness—deflation, falling stock markets (as US stock indices hit record highs), and flagging consumer spending—suggest China is well on the path to become the next Japan, a global powerhouse that's about to stumble for years as it juggles too much debt, a declining population, and flagging exports.

While those deepening signs of trouble suggest Xi Jinping, China's 70-year-old president, will surely spend more time on domestic politics to maintain power and order, other experienced China watchers think Xi will work even harder to lower tensions between his nation and the US.

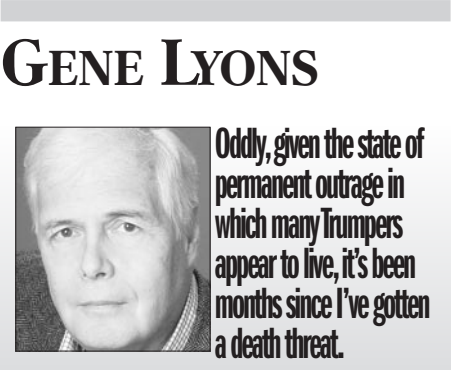
In fact, noted the *Washington Post*, relations between the world's two superpowers have taken a decidedly positive

turn—probably because of China's worsening economic outlook. “Much of the shift ... stems from Beijing's recognition that its own economy has been foundering while the United States' is booming,” the *Post* reported Jan. 27.

Which only proves the age-old axiom that there's nothing like a good customer — China for our ag exports and America for China's manufactured and digital goods — to move people from pounding their fists at the negotiating table to picking up forks at the dinner table.

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



If You’re Going to Argue, At Least Be Able to Form a Sentence

One interesting aspect of writing a newspaper column is reader letters and emails. Lately, mine have been more supportive and friendly than not. I usually try to respond, although I’ve fallen down on the job of late. So, if you’ve sent me a fan letter and haven’t heard back, my apologies. I do read them all. Especially the ones from people who are fond of cows.

Oddly, given the state of permanent outrage in which many Trumpers appear to live, it’s been months since I’ve gotten a death threat. Maybe that’s because it’s pretty much impossible to send an anonymous email. You can create a false identity,

but it’s harder to disguise where a message has originated. People learn these things from watching CSI programs on TV.

Then there are the ones from people who claim they refuse to read my offerings but are outraged anyway. They tend to be online tough guys. Here’s a classic of the genre:

“Just when I didn’t think you could say anything stupider, I never read your articles just your stupid headlines because it’s when I turn the page how can you say Trump’s mental health when you’ve been looking at four years of the most stupid man ever as president as a former marine combat infantry man I despise the fact your even in my country, get the [bleep] out my country you Commie!!!”

Well, it’s my country too, Ace. None of my friends who are former Marines appear to think their service has given them ownership rights. But then they don’t brag about their service, either, so it makes me wonder about the true extent of our hero’s combat experience. The figure of the *miles gloriosus*, or braggart soldier, has been a stock character in comedy since the Roman dramatist Plautus wrote a play with that title circa 206 B.C.

Shakespeare’s Sir John Falstaff is perhaps the most famous example: a blowhard and a rascal who considers honor and courage delusions.

A bit like Trump, actually, but much funnier.

It’s also remarkable how many correspondents are stymied by what I call the Mystery of the Apostrophe. You know, as in “your” Trump Derangement Syndrome [or TDS] vs. “you’re a Commie.” Sixth-grade

stuff.

Speaking of elementary school, my son Gavin’s invariable response when he got his hand caught in the cookie jar was, “What about Doug?” Doug being his younger brother, equally prone to foraging for treats.

Just so my aggrieved correspondents, who ask, “What about Joe?”

A classic example, politer than most: “You completely ignore the facts regarding your man, Joe Biden’s, continuous and accelerating cognitive decline and focus on the mental decline of Donald Trump. Yes, it’s true that he spouts off ridiculous, misleading and sometimes dangerous statements, but you, as a member of the liberal state-run democratic media, are scared to death that Trump may win the election and COMPLETELY IGNORE the daily gaffes, errors, lies and total decline of Biden’s mental ability and capacity. I long for the days when the media was unbiased and reported facts, not just your slanting of what you consider to be facts that you believe that the general public needs to know according to your agenda.”

You’ve got to love that “state-run democratic media” part. I can’t decide what’s more foolish: this fellow’s seeming belief that the small-city Tennessee newspaper where he found my column is part of the “state-run democratic media” or that I’m in it for the big bucks.

“Of course it is clear to me and others that you do this for the \$\$\$’s. It’s easy to profit by spewing hate on a popular figure.”

What’s clear to me is that this fellow — one of several who made similar accusations — has no idea what’s been going on in the news media since the advent of the in-

ternet. Newspapers have been going out of business in droves.

Many also appear to have no concept of the distinction between news coverage and opinion columns, which are expected to be factual, yes, but also opinionated. What I’m still waiting for is a single correspondent who can identify a factual error in the column that set them off, which concerned Trump’s crazy confusing of former Democratic House Speaker Nancy Pelosi and his Republican primary opponent Nikki Haley.

What made Trump’s “gaffe” truly outrageous is that the whole thing was based upon a particularly brazen and thunderous lie. Specifically, that there was ever a phone conversation between then-President Trump and anybody at the US Capitol on Jan. 6, 2021, regarding military protection for Congress.

Did not happen. Trump made no such call.

Pelosi never received one.

Haley bore no responsibility and was nowhere in the vicinity.

I’ve challenged several of my correspondents to show me any remotely similar episode involving Biden. One guy said he once called Kamala Harris “President Harris.”

Otherwise, crickets.

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.

Lawmakers Must Fully Fund the WIC Program

Half of all babies — including mine — rely on this essential program. But unless Congress acts, millions could face food insecurity.

By CANDACE BAKER

When my grandmother was raising my cousins and me, she taught us to work hard and go after what we wanted. I didn’t know it at the time, but we were in poverty.

Scared of judgment and bureaucracy, my grandmother refused to apply for assistance programs. But that meant she had to work several jobs, day and night, bringing us with her because she couldn’t afford child care. We barely got by — and enjoyed no time together outside of work and school.

We thought that’s how everyone lived. Your grandma works around the clock and still can’t make ends meet. That’s life, right? But as I got older, I saw that other kids had new clothes, after-school activities, and time to play.

I wanted that. And most of all, I wanted to help my grandmother so that she could have it too. So I vowed to

get a college education and a good-paying job helping others.

If I wanted to achieve my dream of helping my family, I knew I’d have to do something different. I’d heard about a program that helped pregnant and postpartum moms and their babies, the Special Nutrition Assistance Program for Women, Infants, and Children, also known as WIC.

I almost didn’t apply because, when I tried to enroll in Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), I ran into the same judgment and bureaucratic stumbling blocks my grandmother feared. But I knew I needed help — and so did my baby.

And let me tell you — WIC was a game-changer!

WIC not only provides nutritious foods but also nutrition education, breastfeeding support, and even health care referrals for low-income mothers and small children. It helps to reduce maternal and infant mortality and improves health outcomes so children have the best chance at a healthy and productive life.

I also was able to get the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) to help with our food needs. And because of these programs, I was able to go back to school, get my high school diploma, enroll in college, and graduate Magna Cum Laude. I was even able to become a volunteer mentor with a federally funded program called Second Chance to help people who served prison time reenter society in a healthy, productive way.

Families like mine are everywhere — about half of all babies born in the United States benefit from WIC.

It turns out that most of us just need a little help at es-

pecially difficult times in our lives. If wages had kept pace with the rising cost of living, rent, and food, perhaps we wouldn’t need assistance programs. But wages haven’t kept pace with living costs in 50 years.

For the past 25 years, WIC has served every eligible family that applied for its critical services. But now it’s in danger — Congress hasn’t agreed to fund the program to meet the needs of all who are eligible. There’s a \$1 billion shortfall, which means that 2 million pregnant and postpartum women and their little ones won’t get necessary food and health assistance

Imagine all those families that will face food insecurity, childbirth complications, and negative impacts on their health and well being that can last a lifetime — even generations.

I now have four children. All four benefited greatly from the WIC program, just as all who are eligible deserve to do. I believe in everything WIC does — I even took a job there helping with breastfeeding support. I’m also an Expert on Poverty at the anti-poverty organization RESULTS. These opportunities allow me to advocate for the programs that supported me when I was in need.

I need your help to ensure that Congress does the same. We must fully fund the WIC program so that no eligible family is turned away.

Candace Baker is a mother, fierce advocate for anti-poverty programs, and Expert on Poverty at RESULTS from Indianapolis, Indiana. This op-ed was distributed by OtherWords.org.

Swifties Are the Least of GOP’s Problems

By JOHN YOUNG

Let me get this straight.

Why is Taylor Swift the most popular performer on the planet? Because a wokeness-contaminated Pentagon enlisted her in a grand psychological operations plot.

Key to its success was the Biden administration ordering the NFL to raise her profile, assigning hulking Travis Kelce his own psy-op role as her boyfriend. The feds also threatened Patrick Mahomes with one directive: “Throw it to 87.”

Swift now uses a for-show romance to enhance her deep-state platform. Her assignment: Promote Democrats and wokeness. She denounces Donald Trump. She exhorts robot hordes to vote. Bead-braceleted caravans overwhelm polling places.

Really? Really? I have one thing to say to all that:

Sounds like a really good idea.

If the Pentagon hasn’t already carried

out this ruse, it should run tape of the Fox Propaganda Channel, listen and learn.

Republicans — and, naturally, Fox Propaganda — are mightily afeared of Taylor Swift.

They have good reason. She has encouraged thousands of her fans to register to vote. She supported Joe Biden in 2020. She will again.

The ravings of America’s misogynist right can only boost her power as a change agent.

If you think Taylor Swift and her joyful flock are Republicans’ only problem, however, you haven’t been paying attention.

Consider Renee Rapp. She’s a fireball. Her singing lit up a recent “Saturday Night Live,” like she does on the big screen in the new musical adaption of “Mean Girls.”

She’s blonde, bold, gorgeous and gay: at 24, proudly lesbian. Coming out? For her, it’s stage-left — nothing to hide. Hear her young audiences and know: Others’ hangups with sexual orientation won’t hurt her career.

It might hurt some politicians’ careers, though.

Republicans, marching to the orders of the religious right and the gun lobby, consider themselves, um, bullet-proof. They think they have a good thing going with their jaw-

boning against wokeness — “woke” another word for celebrating diversity in a world of difference.

They are wrong. They are losing young voters. They are losing female voters. They are losing educated voters. They are losing empathetic voters.

They are also losing Christian voters who think the biblical entreaty to treat others as one would wish to be treated countermands the urge to make pariahs of others based on race, sexual orientation and foreign origin.

Republican House Speaker Mike Johnson says he is directed by the Bible, but that can’t possibly be true, because he’d exclude LGBTQ people from the graces of Matthew and Luke.

He recently received an award for “Christian courage” from a religious-right group whose president calls LGBTQ people “a cult.”

One cannot overstate how out-of-step this is with young voters.

Red-state Republicans seek to make “trans” a curse word. Meanwhile, wacky “RuPaul’s Drag Race” is one of the most popular shows streaming into Gen Z apartments.

Republican positions offend most young

voters: on climate change, on reproductive rights, on voting rights, on doing something — anything — about college debt.

The biggest turn-off to those voters is Donald Trump, who operates as if laws don’t apply to him, including those on assaulting women and tabulating votes.

Republicans will pay for all of the above as the party becomes chalkier and more calcified.

Joe Biden is ancient, but at least he knows what’s coming down the pike.

He knows that diversity is the essence of the American experience. He knows that a compassionate government can’t be the plaything of moneyed interests, or one race, or one dogmatic set of believers.

That’s why Republicans fear Taylor Swift. Unlike the narrow target audience of Fox Propaganda, Swift’s appeal just keeps growing and broadening.

If our government is behind Swifties’ rise, fantastic. We the people have latched onto how to build a more perfect union.

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

polls around 10% in the city—always impressed me profoundly.

It seems to be a fact that no one who has experienced him up close regards him with affection or respect. Here are some of their comments on the 45th president:

The late Maryanne Trump Barry, his older sister:

“His goddamn tweet and the lying—O my God. I’m talking too freely, but you know. The change of stories. The lack of preparation. The lying.”

“He has no principles. None. It’s the phoniness and this cruelty. Donald is cruel.”

Mary Trump, his niece:

“The world’s most dangerous man.”

Sen. Mitt Romney, 2012 Republican candidate for president:

“A phony, a fraud. Deeply weird.”

Mark Esper, Secretary of Defense under Trump:

“An existential threat to democracy.”

Rex Tillerson, Secretary of State under Trump:

“A moron.”

William Barr, Attorney General under Trump:

“A consummate narcissist, and he constantly engages in reckless conduct that puts his political followers at risk...”

John Kelly, Trump’s chief of staff:

“A person who admires autocrats and murderous dictators. A person that has nothing but contempt for our democratic institutions, our Constitution and the rule of law.”

Gen. Mark Milley, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff under Trump:

“We don’t take an oath to a wannabe dictator.”

John Bolton, Trump’s national security adviser:

“By the time I left the White House, I was convinced he was not fit to be president. I think it is a danger for the United States if he gets a second term.”

The late Charles Fried, former solicitor general, conservative legal guru:

“...this completely lawless, ignorant, foul-mouthed president.”

Speaker of the House of Representatives Mike Johnson (in 2015):

“The thing about Donald Trump is that he lacks the character and the moral center we desperately need again in the White House.”

Charles Lehrsens, Trump’s ghostwriter for the book ‘Surviving at the Top’:

“A complete dolt. I laughed, I cringed. I was astounded at how a human could reach adulthood knowing so little about history, geography, literature, spelling...”

Glenn Beck, gonzo rightwing media personality, after a visit to Mar-a-Lago:

“Unhinged.”

Nikki Haley, rival candidate for the Republican presidential nomination:

“Totally unhinged.”

If those eyewitnesses don’t convince you, there are plenty more waiting in the wings. And with the probable exceptions of his niece and his ghostwriter, all these warnings come from conservatives, Republicans, individuals nominally on Trump’s side of the great American divide. Only Trump would be crazy enough to claim that their strings are being pulled by President Biden. If this is the way close relatives and former associates feel, imagine what Trump’s enemies might say. In the ghostwriter Lehrsens’s account of his adventures with Trump, back in the early 1990s, there are a couple of incidents that leave the writer and his readers feeling almost sorry for poor Donald. They indicated that he had, and has, no friends.

Sad, as Trump himself has taught us to say. Sad. But Trump’s strange hold on citizens who have never had the pleasure of his company is one of the great mysteries of our collective lives. I could call him the worst man of my generation, but of course we also produced killers, rapists and child molesters (he has yet to be accused of murder, but sex crimes?). Let’s say he’s the worst powerful person of my generation, then, and by a wide, wide margin. No sane, responsible, conscientious citizen would leave Donald Trump in charge of his cat for a weekend, far less his country for four years. He’s ridiculous, repulsive, amoral, embarrassingly crude and infantile, unquestionably “unhinged.” Psychiatrists who study his behavior don’t hesitate to use the word “sociopath.” He’s 800 pounds of rancid ego in a 300-pound sack, topped by a face smeared with pumpkin pie. When you see some of his menacing expressions, you wonder, “Is he even a native earthling?”

If he doesn’t scare you, fear and horror are not in your emotional vocabulary. The beauty of fearing and loathing Donald Trump is that it has nothing to do with policy, ideology or the preposterous polarization of the American electorate. A vote for this rough beast would be unthinkable even if he was selling some benevolent form of progressive uplift. Trump has no functioning beliefs, beyond self-glorification. Whatever he spews, if it even makes sense, is just audience-tested rightwing boilerplate fed to him by Republican trolls. He benefits from the shameless scam that sustains the modern Republican Party — seducing lower-income, less educated voters with conservative culture-wars pitches and offering them nothing, not a crust of bread, in return. But Ron DeSantis ran for the nomination with the same nasty agenda and a lot less baggage, and got nowhere with “the base.”

The mystery remains. What’s wrong with Trump is absurdly obvious. But what’s wrong with you people who vote for him, wear his awful hats and wave his banners? Without you, without the power you granted him and seem eager to grant him again, this is just another mental patient with early dementia and bad hair. Books have been written, scores of columnists have struggled to explain the unnatural bond between this beast and his base. The key to his appeal is “animosity,” according to David French. “Nobody models animosity better than Donald Trump...they come home to Trump in part because they see in his rage a mirror of their own.”

The politics of rage? “I hate to say this, but I do understand why millions of people are drawn to Trump’s dictatorial ambitions, his encouragements of violence,” writes Paul Krugman. “The sad truth is that there have always been many Americans who fundamentally don’t believe in America’s democratic ideals.”

“A large segment of our body politic has in effect joined a cult of personality whose beliefs are nearly impervious to reality,” Krugman has added. “So how did this happen to us? The truth is that I don’t know.”

The truth is that no one knows. None of us. Rage, fear, violence, unreality? A cult inspired by something we might call anti-charisma, a dark force that seems to trigger devotion, among certain simple people, when a natural response to the candidate would be nausea. They all add up to the vampire-like immortality of America’s most improbable political career. Even the legitimate anti-Trump media cut him more slack than he deserves. Fear, in the case of his return? Why haven’t more journalists emphasized that his sexual assault on E. Jean Carroll, as she describes it, was the exact same atrocity he boasted of committing in that infamous interview?

But the most appalling, hypocritical, indigestible victims of Trump’s anti-charisma are the ones who call themselves “evangelicals.” “I know that he is picked by God for this hour,” said one woman who voted for him in the Iowa primary. “He is our David and our Goliath” said another. These ghastly fools, including the reactionary movie star Jon Voight, have compared Donald Trump to Jesus Christ Himself. Talk about blasphemy. If the universe were arranged as they profess to believe, the sky would open up and divine lightning would roast every one of them to cinders.

Not in time to save us, I’m afraid. Trump’s return to the White House would be the greatest calamity to befall America since the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor, at least. And the hour is late. His late wife Ivana testified that he kept a book of Adolf

Hitler’s speeches on his bedside table, a fact that’s open to interpretation. But if you can bear to check the record for some of the eerie points of resemblance between The Donald and the Fuhrer, read Volker Ullrich’s “Hitler: Ascent 1889-1939” (Knopf, 2016). A sample:

“Hitler was so thoroughly untruthful that he could no longer recognize the difference between lies and truth.” An editor describes “Mein Kampf,” Hitler’s answer to “Surviving at the Top,” as “a swamp of lies, distortions, innuendoes, half-truths and real facts.”

Check narcissism, false populism, scapegoating and grandiosity. Trump is no Hitler, perhaps, but America is no Nazi Germany, or so we long to believe. But when the Orange One rages about “retribution” and “retaliation,” it’s time to tremble. And a grim fact is that neo-fascist politics are hard upon us, when Trump supporters rain death threats on judges, prosecutors, state attorneys general and every honest official who tries to impose justice on a criminal ex-president. Debbie Dingell, a Democratic congresswoman from Michigan who voted to impeach him, reports “I have received hostile calls, antagonistic mail and death threats, and I have had people outside my home with weapons. We have to stand up to bullies in this country.”

Death threats, armed lurkers, fury on the internet, all very much in the spirit of Jan. 6, 2021, when rightwing terrorists stormed the Capitol to overturn Trump’s defeat. This is fascism at work. Alarmism is a MAGA weapon, and not usually one of mine. But this is serious. Francine Prose, reviewing a film about the Pinochet years in Chile, quotes a friend from Santiago: “We went to poetry readings, we met our friends in cafes. We went to bed one night and the next day we woke up and those same friends were being murdered in the soccer stadium.”

Prose responds, “It has always seemed like a warning, and one that’s more timely now than ever, about the alarming speed with which a democratic society can turn into an authoritarian one.”

Listen, please. Joe Biden at the age of 100 would be worth 100 Donald Trumps.

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 deleannis1@gmail.com.

‘Hell No’: Trump Allies’ Plan to Privatize Medicare Draws Alarm and Outrage

A right-wing coalition’s proposal to make Medicare Advantage the default enrollment option would be a “clear handout to the private insurance industry,” said one critic.

By JAKE JOHNSON

A right-wing coalition that’s been laying the policy groundwork for another Donald Trump presidency has developed a plan to further privatize Medicare by making fraud-riddled Medicare Advantage “the default enrollment option” for newly eligible beneficiaries. The plan, highlighted Feb. 5 by *Rolling Stone*’s Andrew Perez, is outlined about halfway through Project 2025’s 920-page playbook for the first six months of a conservative presidency. Republican administrations and right-wing groups have long advocated funneling people who are newly eligible for Medicare into Medicare Advantage plans, which are

funded by the federal government and run by for-profit insurers. During his first White House term, former President Trump took steps to actively encourage seniors to choose Medicare Advantage plans over traditional Medicare and expanded the benefits that the privately run plans are allowed to offer. Those efforts have had an impact. As Perez noted, “Last year, for the first time ever, a majority of Americans eligible for Medicare were on privatized Medicare Advantage plans.” “If Republicans win the presidential race this year,” he wrote, “the push to fully privatize Medicare, the government health insurance program for seniors and people with disabilities, will only intensify.” Every year, new and existing Medicare recipients have an opportunity to enroll in Medicare Advantage plans, which engage in aggressive and often highly deceptive advertising practices to lure seniors who are often seeking out benefits not currently offered by traditional Medicare, such as vision and dental care. Once enrolled in Medicare Advantage plans—which offer limited networks of doctors and overbill the government to the tune

of \$140 billion a year—patients often feel trapped and are subjected to care denials and other deep flaws in the program that have drawn growing attention from lawmakers in recent years. If Project 2025, which is led by the

right-wing Heritage Foundation, gets its way, Medicare Advantage providers would be given even greater power over the critical government insurance program. The Trump administration embraced many of the Her-

Continued on next page



It’s Unanimous! ‘Citizen Trump’ is Just Like ‘Any Other Criminal Defendant’ Facing Federal Prosecution.

By DICK POLMAN

Hey, remember the insurrection trial that was on the federal calendar? Bring. It. On.

A three-judge panel of the federal appeals court in Washington, D.C. declared Feb. 6, in a unanimous ruling, that the coup plotter who sought to overthrow a free election is no different than any other accused criminal. He possesses no magical immunity powers, and thus he can be convicted by a jury of his peers and thrown in jail if the factual record warrants such punishment.

The judicial prose was naturally more majestic than my colloquial interpretation. For instance:

“(Trump’s) contention that he is entitled to categorical immunity from criminal liability for any assertedly ‘official’ action that he took as President (is) a contention that is unsupported by precedent, history or the text and structure of the Constitution.”

Let’s see whether Trump’s Supreme Court allies can work their way around that. Predictably, he vowed Feb. 6 to appeal the appellate ruling, if only to fuel his desperate quest to delay the insurrection trial until after the election, but it’s clear, from my

reading of the ruling, that the three federal appeals judges crafted it – veritably padlocked its logic – to withstand any high court sabotage. And this was surely not a difficult task, precisely because there isn’t a scintilla of evidence in law or in our founding document that a criminally indicted ex-president gets magically shielded. Reality is quite the opposite:

“Former President Trump’s alleged efforts to remain in power despite losing the 2020 election were, if proven, an unprecedented assault on the structure of our government ... It would be a striking paradox if the President, who alone is vested with the constitutional duty to ‘take Care that the Laws be faithfully executed,’ were the sole officer capable of defying those laws with impunity.”

Hmmm ... that latter sentence ... where have I seen that before ... wait, I remember!

In January, during the federal appeals court’s oral hearing, Judge Karen Henderson – the Republican appointee on the panel – said virtually the same thing: “I think it’s paradoxical to say that his constitutional duty to ‘take care that the laws be faithfully executed’ allows him to violate criminal law.”

Indeed, the Feb. 6 written ruling, and Henderson’s January remark, echoed Tanya Chutkan, the federal judge who will preside over the insurrection trial. Back in December, when Chutkan tossed Trump’s immunity con in the trash, she wrote: “By definition, the president’s duty to ‘take care that the laws be faithfully executed’ does not

grant special latitude to violate them.”

I’m seeing a pattern here – an impediment too high for Trump’s C-list lawyers to surmount.

Another delicious passage in the ruling caught my eye:

“(D)uring President Trump’s 2021 impeachment proceedings for incitement of insurrection, his counsel argued that instead of post-Presidency impeachment, the appropriate vehicle for investigation, prosecution, and punishment” is the courts, because (in the Trump lawyer’s words) ‘we have a judicial process’ and ‘an investigative process ... to which no former officeholder is immune ... The text of the Constitution ... makes very clear that a former President is subject to criminal sanction after his Presidency for any illegal acts he commits.”

Well, there you have it. The federal appeals court has reminded us that one of Trump’s own lawyers (a guy now long gone from the team) declared during the impeachment-for-insurrection trial that it would be right and proper and constitutional to haul an ex-president into court for criminal acts.

And one particular passage in the ruling is clearly aimed at the US Supreme Court, lest it be tempted to meddle on Trump’s behalf. It quotes a decision authored by ... by the US Supreme Court. Here’s what the supremes wrote in 1882:

“No man in this country is so high that he is above the law. No officer of the law may set that law at defiance with impunity. All the officers of the government, from the highest to the lowest, are creatures of the

law and are bound to obey it. It is the only supreme power in our system of government, and every man who by accepting of office participates in its functions is only the more strongly bound to submit to that supremacy, and to observe the limitations which it imposes upon the exercise of the authority which it gives.”

This ruling is so thorough that (in a rational world) it gives the current high court ample opportunity to opt out, to let the appeals judges have the final word. This new passage in particular seems beyond dispute:

“We cannot accept former President Trump’s claim that a President has unbounded authority to commit crimes that would neutralize the most fundamental check on executive power the recognition and implementation of election results. Nor can we sanction his apparent contention that the Executive has carte blanche to violate the rights of individual citizens to vote and to have their votes count. .In so holding, we act, not in derogation of the separation of powers, but to maintain their proper balance.”

Let’s restart the clock on that insurrection trial. If the courts are indeed our last bulwark against encroaching MAGA fascism, now is the time. We cannot risk waiting any longer.

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 Taylor Swift Is Teaching Us Now

By JOE CONASON

You don’t have to be a follower of Taylor Swift or a fan of professional football to notice the very strange crusade that so-called conservatives have been waging against them. Those icons of music and sport, as American as they could possibly be, are suddenly tarred on right-wing media outlets as secret instruments of a plot by powerful hidden forces – in the Pentagon, the White House or somewhere in “the deep state,” whatever that means.

It is now possible to watch otherwise normal-seeming people on television, including several with their own nightly shows, spreading insane rumors about Swift and her boyfriend, Kansas City Chiefs tight end Travis Kelce. In a calmer time, anyone who persistently shouted such lurid nonsense would have been a candidate for long-term residence in what was euphemistically called “a nice home,” without

access to sharp objects. With deinstitutionalization, they are now paid astronomical salaries to declaim their fantasies on Fox News and its cable competitors. (This is considered progress.)

For weeks, the airwaves and the digital space have been aflame with attacks on Swift and Kelce, promoting the notion that these two attractive, talented and amazingly successful people are not what they seem to be. Consider the recent rant by Jesse Watters, a prime-time host on Fox News, who recently insinuated that Swift isn’t a legitimate musical sensation but merely a tool propped up by Pentagon military intelligence for mass manipulation. Watters called her a “psyop,” jargon for a government propaganda tool or event designed to influence public opinion and political behavior.

“Have you ever wondered why or how she blew up like this?” he asked, questioning her popularity as a musician. “Well, around four years ago, the Pentagon psychological operations unit floated turning Taylor Swift into an asset during a NATO meeting. What kind of asset? A psyop for combatting online misinformation.” Of course, like so many other events reported

breathlessly by Fox fake news, that never happened. It was just a figment of Watters’ monkey mind, which he tried to pass off with a deceptively edited video clip.

It isn’t hard to see what inspired the vile slugging of Swift and Kelce (who also committed the offense of getting vaccinated against COVID-19, just as all the Fox hypocrites did when the company required it). She appears to be a Democrat and a supporter of reproductive rights, an opponent of racism, and perhaps worst of all, a symbol of female power and independence. She has backed a few Democratic candidates, including Joe Biden in 2020 – and Republicans dread the prospect that she’ll do it again this year. Ominously, from their perspective, she has already prodded tens of thousands of her fans to register as voters.

Indeed, the right-wing loonies are warning that the Super Bowl has long been “rigged” for the Chiefs to win, leading up to a romantic Biden endorsement by Kelce and Swift. Pretty sick and, dare I say, un-American.

The craziness is so stupid that it’s almost funny. Even some conservatives are begging for it to stop because they fear the

political consequences of angering the Swifties, as well they should. But it isn’t funny at all.

What thugs like Watters are telling Swift is that she will be punished for disputing their authoritarian and misogynist ideology. Her adversaries have not only viciously insulted her but circulated AI-faked explicit nudes. Naturally, Watters seized on the faked photos as another opportunity to mock and shame a female body. (Don’t you hope he gets a chance to meet Travis Kelce in person someday?)

Whether Swift endorses Biden or not, she has performed a great service, simply by impelling the worst people in America to show who they really are – and how their uncontrollable hatred poisons everyday life in this nation. Let’s not forget.

Joe Conason is the editor in chief of NationalMemo.com and author of several books, including (with Gene Lyons) “The Hunting of the President: The Ten-Year Campaign to Destroy Bill and Hillary Clinton” (St. Martin’s Press, 2000). Conason co-produced a 2004 documentary film, “The Hunting of the President,” based on the book.

Johnson...

Continued from previous page

itage Foundation’s policy recommendations during its first year in power.

“Donald Trump and his MAGA Republican cronies plan to totally privatize Medicare if they win in November’s election,” the progressive advocacy group Social Security Works wrote in response to Rolling Stone’s reporting. “Hell no. Hands off our earned benefits.”

Philip Verhoef, president of Physicians for a National Health Program, told Rolling Stone that Project 2025’s plan to make Medicare Advantage the default enrollment option would be “disastrous.”

“To do so would be really just a clear handout to the private insurance industry,” Verhoef said.

Project 2025 has said that it doesn’t “speak for any presidential candidate,” but Trump’s reelection campaign has relied on parts of the coalition’s proposed agenda for second-term planning.

Trump’s team has faced backlash over some of Project 2025’s work, including draft executive orders that would use the Insurrection Act to deploy the US military against demonstrators. As the Washington Post reported in December, Trump campaign senior adviser Susie Wiles com-

plained privately to Project 2025’s director and asked the coalition to “stop promoting its work to reporters.”

Seth Schuster, a spokesperson for President Joe Biden’s reelection campaign, warned in a statement Feb. 5 that “if Donald Trump wins this November, he and Republicans will continue their push to end Medicare as we know it for millions of Americans.”

“Trump will leave millions of seniors with fewer benefits and less access to doctors—all to benefit his big insurance donors,” said Schuster. “In Trump’s America, the special interests win and seniors and working families lose. Worse care, broken promises, and higher costs—that’s Trump’s plan for seniors and working families.”

In addition to making Medicare Advantage the default enrollment option for Medicare, Project 2025 is calling for the revival of the Global and Professional Direct Contracting Model, a Medicare privatization scheme that the Biden administration rebranded as ACO REACH and slightly modified—to the dismay of physicians, healthcare campaigners, and progressive lawmakers who called for the repeal of the Trump-era pilot program.

Jake Johnson is a senior editor and staff writer for Common Dreams.



Fighting for Time to Heal

By DAVID MCCALL

Mike Morales’s doctor advised him to take four weeks off for an important procedure, and the longtime crane operator readily agreed, secure in the knowledge that he wouldn’t lose a dime in pay or face other repercussions at work.

Morales’ union contract enabled him to step away from his job at the Chevron Phillips plastics complex in Pasadena, Texas, to attend to his health.

He received regular pay during his absence and returned to work when he was able to do so. Morales, a unit recording secretary with United Steelworkers (USW) Local 13-227, recalled having just one concern during his convalescence—getting well.

Workers across the country need the same peace of mind while recovering from surgery or sickness. They need time to care for ill loved ones, bond with infants or welcome other new family members without risking their jobs or forfeiting the income needed to keep their households afloat.

And they need to be empowered to escape domestic violence, ensure family stability during a service member’s deployment or confront other emergencies without throwing themselves on the mercy of employers.

A bipartisan House committee recently released a “draft framework” of a leave plan, which would give states and employers new

incentives to provide more workers with paid time off for emergencies. But that’s a far cry from the mandatory, universal and uniform leave available to workers in many countries.

Unfortunately, Americans’ access to paid leave right now depends largely on where they work and whether they’re fortunate enough to belong to a union. And many still have no paid sick leave at all, according to a recent study by the Economic Policy Institute, a think tank in Washington, D.C.

“It’s a great benefit to us,” observed Morales, who’s stayed at the Chevron Phillips site for 43 years partly because of the USW-negotiated leave allotment, which renews periodically and even enables him to take days off to help family members.

He empathizes with contract workers at the site, saying they face the same life crises as union counterparts but lack the weeks or days off needed to effectively deal with them.

“I’m still in the recovery process,” explained Morales, who has the freedom to take additional paid sick days if necessary. “If I have a complication, I know I have something to fall back on.”

Americans overwhelmingly want the kind of universal leave already available to peers around the world.

Demand increased sharply after COVID-19 spread quickly in workplaces, putting lives at risk. Workers in meat processing plants, for example, operated processing lines that moved too quickly for them to cover their mouths while coughing or sneezing.

Some workers without paid leave, es-

pecially those living paycheck to paycheck, say they have no choice but to go to work when sick even if that means passing on illnesses.

Other Americans, faced with the unfair choice of working or caring for a loved one, simply exit the work force. Morales said his son-in-law quit his job, went without income for six months to care for an ill relative, and eventually landed another position with the same company.

Sadly, many employers oppose paid leave out of greed and ignorance.

When Burger King last year presented a 20-year worker at one of its Las Vegas stores with a “goody bag” for never calling in sick, outraged supporters on the internet pointed out that the restaurant never offered him a paid sick day either.

“It’s all about money,” Morales said of employers who refuse to provide paid leave. “It’s all about business.”

Yet this essential helps businesses as much as it does workers.

It grows the labor pool, especially by enabling women to return to work after having children. It keeps workers healthy and focused. And it helps employers build dedicated, stable and experienced work forces.

“It helps in hiring more people, which everyone is trying to do,” said Steve Kramer, president of USW Local 9777, referring to the hot job market nationwide.

Kramer, who represents workers at dozens of companies, considers paid leave a common-sense benefit that employers foolishly resist. During brutal Midwest winters, he noted, schools close at the last minute and kids get sick, forcing parents to miss work.

As Congress moves slowly to address

the need, more cities and states are heeding workers’ demands for action.

Illinois, for example, enacted a law Jan. 1 that provides most workers with at least 40 hours of paid leave annually. At the beginning of the year, California expanded its sick leave program and began providing workers with time off for reproductive loss.

Workers elsewhere are taking matters into their own hands.

Chuck Perko, president of USW Local 3267 in Pueblo, Colo., helped push through legislation during the pandemic that provides workers with at least 48 hours of paid leave each year.

“You can use that for everything health related,” said Perko, whose local union represents workers at the Evraz mill in Pueblo.

On the heels of that victory, Colorado voters went even further, Perko noted, passing a referendum that establishes a broader family leave program funded with employer and worker contributions. That leave program, the first ever created by popular vote, provides partial pay to workers during longer-term absences.

Morales said he knows many co-workers at Chevron Phillips who are as grateful as he is for union-negotiated leave. The demand for these kinds of benefits will only increase across the country, Morales noted, as baby boomers age and younger workers demand increased flexibility in raising their families.

“It’s very important,” he said, recalling the relief that he felt during his recuperation. “It’s the peace of knowing you’re OK.”

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

This Black History Month, Fight for the Freedom to Learn

More than ever, we need to protect our schools, libraries, and kids from censors and book banners. Our country will be better for it.

By SVANTE MYRICK

A little over a year ago, the College Board unveiled its long-awaited draft AP African American Studies curriculum. What happened next was sad — and all too predictable.

Florida officials, led by Gov. Ron DeSantis, howled. They claimed the course “lacks educational value” and violated state laws against teaching about race and racism. The College Board initially caved to Florida’s demands and said the course would be heavily redacted, then said it wouldn’t.

At the end of 2023, it released the final version of the course, and it’s ... better. But it’s still missing some important concepts.

The new course omits any discussion of “structural racism” and makes studying the Black Lives Matter movement — modern Black history by any measure — optional.

That pretty much sums up the state of the fight against censorship and book-banning in this Black History Month: better, but still problematic.

On the plus side, the last few months have brought some very good news.

School board candidates endorsed by the pro-censorship group Moms for Liberty went down to resounding defeats last fall. After Illinois became the first state to prohibit book bans, several states — including Colorado, Kansas, Massachusetts, New Jersey, New Mexico, Washington, and Virginia — introduced their own anti-ban bills.

In December, two Black lawmakers, Representatives Ayanna Pressley (D-Mass.) and Maxwell Frost (D-Fla.), introduced bills in Congress aimed at fighting book bans. And a federal judge ruled that parts of an Iowa book ban were unenforceable.

But the censorship movement isn’t going away.

Moms for Liberty plans to start its own charter school in South Carolina. In other words, if you won’t let them ban books in your school, they’ll just start their own

school. With your taxpayer money.

Meanwhile, librarians nationwide are being targeted by threats and harassment. And the propaganda outfit PragerU continues to pump out the offensive, woefully inaccurate junk it calls “edutainment” for public schools that will buy it.

So there’s still work to do.

Fortunately, the public is overwhelmingly on the right side of this issue. Poll after poll shows that Americans don’t support censorship and book bans in schools. Those of us who want children to have the freedom to learn are the majority.

We understand that kids are better prepared for life — and our country is better prepared to compete globally — when education is historically accurate and reflective of the diversity of our culture. We understand that book banning is un-American and censorship is a tool of dictators.

This majority needs to mobilize and be heard at the ballot box. The defeat of pro-censorship school board candidates in 2023 was a great start. Now we have to take that momentum into the local, state, and national elections this fall.

In the meantime, we also know that public pressure works. A public outcry got the College Board to change its plans for the

African American Studies course. And when publisher Scholastic said it would segregate books about the Black and LGBTQ communities at its school book fairs, the public was outraged — and Scholastic reversed course.

Together, we have the power to stop the censors who want to whitewash our history and deprive kids of facts and stories that help them to understand our world. That applies to the Black experience in America, but also the experiences of LGBTQ people, Indigenous peoples, people of diverse faiths, immigrants, people with disabilities, and more.

Civil rights activists have pushed for decades for book publishers and educators to acknowledge and teach our full history, and to awaken our consciousness as a nation. We refuse to go backwards.

Black History Month is a great time for us to commit to using the power that we have to protect the freedom to learn. Our kids, and our country, will be better for it.

Svante Myrick serves as President and CEO of People for the American Way. Myrick garnered national media attention as the youngest-ever mayor of Ithaca, New York. This op-ed was distributed by OtherWords.org.

Changing the Culture Around Paid Leave Starts at School

We need a federal paid leave program. We also need to abandon the idea, starting in school, that “perfect attendance” matters more than your health.

By SAFIYA SIMMONS, LAURA COLLINS and SUZETTE GARDNER

Why don’t Americans take sick time when they need it? Often, it’s because of pressures they first learned in school.

From the day their kids first start school, parents are pressured to ensure students don’t miss any days. While that might seem benign, urging a student to attend school while ill creates a culture that prioritizes “presenteeism” — a culture of showing up all the time, even when you’re in no shape to.

In a nation with no federal paid family and medical leave policy, this school culture mirrors the culture of many workplaces. Employers — prioritizing profit over people — run campaigns to encourage attendance and offer incentives for folks to show up no matter what they’re going through.

Some employers make it difficult to apply for leave or create a culture where leave requests are discouraged or denied. When students or employees are absent, little thought is given to why they’re absent, or how the school or company can support them during difficult times when they’re ill or caring for a loved one.

The unspoken rule is that you are never sick enough to warrant missing school or work. Students learn this early. When your child is fighting a health issue, school officials don’t send “get well soon” cards — they send forms and homework assignments.

By rewarding students for “perfect attendance” — for showing up every day, regardless of their condition or needs — schools reinforce that showing up is more important than their own health or their family’s needs. We send the message that work is what’s most important.

Another way schools mirror workplaces

is that many schools require proof of illness. Students and their families must jump through hoops, collect doctor’s notes, and fill out the right forms to earn an “excused absence” and avoid truancy charges.

The result is a nation where too many of us can neither access nor afford to take time to care and heal. Another result is that parents, who lack access to paid sick days, are deterred from offering the same to their children.

It’s difficult to raise children who are in touch with their needs because so few places make space for them to care for themselves without judgment. It’s even harder when our leaders don’t show any care to the parents who keep our economy afloat. Because the United States is the only industrialized country without a federal paid and family leave program, taking time off can throw families into a financial spin that impacts everything from housing to putting food on the table.

America knows how to implement a paid family and medical leave program — we did so, briefly, during the COVID-19 pandemic. And the Family Values @ Work network we’re a part of has won paid family and medical leave policies in 14 states,

including the District of Columbia. At the federal level, legislation like the FAMILY Act offers a way to advance paid leave nationally.

Our current compulsory schooling model was created to prepare children for factory work at the beginning of the Industrial Age. Over a century later, students are still taught to prioritize performance, to tick homework boxes, and to fulfill assignment quotas.

But in this age of interconnectedness, care transcends cold efficiency.

We need to dismantle this cruel conveyor belt and cultivate the fertile ground of care. It is time to redefine success in schools — not by the number of days students are present, but by the depth of care cultivated. Only then can we prepare our children to not only survive, but to thrive in a world yearning for care and humanity.

Safiya Simmons, Laura Collins and Suzette Gardner are parents of young children and employees of Family Values @ Work, a network of grassroots coalitions working to win paid family and medical leave, and affordable, high-quality childcare. This op-ed was distributed by OtherWords.org.

MARY SANCHEZ



We'd be better off taking time to understand why latching onto conspiratorial ideas is a very human trait. It's one that people of all levels fall prey to.

Sorry Liberals, There’s Something to Learn from the Taylor Swift/ Travis Kelce ‘Conspiracies’

Liberals are now claiming to be oh-so-tired of the feeding frenzy they helped stoke. This would be their pushback, some of it admittedly quite witty, to far-right conspiracy theories about the lovey-dovey relationship between singer-songwriter Taylor Swift and NFL player Travis Kelce.

There’d been an avalanche of opinions lately. Late night TV hosts weighed in, as did pundits and maybe your neighbor or yourself.

But now, they’ve grown tired of it all, many people are now saying in Facebook posts. Tired of trying to understand how MAGA adherents could possibly believe

the latest conspiracy theory about the global pop star and her Kansas City Chiefs boyfriend.

The theory is whack-a-doodle, detached from reality.

But that’s what conspiracy theories are, after all. And if they’re honest, liberals often hold tightly to their own.

Ask someone with far-left leanings to discuss global economies or conflicts around the world where US interests are involved. Some mindsets will quickly cite what sounds like a belief in a diabolical roundtable of military generals and CEOs who plot calamities for profit.

Which is why we’d all be better off taking time to understand why latching onto conspiratorial ideas is a very human trait. Contrary to common thought, it’s one that people of varying political leanings and education levels fall prey to.

Science learns more about the human brain daily. It can help us understand how people mold conspiracies and spread them.

Cognitive bias plays a role – our minds are wired to dismiss information that conflicts with what we already believe. That’s part of human hardwiring, how the brain tracks information, applying new information to previous memories.

This isn’t to argue that the far-right theories initially blasted out by Fox News host Jesse Watters and other influential MAGA voices hold water. They do not.

Here’s a summary of one conspiracy: Swift is the pinnacle in a government plot. She’s not merely dating Kelce or just going to the Super Bowl to watch her boyfriend compete (Go Chiefs!). She’s really trying to take down America.

This would be the America of their dreams where former President Donald

Trump is elected president again in November and everyone suddenly prospers.

The Pentagon has even clapped back at these notions lately. A Pentagon spokesperson told **Politico**, “We know all too well the dangers of conspiracy theories, so to set the record straight, Taylor Swift is not part of a DOD psychological operation. Period.”

Yes, there’s a tone of exasperation in that statement.

“Psy-op” is the term that people who believe in the Swift conspiracies like to use, probably because it makes it sound like they have the inside track on top secret data.

Here’s another common plot line of one conspiracy theory: Swift (a government planted agent) will take to the field during the half-time performance of the Super Bowl (with apologies to Usher who was contracted for the entertainment) and while standing in mid-field, she’ll endorse President Joe Biden.

The Chiefs winning the Super Bowl is also part of this plot. Sorry, but we’ve got Patrick Mahomes as quarterback, the team’s secret sauce.

Here’s the part that is logical: Swift has backed Biden previously. And it is not loony to think that she might do so again, or that she might also encourage voter registration, as she has done in the past.

Given her megawatt star power, she could be influential to younger voters especially. That is what far-right minds fear: a Biden win and, moreover, what they believe Biden for another term will mean for their lives.

Conspiracy theories rise to the level of the threat felt by believers. This is how such an all-American love story – literally America’s sweetheart dates a football star – could

take on such a twisted and sinister storyline.

Consider the magnitude of the conspiracies surrounding COVID-19 and vaccines. It was a global pandemic. Not something happening on just one block in North America. COVID disrupted the world. Economies were deeply impacted as supply chains were hit, which in turn, caused panic and hardship at a scale not seen in many people’s memory.

So the explanations to place blame, to understand how it occurred, were equally gargantuan in scale.

Experts now point out that some of that reaction should have been expected. There was already a strong anti-vaccine sentiment in the U.S., partially due to debunked theories about the causes of autism, linking it to childhood vaccinations.

Public safety measures like masking and vaccines were then less accepted. And some people latched onto ideas about global plots to explain global supply chain disruptions. Peeled back, it’s somewhat understandable.

Addressing anxieties, yes, even some folks’ spinning monologues of imminent societal doom under a Democrat president, is one way to put the Taylor-Travis uproar in a different light.

We would be better off as a nation if we could devote more time to trying to understand the fears of those who wind up believing conspiracy theories, rather than spending so much time ridiculing them.

Ultimately, it would be time well spent.

Mary Sanchez is a syndicated columnist for Tribune Content Agency, formerly with the **Kansas City Star**. Email msanchezcolum@gmail.com and follow on Twitter [@msanchezcolum](https://twitter.com/msanchezcolum).

Border Wars

If Democrats Hang Tough, Republican Attempts to Sabotage the Bipartisan Immigration Bill May Yet Backfire on the Far Right.

By ROBERT KUTTNER

On Sunday, Feb. 4, after extensive negotiation, a bipartisan group of senators with the support of leaders Chuck Schumer and Mitch McConnell, released the text of a border bill that makes it significantly harder for migrants to enter the United States. The \$118.3 billion bill also includes \$60.1 billion in aid to Ukraine, \$14.1 billion for Israel, and \$10 billion in humanitarian assistance to Gaza, the West Bank, and Ukraine, as well as \$20.2 billion for border security.

Trump and Republican House members are determined to deny President Biden a victory, no matter what the costs to resolving the refugee crisis, which has been cynically used by Republican governors such as Greg Abbott of Texas and Ron DeSantis of Florida to flood northern cities with migrants. The measure has been pronounced dead on arrival in the Republican-led House, and appears dead in the Senate,

where only four Republicans supported it.

The package would make it far more difficult to claim asylum at the border, expands detention facilities, and effectively closes the border whenever more than 5,000 migrants seek entry in the course of a week. It allows the president to lower that threshold to 4,000, and President Biden says he will use it. Migrants seeking entry would be rapidly processed. The system that critics have derided as “catch and release” of releasing migrants into the U.S. with court dates far into the future would be drastically curtailed.

The measure is far more restrictive than anything Democrats have contemplated since the original anti-immigrant law of exactly a century ago. But the border crisis is real, and so is the political and fiscal damage in blue states and cities far from the Mexican border.

The bill falls short of more extreme Republican demands to close the border entirely.

House Republicans have cynically calculated that continuing to let the crisis fester is far more to their advantage than helping to solve it. If former Democratic Rep. Tom Suozzi loses the special election on February 13 to fill the Long Island House seat vacated by George Santos, a key reason will be local anxiety over the flood of migrants.

The vote in the Senate, which required 60 votes, fell six votes short. Some on the Democratic left have denounced the bill as anti-Hispanic as well as anti-humanitarian;

other progressives reject unconditional aid to Israel. On the Republican right, Sen. Josh Hawley (R-Mo.) preposterously termed the measure “an open border bill.”

If the bill had passed the Senate, House Speaker Mike Johnson (R-LA) said he would refuse even to call it up for a vote. Depending on the outcome of the Long Island election, Republicans will have a majority of either three or four. The only hope for a win in the House is that a Democrat-led discharge petition could peel off a few Republican votes.

Instead, the Senate passed the supplemental aid bill to Ukraine, Israel and Taiwan. But that bill still faces opposition from the MAGA wing in the House.

Regardless of the outcome, Biden needs to get tough in one other respect. Abbott is using the border issue not just to flood northern cities with migrants but to restart the Civil War.

Despite a clear Supreme Court ruling that the federal government controls the border, Abbott has sent the Texas National Guard and state police to enforce his version of immigration policy, and there have been standoffs between armed Texas forces and outnumbered federal Border Patrol agents. In his latest ploy, Abbott was joined Sunday by 13 Republican governors at the border who backed his stance.

Biden needs to federalize the National Guard, add federal agents to the border, and treat Abbott’s move as the insurrection that it is. Despite Abbott’s efforts to revive it, the

Civil War is over. His side lost.

The compromise bill is not pretty. Much better comprehensive immigration reform was nearly enacted a decade ago but was blocked by far-right Republicans. But the idea that a long-term program of aid to Central America could solve a short-term crisis always was a fantasy.

Assuming that the border bill remains blocked, a worsening crisis may eventually backfire on the Republicans. Biden can now say that he was willing to fix the border and support an ally from an invasion by Russia, but was cynically blocked by Trump’s minions who wanted an issue in the elections. Running against the do-nothing Congress worked for Harry Truman.

But there is a long-term cost to this. The bargain always was that Democrats would trade border security for a path to citizenship for the 11 million or more undocumented immigrants here now. That was the basic framework of the 1986 Immigration Reform and Control Act, a bargain between the Democrats and Ronald Reagan. Now Democrats have said they could trade border security for other priorities, like military aid. The millions of undocumented are the collateral damage.

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

Exciting Ecological Innovations

By FRANK LINGO

Despite the bad news that 2023 was the warmest year on record, proving that efforts to reverse global warming aren’t working, there are some remarkable inventions and adaptations that herald significant progress toward replacing fossil fuels with renewables.

CleanTechnica.com recently ran an article by Carolyn Fortuna covering some promising developments. Instead of just solar panels (which are fine and have plummeted in cost) how about solar windows? A company named Ubiquitous Energy can turn windows in everyday homes and businesses into transparent solar collectors. The

solar coating is made up of light-absorbing dyes that are non-toxic and Earth-abundant.

Forest fires can be stopped much sooner with Dryad Networks’ “electric noses” using solar-powered sensors which can be spread throughout a forest to detect even smoldering fires before they get out of control. This is extremely important because the gigantic fires of the last few years add greatly to the heat and pollution in the atmosphere.

Aren’t camping vehicles terrible gas hogs? How about a camper that is an electric vehicle? Aptera is an efficient solar EV that only uses 30% of an average EV’s energy. It reportedly has the capacity to go up to 1,000 miles on a single charge.

SustainabltyMag.com ran a piece by Tom Swallow on the Top 10 green technology innovations. Smart meters installed in homes allow consumers to save money and use less energy at times of day when there

is a strain on the grid. For instance, washer/dryers and dishwashers can easily be used after the 8 pm reduction.

Plastics can be used for road surfacing. Coca-Cola has been promoting its project called World Without Waste for over a decade. It is now working on building roads in Pakistan using plastic in the mix. It is also aiming to eliminate petroleum-based plastic for its beverages by 2025 and replace it with plant-based biodegradable material.

I disagree with SustainabilityMag’s contention that nuclear is a viable clean alternative. To me, putting humans in charge of nuclear power is like giving a 16-year-old a Corvette and a keg of beer. What could go wrong? The truth is we just aren’t capable of handling it, particularly when nature deals its destruction, like it did at Fukushima, Japan.

An October 2023 article on Earth.org covered the pros and cons of wave energy,

a clean source from the perpetual movement of the ocean’s waves. A huge advantage of wave energy is that its predictability is solid, or rather liquid, unlike wind and solar. But a major concern is the impact wave energy has on marine life. Animals can become entangled in the mooring cables, and migration patterns can also be adversely affected. I’m betting these hazards can be mitigated to a minimum, like with wind turbines, which have greatly reduced the incidences of bird deaths simply by painting one of the blades black.

With personal and political movement, innovations like these can become part of our lives. When a northern country like Germany can use renewables to power over 50% of its grid, the rest of us can match that or do better. Call it Triumph of the Will.

Frank Lingo is a free-lance writer based in Lawrence, Kansas.

Do the Rich Dudes Want the Court to Ban Trump or Not?

Now that several of the Republican justices have been so heavily saturated with fat-cat money and thus regularly vote in favor of their morbidly rich “friends,” what do those rich dudes want?

By THOM HARTMANN

On Feb. 8, the Supreme Court heard oral arguments in the case of *Trump v Anderson*, which will determine whether Trump can appear on the ballot and hold office if elected or if he’s disqualified by virtue of his having incited an insurrection on Jan. 6, 2021.

The really fascinating part of this whole drama, though, will have to do with the power politics “behind the thrones” on the Court. Now that several of the Republican justices have been so heavily saturated with fat-cat money and thus regularly vote in favor of their morbidly rich “friends,” what do those rich dudes want out of Clarence Thomas, John Roberts, Samuel Alito, Neil Gorsuch, and their other “investments”?

Do they want their toadies on the Court to keep Trump off the ballot because he’s more likely to lose against Joe Biden

than is Nikki Haley or somebody else? Or, like Fritz Thyssen in Germany in 1933, do they still think they can control him and he’ll give them more tax breaks and deregulation and anything else they want if they help him become president again?

While political and legal commentators will be hyperfocused on the arguments made for and against Trump being able to stay on the ballot, I’ll be looking for any indications that at least a few of the justices may be peeling off from Trump because their sugar daddies are concerned about his electability or erratic behavior.

Trump’s defense has largely been confined to a few technical points.

The 14th Amendment says that any person who’s acting as “a member of Congress, or as an officer of the United States” will be barred if they engage or have “given aid or comfort” to an insurrection.

So, his first defense is that the president isn’t “an officer of the United States.”

Trump’s position on this was actually endorsed by the District Court Judge, Sarah Wallace, who originally said Trump could remain on the Colorado ballot; her decision was overturned on that basis by the Colorado Supreme Court, which said an interpretation like that is “inconsistent with the plain language and history” of the 14th Amendment.

Trump’s second defense is that while the language of the 14th Amendment is clear, it’s never been activated or put into effect by enabling legislation passed by Congress. John Yoo, who wrote the pro-torture memos for George W. Bush, has submitted an amicus brief with the Court in this case that makes exactly this argument.

Trump’s third defense is that Jan. 6 wasn’t actually an “insurrection”: it was something else. A protest, maybe. Or a tourist visit. Or even an “interruption of

Congress for a few moments.” But not an insurrection.

And a very weak fourth defense is that the 14th Amendment was meant to be wielded against Confederate turncoats in the wake of the Civil War and simply no longer applies.

Given that the 14th Amendment’s provision against secessionists serving in public office was applied hundreds of times in the years after its passage — including to prevent Jefferson Davis from running for president — a group of some of the top Civil War scholars and historians in America have submitted their own brief arguing that preventing Trump from appearing on ballots nationwide is purely and simply consistent with history and past enforcement of that law.

Their brief also points out that the presidency is referred to as an “office” in multiple places throughout history, as well as the president himself being referred to as an officer of the United States.

For example, they knock down the “not an officer” argument with ease:

“During the congressional debates, Senator Reverdy Johnson of Maryland, a Democratic opponent of the 14th Amendment, challenged sponsors as to why Section 3 omitted the President. Republican Senator Lot Morrill of Maine, an influential backer of congressional Reconstruction and the 14th Amendment, corrected the Senator. Morrill replied, ‘Let me call the Senator’s attention to the words ‘or hold any office civil or military under the United States.’ Senator Johnson admitted his error; no other Senator questioned whether Section 3 covered the President.

“Similarly, debates over the Amnesty Act of 1872 demonstrate that decision-makers understood that Section 3 barred former Confederate President Jefferson Davis

from running for President of the United States, a disqualification that amnesty would remove. Republican Senator James Flanagan of Texas warned that ‘Jefferson Davis is living,’ and if ‘the disabilities of Jefferson Davis were removed,’ the Democrats in finding ‘candidates for the Presidency and Vice Presidency ... would go no further than Jefferson Davis.’”

As much as the Republicans on the Supreme Court try to pretend they’re neither political nor bought off by their morbidly rich “friends,” they are very much both. And they control the Court itself.

So, the big question here won’t be what the law or the Constitution say: five Republicans on the Court completely ignored the 10th Amendment when they gave the White House to George W. Bush by blocking the statewide recount the Florida Supreme Court had ordered in the 2000 election. On multiple occasions, Republicans on the Court have shown they’re more than willing to ignore the Constitution or even common sense.

The real question that’ll be litigated the week of the hearing is whether the billionaires who own this Court want Trump on the ticket or not, and, if they don’t (and there are plenty of reports this is the case), whether a majority of the Republicans on the Court are willing to take the heat for disqualifying him.

No matter how they rule, this is going to be a tough one for the Court’s most corrupted Republicans who’ve taken millions from their morbidly rich donors and “friends.” Time to get the popcorn ready...

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.

Why We Need a ‘Doug Jones’ More Than a Dow Jones

On the Magnificent Seven and market myths.

By KATRINA VANDEN HEUVEL

The S&P 500 rose to new heights in February on the strength of the Magnificent Seven. No, that’s not the title of a new remake of a remake of a Spaghetti Western film. It’s the name coined by Bank of America analyst Michael Hartnett to label the seven tech companies—Apple, Amazon, Alphabet, Meta, Microsoft, Nvidia, and Tesla—that make up over a quarter of the stock market’s total value, and that added a collective \$5.1 trillion to the market last year.

In other words: The companies that were already making a lot of money are now making even more. For the average working American, the market’s ups and downs have little or no correlation to their lives—but they think it does, thanks in no small part to close and continuous media coverage.

Nearly 40% of Americans have no financial stake in the stock market. Among

those households who do, most have only indirect investments through index funds and 401(k)s, which amount to a tiny slice of the total pie. And even for those with direct stockholdings, the average value of their investments is around \$15,000—for comparison, the average American owes about \$60,000 in debt.

The inequity doesn’t stop there. Americans with postgraduate degrees are twice as likely to hold stocks as high school grads. White Americans own a staggering 89% of stocks. And to echo a senator from Vermont, the wealthiest 1% now own more than half of all US stocks—a fact that both illustrates and perpetuates the gross wealth disparity in this country. A “bull” market, indeed.

Adding insult to injury, the value of the stock market sometimes reflects the exact inverse of the worker’s experience. Wins for labor, like unionization and wage growth, often sink stock values. The same goes for antitrust measures that keep prices competitive and hold companies accountable to consumers. After a judge blocked Spirit Airlines’ merger with JetBlue, the carrier’s shares dropped 20%. On the flip side, when the pandemic shuttered businesses and sent unemployment skyrocketing, the S&P 500 saw its best month of trading in 33 years.

And yet, thanks to the tenor of today’s stock market coverage, consumers still tend to conflate the market with the economy overall. The media—its members perhaps over-indexing on their own status in the

stockholding elite—has perpetuated this fallacy. Share prices scroll endlessly on the nightly news, while analysts devote entire shows to evaluating stocks as though they were NBA draft prospects. But the truth is, Jim Cramer’s antics on Mad Money are at best irrelevant and at worst insulting to the millions of Americans who don’t have the money to spend on theatrical stock picks, and don’t have the time to watch a show that airs on their way home from work.

It’s past time to refocus our national attention from the fortunes of the 500 to the concerns of countless families living paycheck to paycheck.

Over 30 years ago, the firebrand progressive thinker and beloved Nation contributor Jim Hightower proposed replacing the Dow Jones Industrial Average with a better economic bellwether: the Doug Jones. (No relation to the former Alabama senator, though he certainly deserves economic prosperity.)

Jim’s tongue-in-cheek ticker tape recorded the fortunes of Doug Jones, the archetypical American worker: his job prospects threatened by factory closures, his grocery bill squeezed by inflation, his bank account burdened by high interest rates. It was, as Jim put it, “a real-life measure of ‘how ya doin’?’”

Decades later, it’s more important than ever. Breathless coverage of the Magnificent Seven’s record-breaking growth stands in stark contrast to the ongoing economic pessimism of many Americans. The result is a sense of whiplash.

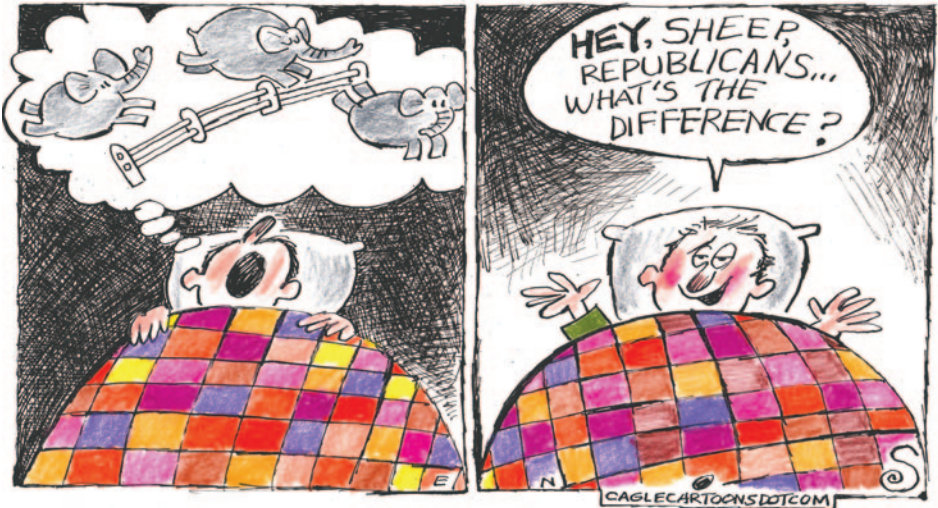
With voters thinking of their pocketbooks as they head to the polls this year, President Biden must sell his administration’s economic wins in terms that square with people’s experiences—by addressing the state of the Doug Jones. To his credit, he has already made real economic indicators a core part of his reelection message, touting low unemployment and slowing inflation. But Biden can do more both to take credit for his successes, including recent consumer protection victories, and to take ownership of issues like wage stagnation.

The media, too, has an important role to play in telling the story of everyday Americans’ economic reality. The tactics used to tout minute-by-minute stock performance would be better spent broadcasting the line items that show up in people’s budgets and bank accounts.

How about showing a live ticker tracking real wages? Or announcing a drop in egg prices with the same fanfare as a spike in Microsoft shares? Robert Reich could take over for Jim Cramer, smashing a celebratory buzzer every time another Starbucks unionizes.

And most importantly, for every report on how much growth we’re seeing, let’s examine who profits from that growth. An economy where everyone benefits—there’s nothing more magnificent than that.

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



The Real Reason Your Grocery Bill Is Still So High

It's not inflation, it's actually corporate greed keeping food prices high. It's now time to turn the tables on our food system by centering justice over profits.

By SONALI KOLHATKAR

Americans have had to weather much in the years since the COVID-19 pandemic first began, including price inflation of basic necessities. Grocery bills, especially, are a drain on household finances. But, as recent reports show, inflation is easing across many industries, and yet food prices overall have remained stubbornly high. Not only is that an indication of a deep rot at the heart of the food industry, agribusinesses, and corporate grocery chains, but it is also a clear sign that we need to repair our entire food system.

Reporting on a new Census Bureau survey, *USA Today's* Sara Chernikoff found that “[t]he average American household spends more than \$1,000 per month on groceries.” And, while it’s not surprising that those residing in expensive states like California have high grocery bills, there’s little relief for those living in states with lower costs of living. An average California family’s weekly grocery bill is \$297.72, but an average North Carolina family’s bill is \$266.23—nearly as high.

Attempting to downplay this reality, Paul Donovan, chief economist of UBS Global Wealth Management, wrote in an op-ed in the *New York Times* that Americans might be overestimating how serious inflation is, feeling the pinch most especially when they buy something as small as a candy bar. “[C]onsumers perceive inflation as higher than it actually is,” wrote Donovan. Further, he claimed, “[h]umans are genetically programmed to emphasize bad news over good news when they make decisions.” Donovan is implying that we’re just imagining high grocery bills.

In fact, inflation in the grocery industry has been higher than in other industries, rising 25% over the past four years compared to 19% overall, and many have pointed to simple greed as the reason: food prices are high because the companies setting prices think they can get away with

padding their profits. Since we all have to eat, naturally this hits lower-income families harder, rather like a regressive tax. A new report by the Groundwork Collaborative found that in 2022, “consumers in the bottom quintile of the income spectrum spent 25% of their income on groceries, while those in the highest quintile spent under 3.5%.”

Economists have attempted to explain the reasons for grocery-related inflation remaining stubbornly high by pointing fingers at supply chain issues, higher labor costs, and agricultural pests. The *Washington Post* even admitted—albeit with little additional comment—that “consolidation in the industry gives large chains the ability to keep prices high.” (I’ll return to this critical point below.)

Fearing that voters feeling the pinch every time they shop for food will punish him at the ballot box, President Joe Biden has taken aim at the food industry. At an event in South Carolina on Jan. 27, the president remarked that, while “inflation is coming down... there are still too many corporations in America ripping people off: price gouging, junk fees, greedflation, shrinkflation.”

To be fair, some foods did become cheaper, such as eggs. Remember the nationwide scramble on eggs in the early months of the pandemic with many grocery retailers limiting the number of cartons per customer? But in the years since, prices leveled off. And then they whisked up again. In fact, eggs are a far better indicator of why Americans are upset about food-related inflation than a Snickers bar.

There are plenty of short-term interventions that government can apply to help American families cope with the high cost of groceries, and President Biden has implemented many of them. Groundwork Collaborative’s report cites an increase in Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits for the lowest-income Americans, as well as the federal government’s initiative in taking food corporations to court over price gouging, and helping to lower the prices of crop fertilizers.

But many of these fixes are workarounds to compensate for the massive monopolistic corporatization of our food industry. Recall the point that the *Washington Post* made with little additional analysis: “consolidation in the industry gives large chains the ability to keep prices high.” The fact is that only a handful of corporations control the majority of our food system. We are all at the mercy of a small number of big companies. And, unless we make serious systemic changes to our food systems, we will remain so.

When thinking about longer-term fixes that free our foods from corporate profiteering, the humble egg is once more a good example. When eggs were prized items dur-

ing the early months of the pandemic, small producers and farmers markets became the only reliable suppliers for many Americans. I recall being even more grateful than usual for my membership with the Urban Homestead, a small farm in the heart of Pasadena, California, where I live. Each week, I place an order with them for fresh produce and other locally grown foods to supplement my store-bought groceries. During the COVID-19 lockdowns, Urban Homestead was one of the few sources my family had for eggs and fresh produce.

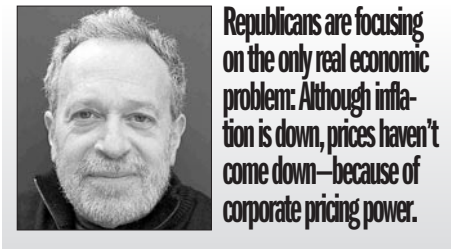
But such small producers are few and far between. While the lucky ones among us may have access to urban farms, there are simply not enough small-scale growers to feed most Americans. Those farms that do exist operate on razor-thin margins, struggling year after year to remain financially viable. They remain on the outskirts of a massive capitalist playing field that is tilted toward profit-centered, highly subsidized agribusinesses and grocery chains. While small farmers, both urban and rural, are struggling, food trading companies are gobbling up massive profits. And the federal government’s farm subsidy program disproportionately benefits large corporate growers rather than the family farmers they are ostensibly aimed at.

Localizing our food supplies and shortening the chain between food buyers (i.e., all of us) and grocery suppliers ought to be the focus of food-centered government policies. This requires adopting a mindset based on the idea of “food justice,” a topic on which much has been written. We need to make it easier for small-scale farmers to grow food while remaining financially stable, and harder for large-scale corporate agribusinesses to control our food supply. This requires incentivizing small-scale farmers to remain small and sustainable—the opposite of the “growth” ideals of corporate profiteers.

Lawmakers and corporate media outlets are so attached to the idea that food producers and distributors deserve massive profits in exchange for controlling our food supply, that a justice-based approach of de-growth rarely enters their discourse. Rather than the rich eating us (and our wallets), it’s time for us to eat the rich.

Sonali Kolhatkar is the founder, host and executive producer of “Rising Up With Sonali,” a television and radio show that airs on Free Speech TV and Pacifica stations. Her most recent book is “Rising Up: The Power of Narrative in Pursuing Racial Justice” (City Lights Books, 2023). She is a writing fellow for the Economy for All project at the Independent Media Institute, which produced this article, and she is racial justice and civil liberties editor at Yes! Magazine. This appeared at BucksCountyBeacon.com.

ROBERT REICH



Truth About the Economy

It’s the economy, stupid. Thus spoke my friend James Carville, one of Bill Clinton’s campaign managers, in 1992. He was correct then and he’s been right ever since.

Friday, Feb. 2, the Labor Department’s Bureau of Labor Statistics reported that the US economy added 353,000 jobs in January, and the unemployment rate remains at 3.7%. The BLS also revised upward the two prior months, bringing the average monthly job gain in 2023 to 255,000.

Even manufacturing, which has been in the doldrums, added 23,000 positions. Average hourly earnings grew 0.6% from December.

Few economists expected job gains to remain this strong when high interest rates were needed to bring down inflation.

But inflation is way down. Larry Summers (with whom I worked in the Clinton administration) predicted that the Fed would have to cause excessive joblessness to tame inflation (Summers also called the 2021 American Rescue Plan the “least responsible” fiscal policy in 40 years).

He was wrong. Jobs growth continues to roar. Economic growth is good. Wages are moving in the right direction.

Yet despite all the good news, 71% of Republicans say the economy is getting

worse, and Donald Trump is once again claiming that the unemployment numbers are fake.

Trump and Republicans are focusing on the only real remaining economic problem: Although inflation is down, prices haven’t come down. Why not? Because of corporate pricing power.

Consider Pepsi. In 2021, PepsiCo, which makes all sorts of drinks and snacks, announced it was forced to raise prices due to “higher costs.” Forced? Really? The company reported \$11 billion in profit that year.

In 2023 PepsiCo’s chief financial officer said that even though inflation was dropping, its prices would not. Pepsi hiked its prices by double digits and announced plans to keep them high in 2024.

If Pepsi had lots of competitors, consumers would just buy something cheaper. But PepsiCo’s only major soda competitor is Coca-Cola, which – surprise, surprise - announced similar price hikes at about the same time as Pepsi, and also kept its prices high in 2023.

With just one or a few competitors, it’s easy for giant corporations to coordinate price increases and prevent price cuts, to keep their profits up while shafting consumers.

The CEO of Coca-Cola claimed that the company had “earned the right” to push price hikes because its sodas are popular. Popular? The only thing that’s popular these days seems to be corporate price gouging.

Pepsi and Coca-Cola dominate the soft drink market. They own most of the brands that appear to be competitors.

This corporate pricing power isn’t just happening with Coke and Pepsi. Take meat products. At the end of 2023, Americans were paying at least 30% more for beef, pork, and poultry products than they were in 2020.

Why? Just four companies now control processing of 80% of beef, nearly 70% of pork, and almost 60% of poultry. So of course, it’s easy for them to coordinate price increases and prevent price cuts.

In 75% of US industries, fewer com-

panies now control more of their markets than they did twenty years ago.

Which is why the Biden administration is taking on this monopolization with the most aggressive use of antitrust laws in half a century.

It’s taken action against alleged price fixing in the meat industry.

It’s also suing Amazon for using its dominance to artificially jack up prices – one of the biggest anti-monopoly lawsuits in a generation.

It successfully sued to block the merger of JetBlue and Spirit Airlines, which would have made consolidation in the airline industry even worse.

But given how concentrated American industry has become, there’s still a long way to go.

THIS MODERN WORLD

MISSION: IMPOSSIBLE (TAYLOR'S VERSION)

BACKSTAGE AT THE GRAMMYS, 2023
GOOD EVENING, AGENT SWIFT. THE DEEP STATE CONGRATULATES YOU ON SUCCESSFULLY ESTABLISHING YOUR COVER IDENTITY AS AN INTERNATIONAL POP STAR.

OUR OPERATIVES IN THE NATIONAL FOOTBALL LEAGUE WILL ENSURE THAT AGENT KELCE'S TEAM MAKES IT TO THE **SUPER BOWL**--WHERE, WITH THE EYES OF THE NATION ON YOU, YOU WILL ENDORSE **JOE BIDEN** FOR RE-ELECTION.

THAT'S IT. THAT'S THE SECRET PLAN.

YOUR **NEW MISSION**, SHOULD YOU DECIDE TO ACCEPT IT, IS TO SHAPE THE OUTCOME OF NEXT YEAR'S **ELECTION**. FIRST, WE NEED YOU TO ENCOURAGE YOUR FANS TO **REGISTER TO VOTE**.

WE RECOGNIZE THAT THIS IS A SINISTER AND UNDERHANDED TACTIC, BUT THESE ARE DESPERATE TIMES.

THE DEEP STATE IS **COUNTING** ON YOU, AGENT SWIFT, HOWEVER, IF YOU OR ANY MEMBER OF YOUR TEAM ARE DISCOVERED, GEORGE SOROS WILL DISAVOW ANY KNOWLEDGE OF YOUR ACTIONS.

THIS AWARD WILL SELF-DESTRUCT IN FIVE SECONDS.

WE FURTHER NEED YOU TO DEVELOP A PUBLIC ROMANCE WITH ANOTHER OF OUR ASSETS--FOOTBALL PLAYER **TRAVIS KELCE**, WHO HAS ALREADY BEEN WORKING TO PROMOTE OUR VACCINATION INITIATIVE, **OPERATION MICROCHIP SHEEPLE**.

AND SO, AGENT SWIFT SPRINGS INTO ACTION!

TIME TO GET TO **WORK!** I SEE NOTHING THAT COULD GO **WRONG**--

--UNLESS MY FOES IN THE RIGHT WING MEDIA SOMEHOW UNCOVER THE **TRUTH** OF MY MISSION!

NEXT: THE CONSPIRACY EXPOSED!

by TOM TOMORROW

© 2024-02-05 ... JOIN SPARKY'S LIST: thismodernworld.com/subscriptions

JESSE JACKSON



Texas Gov. Greg Abbott is trying to score points over immigration in the tradition of southern governors who tried to stop integration of schools and cafes.

Republicans Seek to Gain By Dividing Americans

Republican Texas Governor Greg Abbott is openly defying a Supreme Court ruling that confirms what was already well established: the federal government is in charge of our borders. Abbott has manufactured a series of stunts to score political points over immigration. Now he has erected razor wire barriers at the border and mobilized the Texas National Guard and police to block the ef-

forts of federal agents to take the barriers down and enforce federal laws. This, as Abbott knows, is performative politics. He is in the disreputable tradition of Alabama Governor George Wallace “standing in the schoolhouse door” to stop integration, or Georgia Governor Lester Maddox who became infamous for threatening to beat Blacks seeking to integrate his restaurant with ax handles. Now Abbott claims the right to spurn the laws and the Constitution and the Supreme Court, invoking Texas right to self-defense. He has been supported by 25 of the 26 sitting Republican governors. The Party of Lincoln has twisted itself to the Party of Calhoun. It was South Carolina’s John Calhoun who put forth the doctrine of nullification. In defense of slavery, he argued that slave states could nullify federal laws that trampled their laws enforcing slavery. It took the Civil War, the most costly war in US history, to assert federal authority, and establish the fact that the United States was an “indestructible union.” This was the great triumph of Abraham Lincoln and the Republican Party. Now Abbott and his fellow Republican governors stand on the side of Calhoun against Lincoln and for nullification, even scorning the majority of the most reactionary Supreme Court since the 1800s. Public concerns about immigration and

the Mexican border are real. Republicans have decided that this is an issue that they can use to rouse racial and nativist fears, feed on the anger of Americans to divide us, and wield against Joe Biden. This is all posturing and performance. How do we know? When Senate Republicans and Democrats produced a very harsh bipartisan bill that would provide \$20 billion for border security (along with aid to Ukraine, Israel, and humanitarian relief for Gaza), Donald Trump told Republicans to torpedo it. He didn’t want Biden to have a “victory.” Republican House Speaker Mike Johnson, who had demanded that border security be included in any bill providing aid to Ukraine or Israel, then announced that he wouldn’t even allow the bill to come up for a vote in the House if it passed the Senate. Republicans don’t want to address the problem. They want to preserve the issue as a political club. The posturing is an ugly business. Calhoun’s doctrine of nullification and state rights led directly to the Civil War. Southern defiance of the Supreme Court order to integrate the schools led to President Eisenhower mobilizing the Arkansas National Guard to protect Black students, and President Kennedy mobilizing the Alabama National Guard and ordering Wallace to step aside. Joe Biden may have to do the same if Abbott’s defiance continues.

Texas, for all the bluster, has no desire to secede. More than 20% of state revenues come from the federal government. Moreover, as tragically demonstrated in the power crisis of 2021, where 246 people died and more than 4.5 million were without power for several days in the middle of brutal cold freeze, Greg Abbott’s administration lacks the competence to manage independently. The cynicism here is clear. Once more in an election year, Republicans seek to gain by dividing Americans. Once more they block efforts to address concerns in order to be able to campaign on them. Once more, they will inflict cruelty on the most vulnerable for political profit. Lincoln believed that we were a better people than this. In the 1860s, it took a war to bring slavery to an end. In the 1960s, it took a civil rights movement to bring segregation to an end. Now Americans must decide again – will those who seek to divide us benefit, or will we seek leaders who appeal to our better angels and seek to solve problems, not posture about them. *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. Follow him on Twitter @RevJJackson.*

GRASSROOTS/*Hank Kalet* Criminalizing the Homeless Again

Homelessness should not be a crime, but that is how some municipal and state governments are treating it – using bans on camping in public to keep the unhoused out of public view, with some threatening fines and jail unless they seek help for substance abuse. Supporters of the approach say it’s “an effort to ensure public order and quality of life,” but that treats this vulnerable population as nuisances and threats and not as citizens or people struggling in a changing economic world. None of this is new, but with homelessness on the rise again, it has gained currency with the public. Local and state governments in Florida, Texas, Minnesota, New York, and elsewhere either are or have crafted ordinances banning tent encampments or limiting their scope, even as skyrocketing housing costs and historic wage stagnation (current wage growth has not offset decades of inertia) have reversed the decline in the number of homeless nationally and locally. The annual point-in-time (PIT) count conducted in January 2023 for the US Department of Housing and Urban Development found 653,104 homeless individuals across the nation. The PIT, however, only provides a snapshot and likely undercounts the total homeless population, with some

experts estimating 10 times as many being homeless for at least some time during the year. The 2023 figure, though, is the best count we have – and it was the highest number in more than a decade, and 12.1% higher than in 2022. In fact, the number of homeless has been rising steadily since 2018 after a significant drop-off and stabilization during the Obama presidency, though it is important to remember that homeless counts barely dipped below 550,000 (aside from 2020, which is an outlier because of the COVID epidemic), indicating the systemic and nature of the problem. So, why not applaud efforts like those in Florida designed to move people from tents and the streets to shelters? After all, officials like Miami Beach Mayor Steven Meiner say that crackdowns work. The city has “seen more homeless individuals using available beds in shelters and therefore receiving the services they need,” he told NBC Miami. That demonstrates that punitive efforts are effective, he argues. Meiner’s sample size is absurdly small – they began the crackdown with a new ordinance in October – and does not account for the truly deep-rooted nature of the problem. More homeless may be using city beds, but that does not mean that there will be fewer homeless, or that the issues that drive people into the streets will be addressed. I’ve been writing about homelessness for more than a decade (see my book, “As An Alien in a Land of Promise” (asanalieninalandofpromise.wordpress.com)). I’ve interviewed dozens of homeless individuals, advocates, politicians and law enforcement officials over the years. They do not agree on courses of action, but nearly all view coercive efforts as counterproductive. The data is incomplete and sometimes contradictory, but coercive efforts have a

long history of abuse and there is data showing a high rate of relapse among those forced into treatment. Federal court rulings in recent years have recognized this. Courts have ruled that “punishing homeless people with no other place to go violates the Eighth Amendment’s prohibition on cruel and unusual punishment.” There are questions about these rulings, particularly their reliance on the Eighth Amendment, and the US Supreme Court has agreed to hear a challenge, but they do get at what is at stake – the lack of choices available to homeless individuals and families. Homelessness is not a criminal justice problem, or shouldn’t be, even if the public mood at this moment may favor more punitive approaches. It is a public health and economic issue. There are intersecting needs in play – the need to treat the homeless as individuals and full citizens, to respect their choices, and to provide them with services, and the need to ensure the health and safety of the larger community. Criminalizing the strategies used by the homeless to survive is not just counter productive but inhumane. It treats these fragile individuals as – to use ex-President Donald Trump’s description – infections to be eradicated. They are not. They are people facing difficult circumstances, who are forced to survive in a cruel economic system that treats us all as widgets, judging us only on the value we might provide. *Hank Kalet is a poet, essayist and journalist in New Jersey. He teaches journalism at Rutgers University. Email, hankkalet@gmail.com; Facebook.com/hank.kalet; Instagram, @kaletwrites; X (Twitter), @news poet41; Substance, hannkkalet.substack.com.*

BOOK REVIEW/*Ken Winkes* Hard Work Over the Decades

How about a two-fer, two books about America’s workers, set in two very different decades 80 years apart? One is an uplifting history of the Works Progress Administration, Franklin Roosevelt’s premier effort to put millions of unemployed Americans back to work during the Depression. The other recounts an early 2000s campaign by a community organizer to free hundreds of eastern Indian welders brought to the United States under false pretenses and then held captive in Mississippi and Texas by the company that imported them. On the surface, the stories told in “American Made” and “The Great Escape” couldn’t be more different. During the 1930s, when unemployment reached nearly 25%, people who were willing to work for pennies a day still couldn’t find jobs. In contrast, in the post-Katrina world of “The Great Escape,” employers saw the dearth of the cheap labor to be their greatest employment problem. Nick Taylor’s 500-plus page account of the WPA moves along at a steady and lively pace, from the 1920s and its post WW I boom to the election of Herbert Hoover, the subsequent 1929 Crash and Franklin Roosevelt’s election in 1932. As most know, FDR’s administration hit the ground running. Programs to deal with the crisis multiplied seem-

ingly overnight, along with an alphabet of initials that identified them. And along with the programs came the people: Among them, Harry Hopkins, an accomplished social worker whom Roosevelt brought with him from New York to head what became the WPA, and Harold Ickes, whom Roosevelt plucked from progressive Republican Ohio politics to lead the Public Works Administration (PWA). “American Made” is far more than a recitation of facts. Taylor interleaves his readable history with stories of individual Americans who benefitted from their WPA employment. Among many others, who could forget the woman who delivered library materials to isolated Kentucky communities on horseback? The sheer numbers of WPA accomplishments are unparalleled in our history. In its seven years, it employed millions of Americans to build thousands of schools and libraries, as well as building or improving thousands of miles of roads. It cleaned up and rebuilt after floods and hurricanes. It produced art, plays and travel guides for every state. And it initiated the school lunch programs that have become an American standard. “The Great Escape” is a far different story from a time much closer to our own. And it is a more personal story, that of Saket Soni, the community organizer who wrote the book, of the dozen or so men from India whose histories he details, and of the more than 200 others who accompanied them to the US to improve their lives, but were badly victimized by those who recruited and employed them instead. In debt for the recruitment fees of more than \$20,000 these men left India to ply their welding skills in Mississippi and Texas. Once they arrived, they were locked behind cyclone fences, housed in hastily erected, overcrowded buildings, fed the poorest of food and provided only scant

sanitary facilities. They were virtual slaves. Their rescue did not happen easily or overnight. Once they walked away from their jobs in Pascagoula and Beaumont, their path to salvation had only begun. Led by Soni, and supported by many worker and human rights organizations along the way, they traveled to Washington, D.C. to make their case before Congress. Badgered by ICE, their eventually successful five-year odyssey through a thicket of entrenched bureaucracy makes for dramatic and heart-breaking reading. As different as they are, looked at together these books tell the same familiar story about what work is like for the powerless. That much hasn’t changed in 80 years or in thousands, but today it is foreign workers’ powerlessness in the face of visa and immigration laws that render them so vulnerable and hence so much in demand. The other story that emerges from holding “American Made” and “The Great Escape” side by side is Biblical. When Jesus said, “...as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me,” I don’t believe he wasn’t talking about capitalism. “American Made” by Nick Taylor. Bantam Dell, 2008 “The Great Escape” by Saket Soni. Algonquin Books of Chapel Hill, 2023 *Ken Winkes is a retired teacher and high school principal living in Conway, Wash.*

Strike a blow for the independent press.
Subscribe to The Progressive Populist.
Only \$45 for 1 year (22 issues).
See page 24 for details and subscription form.

HEALTH CARE/*Joan Retsinas*

What Would Kant Do? A Brake on Renegade Individualism

Needed: the wisdom of Immanuel Kant, to curb renegades’ zeal to flout government.

The libertarian strain runs deep in America, emerging as a clarion response to rules, laws, restrictions. Pick a law that purports to improve the public health. Or safety. Or pollution. Or guns. Do you want the government to tell you that you must get vaccinated? No. Do you want the government to dictate highway speed limits? No. Gun laws? What about “no smoking” edicts? Mandatory restrictions of any kind at any time? No. No. No.

The call for freedom-from-rules speaks to the renegade, an iconic figure in American history. It is now, though, when we need Kant, a 19th century Enlightenment philosopher. He proposed a test that Americans should ask before they shout: “no.” Kant urged that one should "act only in accordance with that maxim through which you can at the same time will that it become a universal law.” In short, if I can do it, so can everybody else. If I want to flout a law, then let everybody — and, by ex-

tension, let that law lapse. Let my “right,” my freedom from a rule, be universal.

Consider vaccination. “Anti-vaxers” are resisting the laws, yelling “ no, I do not want myself, or my children, to be vaccinated.” They have various justifications. Some trust herd immunity. Some trust their own immune systems. Some distrust science. Some think they live in a bubble-like silo of health, or that a divine benevolence protects them. Most don’t like Uncle Sam, or the states’ mini-Uncle Sams, dictating to them. Whatever the justification, most argue for themselves. Kant would ask: Do they want nobody to be vaccinated? Using Kant’s dictum, they would have to decide: should my decision be a universal one?

We now see the uptick in measles, once thought, too optimistically, to be on the road to extinction. Polio too has emerged. In 1994, experts declared the United States “polio free.” Polio has surfaced, first in an unvaccinated adult in New York, now in the county’s wastewater. Diphtheria has spiked in Africa; the United States is at risk.

On to pollution. Corporate behemoths that are poisoning a river, or the air, or the ground have justified their action: jobs, the economy, the scientists’ hyper-hysteria. They want an “out,” an “exit strategy” from the rules; indeed, they may pay for such an “out.” Kant would ask: do they want all polluters to have the same option, letting more of our world make more of us sicker? The corporation, and its supportive politicians, may be willing to let one chunk of one rural county devolve into a superfund site. Is that polluter and supporters willing to let major chunks of more states do the same?

As for tobacco, the government has not banned the

sale of cigarettes, but made them more expensive via taxes. Governments, though, buoyed by statistics on second-hand smoke, have forced restaurants, government offices, sports arenas, schools, supermarkets, trains, planes ... to ban smoking. At first, renegades objected: it is my right. And at first we had an absurd delineation of space: non-smoking and smoking areas. But, thinking of Kant, does anybody want to return to a smoke-filled airplane or train?

Finally, guns, with the myriad restrictions that vary by state, arouse the renegade, bolstered by the Constitution. It is an American’s right to buy, to carry, to store guns. The framers of the Constitution did not foresee machine guns, 3-D computer-generated guns, the school massacres, the Wild West of urban gang warfare.

Regardless, though, Kant poses the “universal” test that should be a brake on the enthusiasm for an unregulated Gun-World. Do we want everybody to be able to buy a gun? To carry it wherever they want? To store it however they want? The protesters holding placards at legislative hearings are not going to shoot up a school, or kill their spouse, or let their children play with loaded weapons. But Kant would argue: if you want that freedom, then that freedom should be universal.

The Independent American can still be Independent. But let that Independent icon test his unfettered enthusiasm (a.k.a Trumpism) for “no” against Kant’s “universal action” maxim. If we reject all those laws, we all, including the renegades, will suffer.

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

Pets Keep Us Young

By SAM URETSKY

*“You are old, father William,” the young man said,
“And your hair has become very white;
And yet you incessantly stand on your head —
Do you think, at your age, it is right?”*

*“In my youth,” father William replied to his son,
“I feared it would injure the brain;
But now that I’m perfectly sure I have none,
Why, I do it again and again.”*
— *Charles Lutwidge Dodgson*

Science marches on — notably in *Frontiers in Aging Neuroscience*, volume 14, October 2022, which published a report “Pet ownership is associated with greater cognitive and brain health in a cross-sectional sample across the adult lifespan”

That one is long, and abstruse, and is not recommended reading, but a study from Sun Yat-sen University, Guangzhou, China (JAMA Open Network) 12/26/23 titled “Pet Ownership, Living Alone, and Cognitive Decline Among Adults 50 Years and Older” is easy to read and understand. The authors concluded “In this prospective cohort study, pet ownership was associated with slower rates of decline in verbal memory, verbal fluency, and composite verbal cognition among older adults living alone, but not among those living with others, and pet ownership completely offset the associations between living alone and decline in verbal memory, verbal fluency, and composite verbal cognition.” Of course, they really concluded with the rec-

ommendation that there should be more studies confirming their findings. One of the inferences of his paper is that “owning a pet can reduce one’s brain age by up to 15 years.”

Other studies have concluded that dogs are more effective at warding off dementia than other species and multiple pets were more effective than a single pet. These findings are significant in view of the anticipated opponents in this year’s election. For example, ex-President Donald Trump claims to be a very stable genius with an IQ of 156, although there is no evidence for either. Ex-President Trump is only the third president who did not have a pet in the White House. The other two, James Polk (11th) and Andrew Johnson (17th), did not have pets, although Johnson apparently cared for mice that he found in his bedroom.

While this may contradict recent studies, some presidents had unusual pets. John Quincy Adams, the president with the highest estimated IQ, kept an alligator in the White House bathtub. Calvin Coolidge had a raccoon named Rebecca, and Herbert Hoover had an opossum named Billy Possum. James Garfield had a parrot named Martha who, it’s claimed, attended cabinet meetings.

Of course, the most famous presidential pet was Franklin Roosevelt’s Scottish Terrier, Fala, who was a national delight and starred in two MGM shorts. When Republican misinformation turned to Fala, it led to FDR’s Fala Speech, which kicked off his fourth campaign for President: “These Republican leaders have not been content with attacks on me, or my wife, or on my sons. No, not content with that, they now include my little dog, Fala. Well, of course, I don’t resent attacks, and my family doesn’t resent attacks, but Fala does resent them. You know, Fala is Scotch, and being a Scottie, as soon as he learned that the Republican fiction writers, in Congress and, out had concocted a story that I had left him behind on the Aleutian Islands and

had sent a destroyer back to find him — at a cost to the taxpayers of two or three, or eight or 20 million dollars — his Scotch soul was furious.”

As a matter of record, some presidents had more pets than others. Theodore Roosevelt had a collection that included dogs, cats and a bear. John F. Kennedy had a number of dogs, including Pushkina, a mixed breed given by Nikita Krushchev, who was from one of the first and Charlie, who was, of the Kennedy’s dogs, the first among equals. The Kennedy’s had parakeets, hamsters, a cat and a canary, although there’s no record of how they got along.

Now there are many sources of information about presidential dogs and the benefits of having pets as protection against cognitive decline, which can be a precursor to dementia. Note that the JAMA paper studied 8,000 older adults and observed differences in the study and control groups after nine years. A shorter but more intense study might show differences in as little as four years.

Donald Trump is 77 years old, and so, regardless of his claims, he has a 77-year-old brain. Joe Biden has a German Shepherd puppy (Commander) and a cat (Willow). He also has an adult German Shepherd, (Major) but after a few incidents Major was moved to a quieter environment. Major still has a place in history as the first rescue dog to live in the White House.

Still, in terms of brain age, Biden gets the maximum discount for multiple pets. That is, 81-15 = 66. So, President Biden may be 81, but his brain is a lot more youthful. Pets do keep you young.

Sam Uretsky is a writer and pharmacist living in Louisville, Ky. Email sam.uretsky@gmail.com. Editorial and research assistance provided by Jenny Beagle Uretsky, LMAS (Louisville Metro Animal Shelter)

Where Have All the Doctors Gone?

Rural communities in Wyoming are at risk with gaps in maternal care, as less than half of rural hospitals in America offer labor and delivery services.

By KATIE KLINGSPORN

There’s never been enough doctors in rural Wyoming, where I live, but a shortage of obstetricians is now increasing the risks for pregnant women across the state—and the nation.

In the last decade in Wyoming, three hospitals have closed their maternity ward. That includes Rawlins, where pregnant moms now have to risk travel on Interstate 80—notorious for weather-related closures—to deliver their babies in Laramie, 100 miles away.

But Wyoming isn’t the only state to face inadequate maternal care: Less than half of the rural hospitals in America even offer labor and delivery services.

Gwenith Wachter has experienced this

erosion firsthand. She first gave birth in her hometown of Riverton, Wyoming, back when the local hospital was a bustling place with a well-seasoned staff. By 2016, the for-profit hospital’s owner had closed its labor and delivery unit. Five years later, when her last child was arriving, she had to travel 26 miles to Lander, the closest birthing facility.

Today, her county of Fremont, a New-Hampshire-sized area home to 40,000 people, has gone from two birthing hospitals and many obstetricians, to one delivery facility and a single pregnancy doctor for the general population. The trend prompts women in increasing numbers to travel out of the county to give birth—an expensive and logistically challenging option. “I just think it’s insane,” Wachter said. “It puts women at risk.”

The statistics bear out her observation. Women who live farther from delivery hospitals are more likely to experience adverse medical outcomes, such as requiring neonatal intensive care.

But with traveling doctors and nurses filling the on-call schedule gaps, Fremont County has it better than some other rural counties, because at least it has a birthing facility. Keeping one going is complicated by factors like the unprofitable nature of deliveries for hospitals and burnout of medical staffers.

In an unfortunate “Catch-22,” robust health care is a key ingredient in creating the local jobs and tax revenue that in turn, drive

patient volume and support the economics of rural communities. Worse, said University of Wyoming professor and midwife Esther Gilman-Kehrer, without enough staff, “I would envision that at some point we’ll see deaths.”

Women who received no prenatal care at all are showing up already in labor at Fremont County general hospitals, according to nursing staff. Add that to the prevalence of risk factors like diabetes, substance abuse and high rate of travel, and the chance of a bad outcome grows.

Wyoming’s maternity-care gap, however, is not the state’s issue of highest concern—not by a long shot. It competes with other challenges such as high suicide rates and declining coal mining revenues. Many lawmakers also appear more interested in hot-button social issues like school library policies. People outside of the childbirth realm express shock when I tell them that health care for women has sharply deteriorated.

The state has begun to take notice. An obstetrics subcommittee of Gov. Mark Gordon’s Health Task Force is working to gather data on doctor shortages. An effort to create a maternal health strategic plan could spring from a University of Wyoming program. What’s known is that many factors, including more livable schedules and the chance for better pay offered at city hospitals, make it difficult to attract promising medical profes-

sionals.

Another issue is a pair of abortion bans held up in litigation. The Wyoming Legislature argues that while the state constitution guarantees residents the freedom to make health care choices, those choices don’t include abortion because “abortion is not health care.”

Will good solutions come fast enough? From 2018 through 2020, 13 Wyoming women died during pregnancy or within one year after the end of their pregnancy, according to the state health department. All six pregnancy-related deaths were deemed preventable. Meanwhile, maternal mortality more than doubled in the United States from 1999 to 2019, putting us far behind other first-world countries.

It’s a fundamental experience for women to have a baby, yet even in the smoothest case, there are lasting implications for women’s bodies. It’s time to stop shrugging the matter off and start treating maternity care with the gravity it deserves. The health of moms is absolutely central to healthy families and thriving communities.

Katie Klingsporn is a contributor to Writers on the Range, writersontherange.org, an independent nonprofit dedicated to spurring lively conversation about the West. She lives in central Wyoming and recently wrote a series about Wyoming’s maternal care shortage for WyoFile.

WAYNE O'LEARY

Corporatization of American Health Care

In October 1983, 40 years ago almost to the month, *Newsweek* magazine ran a lengthy feature article on America’s evolving healthcare system, entitled “The Big Business of Medicine.” As its title suggested, the gist of the piece was that US healthcare was becoming a purely business enterprise run by a network of corporations that increasingly controlled all aspects of medical practice — hospitals, clinics, providers, rehabilitation and care facilities— and operated on a cost-cutting, profit-making basis.

Critics of the emerging marketplace system, dubbed “the new medical-industrial complex,” viewed it as a recipe for higher prices and substandard care, and predicted dire long-range consequences for medicine’s social-service mission. A generation later, they’ve been proven correct.

Statistics bear this out. According to the authoritative *Economist Pocket World in Figures*, US health spending, annually the highest worldwide by far, continues to ratchet up; it rose from 13% of GDP in 2004 to 17% (double most industrialized countries) in 2021, while average American life expectancy, the measure of a successful healthcare system, fell from a deplorable 34th among nations to an even worse 48th over the same period.

The trends reported by *Newsweek* investigators did not go unnoticed by America’s political class, but prompted no alarm. Since the article appeared, seven US administrations (four Republican and three Democratic) have held office; the results from a medical-policy standpoint have been

uniformly dismal. When big initiatives were attempted (for example, the G.W. Bush expansion of Medicare Advantage, or the Obama introduction of the Affordable Care Act), the intended results were designed to expand or solidify marketplace medicine, not limit or redirect it.

The bottom-line assumption of both major parties — the exception being the agitation for Medicare-for-All among progressive Democrats — has been that the system should remain mostly profit centered, subsidized if necessary by infusions of corporate welfare in order to generate additional business, guarantee profits, and write off overhead, but kept at all costs from reverting to the public sector. (The rejection of an ACA public option was in keeping with this desired format.) Private vested interests, primarily insurance companies, would take the lead in running the system, with the budgetary support of government; consumers would pay at both ends, through federal taxes and through private premiums.

This is where things stand as we enter the second decade of the 21st century, unchanged in direction from four decades ago. Depending on how you measure it, incremental steps beginning with passage of the ACA in 2010 have whittled the number of uninsured Americans down from roughly 20% of the population to around 10%, but universal coverage, achieved elsewhere by government-run systems, remains aspirational. In the meantime, a dysfunctional free-enterprise healthcare system devised under the pressure of intense corporate lobbying combined with a generally hands-off federal regulatory policy has come to fruition; it negatively affects public health in ways far beyond the mere question of who is or is not medically insured.

Start with the public sector’s leading program, Medicare. For years, conservative Republicans conspired to privatize it, and, with little resistance from Democrats, they’ve virtually succeeded. As of 2021, over half of America’s seniors (54%) had enrolled in Medicare Advantage, purchasing private plans from corporate health insurers federally subsidized through the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS). The gradual restructuring began with George W. Bush’s signing of the egregiously named Medicare Modernization Act of 2003, which set the framework for privatization.

Along the way, private Medicare was reinforced by the CMS itself, first by Donald Trump’s ideologically motivated CMS Administrator Seema Verma, who enthusiastically advanced it, then by Joe Biden’s appointee Chiquita Brooks-LaSure, an inept career bureaucrat who’s done nothing to reverse or temper her predecessor’s policies. Under Brooks-LaSure’s tenure, health insurers have been allowed free reign to market their policies like auto insurance, and the federal government itself has joined in the hard-sell advertising binge, encouraging seniors to switch from standard public Medicare.

The upshot is that private companies now receive \$400 billion annually from Washington to administer their share of Medicare, approximately \$27 billion more than if signed-up customers were covered in the traditional manner; overpayments resulting from systematically fraudulent medical billing add another estimated \$25 billion to insurer coffers, resulting in continued Justice Department lawsuits. Together, these wasted dollars amount to 13% of Medicare’s total yearly budget. Call it the price of privatization.

The government is not alone in being financially gouged by grasping health-insurance companies. So are the nation’s hospitals, which routinely complain of prior-authorization denials and under-payments from insurers when treating Medicare Advantage patients. This has led some to terminate contracts with Advantage plans altogether. But the hospital sector itself is not without fault in the conversion to corporatized healthcare. Most US hospitals (about two-thirds) are nonprofits, yet under growing competitive market pressures, they are increasingly behaving like for-profits.

Abandoning the charitable responsibilities technically imposed by their tax-exempt status (community services like providing free or low-cost care for the indigent), nonprofits have embarked on massive merger-and-acquisition sprees paid for by staffing and payroll cuts, aggressive medical-debt collection, outside contracting, and price increases on patients. Once localized institutions are rapidly becoming impersonal chains led by highly compensated CEOs eager to adopt the prevailing free-enterprise healthcare model.

There are other changes under way in American healthcare. One sign of the times is the increased role of private-equity investment in both hospitals and physician group practices, a sure indicator of the pursuit of profit above all other considerations. Another is the emergence of so-called value-based managed care as a reimbursement replacement for fee-for-service, allowing increased use of pre-authorizations and denials of care.

Value-based care goes hand in hand with perhaps the most disturbing change in the American system — its takeover by what *The Economist* calls Big Health, large, vertically integrated healthcare oligopolists (exemplified by the \$372 billion behemoth UnitedHealth Group) that not only insure Americans, but employ their doctors (70% of whom are no longer independent professionals); they also influence drug prices through ownership of pharmacies and pharmaceutical benefit-management firms (PBMs), and operate hospitals and nursing homes as well.

The nightmare scenario foreseen in 1983 — giant insurers with few restrictions on their behavior, doctors as a disempowered labor force, hospitals as institutional monopolies — is coming to pass. It’s a healthcare system only Wall Street could love.

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.

Diversity in the Crosshairs

By ROBERT C. KOEHLER

“Welcome to Dearborn, America’s Jihad Capital ...”

No, this is not the official “you are now entering Dearborn, Michigan” sign, at the corner of Michigan and Wyoming avenues, or whatever. This prosperous Detroit suburb — not only the hometown of Henry Ford but my hometown as well, the place where I grew up — which has one of the largest Arab-American populations in North America, was recently the target of a snarky, racist op-ed published in the *Wall Street Journal*. The above words were its title.

It’s so easy to toss hatred at the chosen enemy of the moment. It’s so easy to dance joyously at the “us vs. them” divide, celebrating the evil of The Other (and thus quietly basking in our own obvious goodness). Evil is external and all we have to do is kill it. This seems to be humanity’s organizing principle. Can we evolve beyond it?

In the wake of the *WSJ* article, Dearborn’s Mayor Abdullah Hammoud expressed deep concern that it would feed Islamophobia and put the city’s residents in danger, noting that is has “led to an alarming increase in bigoted and Islamophobic rhetoric online targeting the city.” The mayor has increased police patrols around mosques and other places of worship and has called on the *Journal* to retract the op-ed, written by Steven Stalinsky, executive director of the Middle East Media Research Institute.

Stalinsky pushed the usual buttons in response, belittling protests in the city against President Biden’s military support for Israel in its ongoing bombing of Palestine.

He asked why the mayor “has allowed support inside Dearborn for US-designated terrorist groups, including Hamas and Hezbollah, as well as for the world’s leading state sponsor of terrorism, Iran and its leaders and its proxy militias . . .”

Huh? Protests against Israel’s devastation of Palestine — with more than 27,000 civilians killed so far, many thousands of whom are children — have been going on all around the world. But the mayor of Dearborn shouldn’t have “allowed” such protests to occur in his city, much less publicly declared support of “US-designated terrorist groups”?

Murder is murder, on both sides of any war. But conceding the US government the power to designate which organizations are terrorists (and therefore very, very bad) requires a complete mental blackout of the country’s history — its hideous wars merely in recent decades ... including Vietnam, Afghanistan, Iraq ... which have inflicted death and displacement on millions of people. In other words, when you’re certain who the enemy is, facts don’t matter. There’s only one valid point of view. This is the nature of hell.

The point I’m struggling to make here is summed up succinctly by Abed Ayoub, director of the American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee. He described the *WSJ* piece as the likely beginning of a media assault on Dearborn and its Arab population, in the midst of the Israeli devastation of Palestine (with US complicity). That is, it could be the first of numerous attempts “to make this community look like ‘the other.’”

The Other! Good vs. Evil. It’s just way too easy. George W. Bush and his Axis of Evil come home, shake hands with Jim Crow. Maybe it’s time to start bombing Dearborn. That, in any case, seems to be the quiet implication of the words in the title of Stalinsky’s column: “America’s Jihad Capital.”

Uh oh. We’d better get rid of it.

As *Time* magazine wrote a year ago: “Dearborn is known as the Arab capital of North America for its high concentration of Lebanese, Syrian, Palestinian, Iraqi, and Yemeni communities, and the city claims the largest American Muslim population per capita, as well as the country’s largest mosque.”

Not only that, the article informs us, when the city entered into labor negotiations with city employees last year, it became the first city in the country “to offer Eid al-Fitr, one of Islam’s major holidays that marks the end of Ramadan, as a paid holiday for city employees” ... joining “the likes of Thanksgiving, Christmas, and Good Friday.”

This is called diversity — indeed, evolving diversity. I grew up in Dearborn in the 1950s and ’60s — when Dearborn was nothing like this at all. It was just a typical White, segregated suburb, with a famously racist mayor known as the George Wallace of the North. My response to this evolving Dearborn is, simply, wow. I couldn’t be prouder.

But the nature of war is always us vs. them — that is to say, us vs. someone. That “someone” becomes the enemy and everything specifically — culturally — associated with it becomes a symbol of evil. And once this has penetrated a society’s collective consciousness, dialogue, respect, and a desire for understanding disappear. They’re replaced with hatred and, eventually (all too often), violence. Read some uncensored American history. We know about this all too well.

So I kneel in honor not simply to the city in which I grew up, but to the way it has changed and evolved. Welcome to Dearborn: An American Diversity Capital.

Robert Koehler (koehlercw@gmail.com), syndicated by PeaceVoice, is a Chicago journalist and editor. He is the author of “Courage Grows Strong at the Wound,” and his newly released album of recorded poetry and art work, “Soul Fragments.”

Violating Academic Freedom, Again

By GENE NICHOL

I was unsurprised to read the University of North Carolina Board of Governors is about to require a “foundations of democracy” course, or group of courses, for all system schools. It will, reportedly, mandate the study of the Constitution, the Declaration of Independence, Federalist Papers,

Dr. King’s Birmingham letter, and the Gettysburg Address. It has roots, we’re told, in the North Carolina Reach Act, pushed, but not yet enacted, by the General Assembly.

A few weeks ago, former Chancellor Holden Thorp reminded that our governing boards have no “ability to propose a class, propose a degree, or — for God’s sake — propose a school.” But this is the new Carolina.

I was astonished, though, to see that our Republican lawmakers, and their Board servants, want students to read the US Constitution. Since 2010, no legislature in

America has piled up a list of constitutional transgressions to match our friends in Raleigh. You’d think the Constitution would, literally, be the last thing they’d draw attention to.

Our leaders suggest the listed documents won’t be the only content allowed in the sessions. Other offerings might be considered. The paragraphs below are my modest suggested addition. The listing is mine, but the words are from judges, state and federal.

In *Moore v. Harper* (2023), the US Supreme Court rejected the extraordinary

assertion by Republican North Carolina General Assembly leaders that their federal districting decisions were not subject to state judicial review. Chief Justice John Roberts chided the lawmakers:

“Since early in our Nation’s history, courts have recognized their duty to evaluate the constitutionality of legislative acts. We announced our responsibility to review laws that violate the constitution in *Marbury v. Madison* (1803). All those who have framed written constitutions contemplate them as forming the fundamental and para-

Continued on page 19

Top 3 Things Biden Could Do Instead of Intensively Bombing Iraq and Syria

By JUAN COLE

ANN ARBOR – The Biden administration launched 85 air strikes Feb. 2 against small bases of the Party of God Brigades (Kata’ib Hizbullah), an Iraqi Shiite militia active in Iraq and Syria. The organization is likely the culprit in Sunday’s drone strike against the Tower 22 US base in the far north of Jordan on the border with Syria. The communique issued by something calling itself “the Islamic Resistance in Iraq” said that the strike had been in the cause of “resisting the American occupation forces in Iraq and the region, and in response to the massacres of the Zionist entity against our people in Gaza.”

Sot al-Iraq, an independent Baghdad daily, reported that the US counter-strike on Qaim on the border of Iraq and Syria killed two civilians and wounded five other people.

Although US military analysts and spokesmen will say that the US air strikes are aimed at degrading the militia’s capabilities and at deterring it from future such attacks, it isn’t very likely that either goal will be achieved in this way. Bombing guerrilla groups from 30,000 feet is as close to a futile military tactic as you can get. It is not as though these light, mobile forces were likely sitting around in their known bases and hideouts, oblivious that the US was coming for

them.

In any case, the Party of God Brigades already announced that it was pausing its attacks on US forces after the Jordan operation killed three US servicemen. It makes you wonder whether they had been expecting the US to shoot down their drone and were appalled that it got through and killed servicemen. The Saudi owned, London-based daily, al-Sharq al-Awsat alleges that the militia was pressured afterwards by Iran and by Shiite political parties in the Iraqi parliament to suspend their anti-American attacks.

Iraq’s president, Abdul Latif Rashid, and the prime minister Muhammad Shia al-Sudani, warned against Iraq becoming an arena of regional conflict.

Although Friday’s air strikes on the Party of God Brigades’ known facilities are unlikely to spiral into a general war, you never know about these things. People don’t usually start out trying to have a war— they often fall into it.

President Joe Biden could easily avoid the necessity of bombing Yemen, Iraq, Syria, and the good Lord knows how many other countries in the region. He just has to do three things to make US troop secure in the region.

1. He could cut Israeli Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu off from resupply of armaments and ammunition, forcing a ceasefire in Gaza. Whatever is going on there, it isn’t primarily a war on Hamas. It is a total war on Gaza civilians, hundreds of whom are likely dying of hunger daily, on top of the innocent civilians killed by air strikes and sniping. No one can understand Biden’s single-minded dedication to the killing of 27,000 Palestinians, 70% of them women and children.

2. Biden could just pull the US troops out of Syria. It is crazy that they are still there. They only total 900, spread across three small forward operating bases. The Syrian government doesn’t want them there and given the defeat of ISIL (ISIS, Daesh), their presence is no longer required for self-defense. Their presence is by now illegal in international law. They are also exposed to danger, being so few. Bring them home.

3. Biden could also withdraw the 2,500 US troops from Iraq. The Iraqi parliament voted against their continued presence in January 2020, so they are there illegally, as well. They are also exposed and vulnerable.

Presto change-o, the extreme tensions and crisis that threaten to draw the US into a wider war would likely evaporate.

Or, Biden could go on the mule-headed and amoral way he is going. It is starting to cast a dark cloud over his presidential campaign. His Feb. 1 swing through Michigan did not include an appearance in Dearborn, which has a significant Arab and Muslim population. They are an important swing vote in the state. The Biden people tried to set up a meeting, but were rebuffed.

Ceasefire.

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

US Should Recognize a Palestinian State

By JOEL D. JOSEPH

Palestine should draft a Declaration of Independence like the United States and Israel did. The United States should then immediately recognize Palestine as an independent state. The United States and Israel declared their independence without waiting for other nations to give their approval. The United States did not ask Great Britain for permission to become an independent national and neither should Palestine.

The first nation to recognize the United States was Morocco in December, 1777. France recognized the United States two months later and fought side-by-side with us against Great Britain.

When Israel declared its independence on May 14, 1948, President Harry Truman recognized Israel as a nation on that same day. Three days later, the Soviet Union recognized the State of Israel. Palestine will be recognized by most nations in the world in a short period of time.

Declaration of Independence

Palestine’s Declaration of Independence should provide for the following:

1. Palestine should declare that it is the homeland for the Palestinian people and that all Palestinians from all over the world, have the right to become citizens there. Israel similarly allows Jews from all over the world to become citizens of Israel.

2. Palestine shall declare that Israel has the right to exist, and that the Palestine will not invade Israel.

3. Palestine should declare that because Hamas murdered 1,200 innocent Israeli citizens in October 2023, in violation of international law, Hamas is not permitted to be part of the ruling coalition for the new country.

4. Palestine should declare that there will be no religious discrimination. Currently 50,000 Christians live in the West Bank and 1,300 live in Gaza. Palestinian Christians trace their history back 2,000 years to the beginning of Christianity. Palestine is the home of many Biblical sites and is considered the birthplace of Christianity. Nazareth and Bethlehem, Jesus’s birthplace, are in the West Bank. Approximately 11,000 Druze now live in the West Bank. The Druze religion branched off from the religion of Islam and is now considered its own religion separate from Islam. The Druze religion was created in the 10th and 11th centuries in Egypt, with aspects of Hindu and Greek philosophy incorporated into the tenets of Islam.

5. The 500,000 Jewish settlers in the West Bank should be allowed to stay and be allowed to become citizens of Palestine. After Palestine becomes an independent state, no additional Israelis will be allowed to move there.

6. Palestine will be a democracy and will establish a constitution defining rights and responsibilities of Palestinian citizens.

7. Palestinians will have freedom of speech and assembly.

8. Palestinians will have the freedom of travel throughout the West Bank and there shall be freedom to travel to and from Gaza.

9. Palestine shall establish a road and rail service between Gaza and the West Bank with consent of Israel.

10. Palestine will negotiate with Israel in good faith to establish their common borders.

Rebuilding Gaza

The United States, Europe and the Islamic world should all participate in the reconstruction of Gaza. The new Palestinian state will have a population of about five million, two million in Gaza and three million in the West Bank. In order to assure Israel that the new state will be peaceful, there can be a transition period where an international force, made up of troops from Saudi Arabia, Turkey, the United States, Great Britain and other nations keep the peace. Gaza should be allowed to have a seaport and an airport that allows its citizens, and others, to travel to and from its territory. At its closest point, the Gaza Strip is 25 miles from the West Bank separated by Israeli desert. Israel could build a limited access freeway, and/or rail link, between the two Palestinian enclaves with no exits in Israel.

The only peaceful solution to the war in Gaza is the creation of an independent state of Palestine. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu is opposed to this, but the United States can proceed with international recognition of an independent Palestine state without his approval. This will help President Biden usher in a new era of peace in the Middle East. The first step is up to the Palestinians to draft a declaration of independence. Then the world can recognize Palestine as an independent nation and invite it to join the United Nations. Israel, with a new government, can negotiate a treaty with Palestine so that both nations can live in peace.

Joel D. Joseph is a lawyer, economist and author of 15 books, including “Solomonic Justice: How the Israeli Supreme Court has Become a Beacon of Justice in the Middle East.” He is founder and chairman of the Made in the USA Foundation, a non-profit organization dedicated to promoting American-made products.

No Turning Back on Iran’s Nukes

By JASON SIBERT

The head of the International Atomic Energy Agency recently spoke of concerns about Iran’s advancing nuclear program and called for diplomacy with Tehran.

During the January World Economic Forum in Davos, IAEA Director-General Rafael Mariano Grossi said Iran is “restricting cooperation in a very unprecedented way” and is punishing the agency for actions taken by the United States and European countries. He said it is “unacceptable” for the IAEA to be held “hostage” to Iran’s “political disputes with others.”

There is no doubt that Iran is a negative player on the world stage, as it supports terrorism against Israel, bandwagons with the Chinese and Russians, and – like all Islamic theocracies – promotes none of the values that Western civilization holds dear. However, controlling Iran’s nuclear arsenal is more important than making moral judgments on its form of government, considering the volatile nature of international relations.

Grossi emphasized that diplomacy is necessary “to prevent the situation deteriorating to a degree where it would be impossible to retrieve it.” He also said that Iran’s nuclear program is “galloping ahead” and that the agency’s visibility into the country’s activities must meet the challenge. Grossi said Iran’s activities would be legitimate if Tehran abided by the rules, but he also noted that Tehran is not providing “the whole range of information” and clarifications about its required activities.

The IAEA reported in December that Iran increased its production of uranium enriched to 60%, which is near weapons-grade. As of late December, production returned to the same levels as in the first half of 2023 before Tehran reduced its 60% enrichment by about two-thirds in

June 2023.

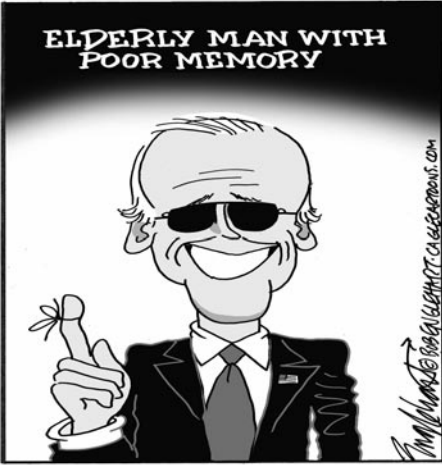
Mohammad Eslami, head of the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran, suggested that the IAEA should not expect additional transparency or for Tehran to cooperate with the agency’s years-long investigation into past nuclear activities until sanctions are lifted. Eslami made those comments during a September meeting with Grossi. While the prospects for revived diplomacy between the United States and Iran appear unlikely, as tensions escalate in the region and US forces clash with Iranian-backed militias, Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesperson Nasser Kanaani said the environment for talks “still exists” if negotiations occur “within the framework of our redlines.”

However, it is unclear what framework would be acceptable to both sides. The Biden administration no longer views restoration of the 2015 nuclear deal as a viable option. Iran has been more vocal about diminishing prospects for a revived Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action. In December, Iran’s Foreign Minister Hossein Amirabdollahian said that the 2015 nuclear deal is becoming “useless.” De-escalatory actions to lower tensions appeared feasible in both Washington and Tehran when indirect talks occurred in 2023. Unfortunately, Iran has increased the production of uranium by 60%.

We can see how leaving the JCPOA in the administration of President Donald Trump was a mistake. It must be added that President Joe Biden didn’t make much of an attempt to revive the deal before the Israel/Hamas war broke out.

The ending doesn’t look like a happy one. Can we learn from our history? Hopefully, we can find a way out of this mess and build a stronger and less armed Middle East when it’s over. We can’t continue with the status quo. The weapons of mass destruction we now possess make the status quo unworkable.

Jason Sibert of St. Louis, Mo., is the Lead Writer for the Peace Economy. Email jasonsibert@hotmail.com.



The Women Driving Trump Mad

By JAMIE STIEHM

Stick around to see Donald Trump rage against strong women, especially women of color like Nikki Haley. This intensifying trait is hurting him as the presumptive Republican nominee.

Case in point: Haley placed second in the New Hampshire primary and vowed her campaign for president is “far from over.” That election night, she looked bright and sounded like a confident winner. Trump’s victory speech was a tirade threatening to “get even” and sniping at her “fancy dress.”

Red-faced, he looked like a loser. Alas, he was just a sore winner.

The *nerve* of Nikki, not dropping out of the race. Then E. Jean Carroll just won an \$83.3 million jury verdict in a civil defamation case that found Trump liable for sexual assault.

That’s real money out of Trump’s pocket for a woman he insulted over and over. The *nerve* of Carroll: ignoring his barrage and pursuing her day in court. Intimidation didn’t work.

This is bound to be a pattern of crime and punishment as Trump faces more trials and 91 felony counts this year. The hush money trial featuring Stormy Daniels is the least of it.

These trials could push Trump past his point of endurance and cause a meltdown, unless the Supreme Court

eases his predicament and grants presidential immunity.

Trump is certain to chafe in Judge Tanya Chutkan’s federal courtroom in Washington. Chutkan is scheduled to preside at the election interference trial. This is Special Counsel Jack Smith’s legal centerpiece in the crown for prosecuting the ex-president for the Jan. 6, 2021, mob attack on the Capitol.

That’s bad luck of the draw for Trump: Chutkan is a nonsense woman jurist of color. She’s known for handing down the stiffest sentences for the Jan. 6 insurrection.

Trump incited storming Congress in a rally for all the world to hear: “We fight like hell ... we’re going to go to the Capitol,” he roared to a rowdy crowd of White nationalists.

Thousands who came to town did serious harm on Trump’s command. Contrary to his claims, he did nothing to stop the violence at the Capitol for hours, according to sworn testimony.

How Trump will hold his tongue as defendant in that indictment is a mystery. His courtroom conduct in the Carroll case was surly and defiant. But the stakes in the Jan. 6 are higher, more sweeping as a federal crime charge and could result in a prison sentence.

Accepting Chutkan’s authority will be the worst thing that ever happened to Trump. Is he capable of acting with respect for the judge if his future depends upon it? Will Chutkan clamp down on his speech outside the court?

This case is the crucible of American democracy. Make no mistake.

Let’s not forget Fani Willis, Fulton County district attorney, has built a strong case for Trump trying to overturn the Georgia election in 2020. As president, Trump was caught on tape seeking “11,780” more votes, speaking to a state official.

Willis is a woman of color with gumption. That combination is likely to make Trump see red.

Trump makes no secret of his disdain for women, period. He brags that his Supreme Court nominees reversed 50 years of constitutional reproductive rights. Tragically, in Texas, about 26,000 pregnancies were caused by rape since that 2022 ruling.

That’s the price of doing business for Trump, courting the hard right in the White House. Never mind the suffering of injured women and girls.

We’re pretty worthless in Trump’s crude world. I realized how alike and interchangeable women are to Trump when he kept referring to Haley as “Nancy Pelosi” in his rambling New Hampshire speech.

As House Speaker, Pelosi, D-Calif., was the one politician who stood up to President Trump to his face in public and private meetings. She ripped up his State of the Union speech in a moment of resistance.

Trump has a special place of inner ire for Pelosi. In his confused state, he saw her as his tormentor. The *nerve* of Nancy.

Feeling besieged by women, Trump is making mistakes: hoping the economy will crash and insisting Republicans block a big border deal in the works.

His fluster and bluster, sound and fury, will be something to see.

*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.*

Trump’s Inner Voice

By BARRY FRIEDMAN

Donald J. Trump sits on Trump Force One, about to fly to another rally and to the waiting crowds who want to touch, paw, hug, and kiss him.

He asks the steward for Wet Wipes.

Trump reluctantly picks up a newspaper. It’s everywhere: 91 criminal charges, including four felony counts for overturning a federal election, 13 for election interference in Georgia. In New York, he has to pay a woman \$84 million. He throws the paper aside.

He picks it up again.

“I never touched her pus*y. She’s lying,” he tells the steward.

“Anything else, sir?”

There are the 34 additional felony counts against him in connection with payments to Stormy Daniels.

“Bitch!”

He opens the container, pulls out a wipe, and covers his face to hide it.

There are the 40 felony counts in Florida — “Why doesn’t DeSantis do something for me? Ungrateful bastard!” — for hoarding classified documents after leaving office and impeding efforts to retrieve them. He turns the page. There is also a civil fraud trial, including allegations of conspiracy, falsifying business records, and insurance fraud. He has been found liable for fraudulently inflating the value of his properties, and, if New York Attorney General Letitia James — “Another bitch” — has her way, there will be a \$370 million fine, a lifetime ban preventing him and his sons from working in New York real estate.

His nerves are shot. He throws the paper down again. He can’t get comfortable on the plane. His pants are tight. He can’t re-

member names, facts, dates, connections. He sees himself in the reflection of the window.

“I still got it.”

People are snickering about how he smells, though, whether Melania loves him, what’s inside Ivana’s coffin that he hastily buried on his golf course, and whether he covets Ivanka.

He knows all this. People are nasty. He’s a punchline — a smelly, inarticulate, bigoted, unraveling punchline. The smart people don’t think he’s smart; the dumb ones, the ones who send him money, think he should win multiple Nobel Prizes.

“I should have.”

The *New York Times*, his hometown paper, still won’t give him a good story — never has.

“I’ll close them down in November.”

His former chief operating officer at the Trump Organization, Allen Weisselberg, now imprisoned, has been cooperating with authorities in New York. His former White House chief of staff Mark Meadows, the man who was in his Oval Office on the morning of Jan. 6, 2021, has been granted immunity.

He picks up the paper again.

Seven hundred years in prison, he reads, if he’s found guilty on everything.

He hears the pilot announce an arrival time in Florence, South Carolina.

“I’ll pardon myself when I’m re-elected.”

But a presidential pardon does nothing, he’s been told, about the state charges he faces — he can’t believe it, but it’s true — in Georgia and New York.

As the plane lifts off, he knows the stalling tactics will not work forever. A trial is going to happen.

“Bastards.”

He could lose in November. He could lose, he says it — he knows it — again.

Michael Cohen and Weisselberg and Meadows and the execrable Rudy Giuliani, who included him as an unpaid debt in his

bankruptcy filing.

“They’d be nothing without me.”

The steward brings him a Diet Coke, a Big Mac, a piece of black-forest cake.

“Loser! I’m not paying Rudy sh*t! He didn’t deliver for me.”

Trump smiles, thinking about the hair dye running down Rudy’s face.

He stops smiling.

He unwraps the cake, breaks off a piece with his fingers.

His wife didn’t want him in the car with her on the way to her mother’s funeral. He’s ripped off students and charities. He has stiffed carpet layers and painters who did work for him at casinos. He has humiliated political opponents and the disabled. He has neutered and belittled political friends.

“F*ck them all, even Melania!”

For most, stress comes with a DUI, a denied insurance claim, a prostate or breast exam showing anomalies, identity theft, a lousy boss, a blown engine, a child on drugs. But what does all this do to a man like Trump, who thought he was untouchable, Teflon, someone who gave so much to a nation?

If Trump wins in November, Republicans will fear him, but unless he cancels future elections, a distinct possibility, they won’t have to deal with him after 2024.

History will do his biopsy.

When he dies, ex-presidents will not come to his funeral. He tells himself he doesn’t care. He does. He thinks about lying in a coffin.

Those who eulogize him will strain to find his humanity. His sons will spew invectives at those who didn’t support him. Ivanka will come to the service but won’t speak. Melania, if she’s there at all, will shed no tears. Democrats and Republicans will not come together outside the church, after the service, as they did when Bush died or after 9/11, to remind the nation we are one.

the rodent who employed 77,000 people in Florida, but who could, if provoked, pack up Minnie and Snow White and the Seven and move them to another more welcoming clime.

What can you do with a candidate like that? Only a fool would attack Mickey.

Scott Wagner, Ron’s genius campaign manager, hatched a plan to persuade his doctor to include a set of brain scans during Ron’s next physical exam.

Wagner then secretly ordered the scans converted to a 1,000 piece jigsaw puzzle. He worked on it diligently to try to understand his boss’s puzzling operating system, hoping a better campaign strategy would reveal itself.

Right up until the end in Iowa he was seen bending over the table, picking up a piece, murmuring, “Maybe if I put the corpus callosum over here ...”

He would the piece aloft as he hovered in one spot after another before he set

Those who mourn him will be those who believe that prosecutors in Georgia, Florida, New York, and Washington, as well as E. Jean Carroll, Stormy Daniels, Serge Kovaleski, students at Trump University, the charities the Trump Organization defrauded — EVERYONE — was lying except him.

In *The Godfather, Part III*, Michael Corleone talks to the corpse of Don Tommasino, a man who decades earlier helped avenge the murder of Michael’s grandfather.

“You were so loved, Don Tommasino,” Michael cries. “Why was I so feared, and you so loved? What was it?”

But Corleone knows why.

Trump knows why.

When Corleone died, alone, nobody talked to his corpse.

The plane lands. Trump looks out the window and sees the red hats, the smiling faces, the contorted faces, the angry faces, the tattooed faces. The people are screaming, punching the air, bowing down to the plane.

“My people.”

They’re holding signs, pictures. He’s Superman. He’s with the flag. He’s saluting. He’s saving drowning children. He’s with Christ. He’s young. He waves through the little window.

“I am loved.”

*Barry Friedman is an essayist, political columnist, petroleum geology reporter — quit laughing — and comedian living in Tulsa, Okla. His latest book, “Jack Sh*t: Volume One: Voluptuous Bagels and other Concerns of Jack Friedman” is out and 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 barryfriedman.com and friedmanoftheplains.com.*

it back down.

“Or maybe if I placed the hippocampus next to the amygdala ...”

“Or, maybe if I shifted the right frontal lobe more to the left ...”

After several hours, he cried out, “It’s hopeless,” and swept the thousand pieces to the ground. “There is no way to turn this brain into a winner.”

Sadly, as he started picking up the pieces, he recalled the one true Churchill quote he should have adopted for Ron’s concession speech:

“Success cannot be achieved; failure’s the only option. It is the courage to quit before the bullet ricochets off your foot and penetrates your brain.”

Rosie Sorenson is a humor writer in the San Francisco Bay Area. Her column is satire and, like Fox “News,” cannot be believed as fact. You can contact Rosie at: RosieSorenson29@yahoo.com

SATIRE/*Rosie Sorenson*

Pieces of Ron

Ron DeSatan exited the presidential stage the way he entered—not with a bang, but with a stupid-ass blunder by unwittingly using a faux Churchill quote: “Success is not final, failure is not fatal: It is the courage to continue that counts.”

Someone on his campaign, probably not him, wanted to class up his exit speech by inviting Winston Churchill to the party. So, then, how did a 1938 Budweiser commercial show up instead? There’s been a mystery surrounding the DeSatan campaign from the beginning, including the question of how could a putative front runner with bushels of cash lose four inches in height whenever he took off his cowboy boots?

Provoking Trump to Defeat Himself Jujitsu Style

Part of Donald J. Trump’s public persona is to behave like a pouting tween. This trait was on display after the New Hampshire primary results were in, showing Trump getting 54% to Haley’s 43%—the results were closer than polls had predicted. Haley preceded Trump with an address to her supporters and described her vote total as a strong finish. This enraged Trump who at his rally said, “Wow, she’s doing like a speech, like she won.” He continued: “Who the hell was this imposter that went up on the stage before and like claimed a victory? She did very poorly, actually.”

Vintage Trump. He always accuses people of exactly what he can be accurately charged with saying or doing, as partially reflected in the criminal and civil lawsuits against him. Demolishing any dignity that should be associated with a front-running presidential candidate, Trump went on degrading himself by mocking Haley’s dress, mumbling his usual mentions of her unspecified violations, and later, as the *Washington Post* reported, “threaded his feelings into several dozen increasingly frenetic messages on his personal social media site.”

Once again, it’s Trump being always about Trump. Trump’s most fervent MAGA supporters are “verbalists,” believing everything that pours from his foul, lying, vengeful, bigoted mouth and ignoring that his deeds as President allowed Big Business to

screw people like them. Many suffered devastating health, safety and economic consequences because of Trump. Just recall his boastful bungling of the COVID-19 pandemic’s early weeks in the US.

Keep in mind that a majority of Trump voters are traditional, rock-ribbed Republicans who vote for the party ticket no matter who the candidates are. They need no persuasion because party affiliation overrides self-interest.

Defeating Trump by provoking Trump is not the Democratic Party’s strong suit, but it better become one of the tactics candidates and their surrogates embrace.

One way to expose Trump is to personalize criticisms of him the way he mostly inaccurately personalizes others, with accusations and nicknames. It’s giving a bully—who still gets his libels replayed verbatim on the mass media—a taste of his own medicine. *Der Fuhrer* Trump cannot stand being pejoratively nicknamed.

David Kamp, in an opinion piece for the *New York Times*, recounts that while writing for *Spy* magazine, the staff produced a Trump epithet that stuck, “short-fingered vulgarian.” Trump being thin-skinned, long before entering politics, “sent angry threatening letters to *Spy*, which only heightened our joy,” he added. A slew of accurate nicknames will enlarge Trump’s juvenile immolation because he can’t resist spending time to huff, puff and assail his perceived politi-

cal tormentors.

Enough Republicans will see his serious instability and narcissism—that the campaign is all about him, not them—to not vote for Trump or stay home on election day. A 10% loss of his voters would ensure his losing big, apart from other anti-Trump GOTV strategies highlighting what he did in the White House to the American people, regardless of their political labels.

Readers interested in a factual, readable elaboration of Trump’s misdeeds can read “Wrecking America: How Trump’s Lawbreaking and Lies Betray All” (2020) by Mark Green and me. Facts matter, like opposing increasing the federal minimum wage frozen by the GOP at \$7.25 per hour, or pushing to take away health insurance from millions of American families, or eliminating health and safety protections for consumers, children and workers and on and on.

In the Jan. 21, 2024, Sunday edition, the *New York Times* printed a lengthy feature by Sarah Longwell, publisher of the conservative news outlet The Bulwark, subtitled “What 17 of Trump’s ‘Best People’ Said About Him.” People that Trump praised and selected to operate at the highest level of his Administration.

There are people, the Times column noted, “...who worked closely with Mr. Trump—whom he trusted, who worked with him every day, who saw him in private when the cameras were off.”

A few excerpts: Retired four-star Marine Corps general, John Kelly, was Trump’s chief of staff for a year and a half. His take: “A person who admires autocrats and murderous dictators. A person that has nothing but contempt for our democratic institutions, our Constitution and the rule of law.”

Mark Esper, Trump’s Secretary of Defense said: “I have a lot of concerns about

Donald Trump. I have said that he’s a threat to democracy. I think the last year, certainly the last few months of Donald Trump’s presidency, will look like the first few months of the next one if that were to occur.”

William Barr, Trump’s Attorney General: “...[H]e is a consummate narcissist and he constantly engages in reckless conduct that puts his political followers at risk. ... He will always put his own interest and gratifying his own ego ahead of everything else, including the country’s interest. ... He’s like ... a defiant 9-year-old kid, who’s always pushing the glass toward the edge of the table defying his parents to stop him from doing it.”

John Bolton: Trump’s national security adviser and a hawk, declared, “By the time I left the White House, I was convinced he was not fit to be president. ... I think it is a danger for the United States if he gets a second term.”

In his memoir, Bolton also wrote that “obstruction of justice was a way of life at the White House.”

It has been said that Trump is his own best promoter and also his own worst enemy. If the Democrats practice jujitsu on Trump, he’ll save them a lot of money, as he defeats himself. Savvy opponents can always count on Trump to bring out the worst in himself, against himself.

If this presidential election is going to turn on personal behavior, and less on policy records and agendas, count on Trump to make ever more Americans say to themselves: “I would never associate with a neighbor like Trump. It’s too scary to have him in the White House again.”

Ralph Nader is a consumer advocate, lawyer and author. See www.nader.org or facebook.com/ralphnader.

TED RALL

What’s Left: We’re a Rich Country. Let’s Act Like It

Lyndon Johnson, cautioned that his support of the Civil Rights Act was too bold and politically risky, famously responded: “What else is the presidency for?”

The United States of America is one of the richest, if not the richest, nation-state in the history of the world. It also is the most unequal. So its people live in misery and squalor. What else is a country’s spectacular wealth for, other than to provide a high standard of living for its citizens?

A Leftist economic program should begin with the government’s budget. How should revenues be collected, and from whom? How should the money be spent? The Left must articulate a holistic approach to the federal budget.

According to the US Treasury’s website: “The federal government collects revenue from a variety of sources, including individual income taxes, payroll taxes, corporate income taxes, and excise taxes. It also collects revenue from services like admission to national parks and customs du-

ties.” This came to \$4.44 trillion in 2023. The biggest source of this cash bonanza was income taxes.

In addition, states and cities took in about \$2 trillion.

\$6 trillion is, to state the most obviously obvious thing in the world, a staggering enormous amount of money. Yet we rarely take a beat to take in that fact.

Part of the reason is that it doesn’t feel like we live in a rich country with a huge amount of taxes coming into its coffers. It sure doesn’t look like one. People sleep on the streets. Factories are abandoned. Schools are worn. Hospitals are chaotic, understaffed and depressing. Storefronts are boarded up. Litter abounds. Bridges collapse, subways derail, doors fall off airplanes, high-speed rail and free college and affordable healthcare are for other countries.

Why can’t we have nice things? One can blame cycles and systems: late-stage capitalism, the duopoly, the corrupt revolving door between business and the government officials who are supposed to regulate them. Fundamentally, the answer boils down to bad priorities. The people in charge would rather spend our money on the things that they care about than what we want and need: sending weapons to other countries instead of feeding the poor, tax breaks for corporations rather than treating young men addicted to opioids, building more prisons in lieu of hiring social workers.

Reordering a society’s social and economic priorities is a complex task. To keep

things relatively simple let’s set aside the comparatively lesser and infinitely more diffuse state and local budgets in order to focus upon the federal budget—round it up to \$5 trillion—as the principal engine in the Left’s proposed shift of the US to a country that puts people first. Further to the goal of simplification let’s assume that overall revenues remain flat in real terms adjusted for inflation—no tax cuts or hikes, no significant changes in tariffs like a trade war.

The most recent US military budget, for 2024, comes in at \$886 billion—by far the biggest expense, and greater than all other federal spending combined. And that’s radically understating the real cost of militarism. As the socialist journal *Monthly Review* calculates, when you include costs associated with medical and other expenses related to veterans, debt service on deficit spending for old wars and military aid to foreign countries, the real number doubles. So the actual 2024 total is closer to \$1.6 trillion.

Recognizing that nothing makes us less safe than a forward, aggressive military posture in which US forces and proxies are stationed around the globe. They are sitting ducks and provocateurs. A Left worthy of its name favors a military apparatus capable of defending the US —nothing more, nothing less. We need missile defenses, border protections, a naval force to protect our coasts, the kind of domestically-focused armed forces that could have effectively responded to the 9/11 attacks. Given our exceptionally secure geographical situation, surrounded by two vast oceans and directly

bordered only by two nations, both close allies, we can get defense—the real thing, not what the hegemony we buy with the Department of Defense—on the cheap.

Chalmers Johnson, the academic and great critic of the American empire, called the Pentagon to ask for a list of its overseas bases; not only could they not produce such a list, they could only estimate the number. (It’s 800, more or less.) Not knowing how many bases you are is a major sign of overextension. So is the reaction, when learning that one of your country’s soldiers has been killed in combat, of surprise that we were in that nation in the first place. We should close every last one and bring every last soldier and sailor home.

Brazil, a regional superpower that is bigger than the contiguous 48 states, has a military budget of \$20 billion. That’s a rounding error, 0.25% of ours. Of course, Brazil doesn’t wage wars or plant bases on the opposite side of the planet—and neither should we. We can spend that 99.75% of that \$1.6 trillion on stuff that helps rather than kills.

Then we can look at other federal budget expenses the Left should slash so we can redirect those precious funds to addressing our wants and needs.

Ted Rall, political cartoonist, columnist and graphic novelist, co-hosts the left-vs-right DMZ America podcast with fellow cartoonist Scott Stantis. Write him c/o his website (rall.com), Twitter @tedrall

Nichol...
Continued from page 16

mount law.”

The *Moore* decision was presaged by a series of judicial rulings over the preceding decade that invalidated a cascade of constitutional violations by the N.C. General Assembly. Judges held state lawmakers enacted “among the largest racial gerrymanders ever confronted by a federal court.” Those laws constituted a “widespread, serious and long-standing constitutional violation.” A legislature that is insulated by invidious gerrymandering, the judges wrote, “can enact additional legislation to restrict voting rights and cement its

unjustified control.”

Another federal court held North Carolina Republicans used “almost surgical precision” to deny the right to vote to African Americans. “Neither this legislature, nor any other legislature in the country, has ever done so much, so fast, to restrict access to the franchise.”

A third federal judge ruled North Carolina’s “Right to Know Act,” which “coerced a doctor to voice a message on behalf of the state,” violated the Constitution. “Having to choose between blindfolding and earmuffing herself or watching and listening to unwanted information” to obtain a medical procedure (abortion) could not be tolerated. Forced speech “to unwilling and incapaci-

tated listeners does not bear a constitutionally necessary connection to the protection of fetal life.”

The North Carolina Supreme Court ruled, in invalidating one of the many legislative attempts to eviscerate the powers of the governor: “A frequent recurrence to fundamental principles is absolutely necessary to preserve the blessings of liberty and the principle of separation of powers.” [Those rules] “do not allow the General Assembly to take control over the executive and lodge it with itself.”

Finally, another exasperated federal judge concluded the long string of intentional constitutional violations by North Carolina Republican lawmakers, “raises le-

gitimate questions regarding the General Assembly’s capacity or willingness” to comply with fundamental law.

Perhaps a civics lesson is in order. But it might not be the one our deeply partisan Board of Governors and their compliant president want to deliver.

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.

They Struggle to Come to America: One Woman’s Story

By LAURA PRITCHETT

Exactly what causes people to leave their homeland and make a difficult trek of 3,000 miles? A young woman I’ll call Jhovid, who came here from Venezuela, has asked me to listen to her answer, so that I and others may understand.

Her hair is neatly ponytailed, her clothes tidy, she looks composed — but her food is uneaten and tears streak her face. She tells me that people are starving to death in Venezuela. She looks at me to make sure I understand. Starving.

We know about the dire conditions generally, and we know that our Colorado town of Fort Collins, like many, has absorbed large numbers of newly arrived immigrants who fled for their safety. But she hopes someone will bear witness to her particular journey, and so we gather with my friend, bilingual author Laura Resau, who has collaborated with other South American women to help them share their stories.

Jhovid is one of the many Venezuelan refugees who climbed off a bus months ago with no coat, food, shelter or contacts. She’s 32, she tells us, and graduated from college

with a degree in business administration, but Venezuela was sinking economically as she was growing up. Jobs were scarce and gangs were everywhere.

She traveled with her sister to Colombia, where they worked for five years in a tennis shoe factory. But economic conditions soured there too, so the women went to Chile, traveling 23 days by foot and bus.

“We were crossing a banana plantation on the Ecuador-Peru border and men approached, asked for valuables, but we didn’t have any, so they said, ‘You’ll have to pay with something else, then.’”

I wince, predicting what is to come, but she offers a small smile. “I gave them my cheap cell phone and they left.”

Luck, kindness and perseverance seem to be the themes of her story, where, time after time, good people—in law enforcement, nonprofits, people living in poverty themselves—offered help.

Like the time that immigration officials in Chile “gave us medical help and food, and we got jobs in fruit processing.” She liked the factory, the country, and sending money to her family.

Pero después. But then. Her father, a retired police officer, who had been kidnapped and rescued, developed Parkinson’s disease. Her family was desperate for help. Jhovid knew that if she could make it to the US-Mexico border where there was a “Very Famous Hole” through the border wall, she could get to America and find work that paid more.

For the next three months, the sisters traveled north, walking and hitchhiking through three countries. In Panama, they foraged for food in the jungle with los animales. Worst

of all, her sister became very “sick from the river, because the river was contaminated from dead people.”

But then her eyes light up: A kind person gave them food, medicine, tickets to Costa Rica. Then it was on to Nicaragua, Honduras, Guatemala and Mexico. They hid under cars at a mechanic shop to avoid the Mexican Mafia. Caught twice by immigration patrols in southern Mexico, they were sent to towns near the Guatemalan border.

By the third time, she knew how to avoid la migra, and after making it through the Very Famous Hole, they arrived in El Paso. Finally, she and others were bused to Denver, where a stranger directed them to a homeless shelter, and later, a bus to Fort Collins.

Various groups stepped up with lightning speed, including churches and the nonprofits Fuerza Latina and Alianza NORCO. She’s grateful for all the help but is happy to have found a full-time job.

As Jhovid wraps up her story, I breathe out a sigh. This woman walked thousands of miles through country after country because she had to. Determination and the kindness of strangers helped her succeed. But as I listen, I think of a family member’s response to immigrants—one echoed by many in this country: “They’re ruining the country, why would you want to help them?”

My answer: Why wouldn’t you respect their desperate quest for a decent life?

Laura Pritchett is a contributor to Writers on the Range, an independent nonprofit dedicated to spurring lively conversation about the West. She has two novels coming out this year from Torrey House Press and Ballantine; for more, see laurapritchett.com.

Support the Workers in the Entertainment Industry That Helps Us Get By

By ROB PATTERSON

It was all in behind last year’s strikes by the Writers Guild of America (WGA) and the Screen Actors Guild/American Federation of Television and Radio Artists (SAG-AFTRA) that brought TV production and filmmaking to a halt. Labor in general as well as creatives like myself and those union’s members always get pressed down by the big-money interests. It’s how America works in rampantly capitalistic times such as these. I’m forever on the side of the sometimes growling and barking underdogs that do the work that counts.

Even if the strikes affected my life in ways that saddened me. I’m a bit of a TV series junkie. In recent years the ones I follow, and those I dip into for a while, kept me happily occupied in my evenings. After a day’s work at a screen inputting and revising, editing and rewriting myself and clients, I like to kick back and let another screen’s output engage, entertain and sometimes enlighten me. It feels like a nicely balanced equation.

Sure, as with TV since my youth, there was always some kind of summer lull. But here in the streaming era there was always

something that would catch my fancy that I’d watch. Then came the COVID lockdown and the production of TV series went on hold. That set back new episodes being produced. Once the health safety restrictions and precautions eased, some series started back up.

Then the writers, who in some cases were able to keep working during the pandemic, went on strike. Actors followed. With both those key elements out of the loop, both TV and film production hit a wall.

That caused a lot of people who work in many of the fields and crafts that it takes for a production to create shows to lose work and genuinely suffer. That puts into perspective whatever disappointment I might have felt as last fall began and all my regular shows didn’t start new seasons. Small potatoes, really.

However, my favorite series have become ingrained into my life. They feature stories and characters I feel compelled to care about and follow. As I’ve noted previously in this column, my primary favorites are all trios of show from the bustling stable of creator Dick Wolf: the current “Law & Order” line-up of “Special Victims Unit” and its Elliot Stabler spinoff “Organized Crime” plus the reboot of the original L&O that launched Wolf’s TV series empire; “Chicago Fire,” “PD” and “MD.” And the three Wolf “FBI” shows. I missed ‘em.

I can’t comment much on the SAG issues other than to note that even though stars quite obviously have lucrative and

even enriching compensation, minor role players and extras that even may work regularly are still squarely in the middle-class income bracket. I doubt that I am telling most all of my readers something they don’t already know — in the current economic climate anyone making a middle class living often feels financially challenged.

I have spent time looking over the WGA schedule of minimums that is its agreement with studios and producers. Writing for TV shows is also largely a middle class-level pursuit — and anyone who lives in the two primary production hubs, Los Angeles and New York City, feels the squeeze of the high costs of living in both locales for the middle class. So the main strike issue of better compensation from steaming revenues is valid indeed.

The other big matter, protection from artificial intelligence, is also reasonable, even if I don’t share the panic about an AI threat that some other professional writers feel. I must confess that as I pass through the living room of my shared house where one of my housemates spends much of his spare time shuffling through the many offerings on Netflix and other platforms — I kid him that he watches those shows so I don’t have to — I hear lots of dialogue that’s so mediocre and pedestrian that it could have been written by a program.

This gap in my series viewing has reminded me that even if strikes affect our lives in some way that’s negative, there are bigger issues regarding a financially secure

and thriving populace we must keep in mind. Unions by and large serve the middle and lower-class workers. Media portrayals of life in Tinseltown as lifestyles of the Hollywood rich and famous gloss over how the vast majority of the workers on our favorite shows are regular folks trying to get by. We can suffer a bit for a bit so they might suffer less, right?

Populist Picks

TV SERIES: “ Fargo ” (Season Five) — One series that has returned does so with a bang. Its wonderfully bizarre accounts of Midwest life and crime goes full monty weird and hilarious in this new season. Juno Temple glistens as an odd, sweet yet cunning and strong heartland wife and mom. Bonus points for Jon Hamm’s corrupt sheriff.

SONG: “Let’s Be Grown Ups Now” by Paul Brady — Sometimes a song just feels so right for the times, This title tune to the latest album from Ireland’s singer-songwriter bard is addressed to what Dylan called the Masters of War. But its sentiments apply across the board. And it should be played every time the US House of Reprehensible children convenes. Good introduction to a masterful writer of songs with one of the most verdant tenor voices in popular music.

Rob Patterson is a music and entertainment writer in Austin, Texas.

Langston Hughes and Language of Human Liberation

By SETH SANDRONSKY

Langston Hughes (1902-1967) was a great American poet. However, he did not stop there. Jonathan Scott’s new Socialist Joy in the Writing of Langston Hughes helps us to take pleasure in his originality and productivity.

“I’ve been obsessed by the relation between the individual and the collective,” writes Scott, a Detroit native. To this end, he illuminates Hughes’ patterns of poetry and prose as organic ingredients of social actions in the United States and abroad at that time in history. Our era lacks a similar writer or politics.

Scott’s book has four parts. Part one looks at Hughes and his work on African-American culture that sees society from a unique point of view informed by a daily struggle for justice. This vision, Scott writes, also is open to unity with others who labor for a living.

For instance, in the body of literature

that Hughes produced, the blues constituted a culture that was more than art by, of and for Blacks. Rather, the blues were a canvas for the lives of oppressed working people of all hues, voicing a socialist joy of potential human liberation.

“I’m so tired of waiting, aren’t you,” wrote Hughes as a 20-something, “for the world to become good and beautiful and kind? Let us take a knife and cut the world in two and see what worms are eating at the rind.”

Hughes’ essays and poems placed daughters and sons of former slaves within a mass of wage earners bridled by the time clock and the workplace. Both restricted their full abilities. Readers here and abroad responded to Hughes’ emancipatory writing, but mainstream critics were cold to his literary flair.

In part two, Nicolás Guillén, the Cuban national poet, had a different reaction. He and Hughes met in 1930. Their union helped Guillén create new forms of popular poetry for Cubans who were struggling to free themselves from Western colonialism.

In part three, Scott turns to Hughes’ journalism from the 1940s to the 1960s, “his most popular literary innovation since his blues poems of the 1920s and 1930s.” In the *Chicago Defender*, a Black-owned

paper, Hughes penned “Here to Yonder,” a column with a main character named Jesse B. Simple. He spoke with Hughes and other Blacks about current events, including class conflict among and between them, while rejecting their shared second-rate citizenship.

Readers loved this column, a community talking book. In it, Hughes seeded a transformative dialogue about the living and working conditions of regular women and men. As a columnist, Hughes urged social equality “through the popular language of the African-American laborer,” Scott notes. This message was loud and clear in the Civil Rights movement.

In part four, we read about Hughes, a pioneering author of children’s literature. This, like his journalistic efforts, attracted new readers. *The First Book of Rhythms* flowed from his time as a writing teacher for Chicago eighth graders. Hughes emphasized their use of drawing to describe movement, a process that has animated the natural world from the days of the ancient Greeks and Egyptians.

“Hughes’ method is an ingenious way of getting students to think in terms of the rhythms of prose writing; of lyrical flow; of word sequences, transitions, cadences and caesuras,” Scott writes. “Already there is the room to start and stop as suits the writer,

but in a disciplined, rhythmized way.” The connections between listening, seeing and writing blossomed in Hughes’s able hands. Parents and classroom teachers of middle and high school students, take note!

Currently, Hughes has a larger stature outside the United States than inside of it. Here, he is largely a writer studied during Black History Month and otherwise ignored. That is a shame and a trend to end. Scott’s book may be a move in that direction.

Seth Sandronsky lives and works in Sacramento. He is a journalist and member of the Pacific Media Workers Guild. Email sethsandronsky@gmail.com.



A Filmic Feast for the Eyes: The Gastronomy of L'Amour

Taste probably hits the spot for most cinematic connoisseurs and gourmets of fine dining.

Writer/director Trần Anh Hùng’s “The Taste of Things (La Passion de Dodin Bouffant),” a tasty full-course movie meal that serves up spectacular cuisine and rarefied romance, is an acquired taste. For popcorn munching multiplex denizens conditioned by frenetic superhero histrionics and antics, the 135-minute “Taste” will likely unspool at an excruciatingly slow pace, and requires reading dreaded subtitles, to boot. Likewise, those who expect dollops of politics in their pictures may be sorely disappointed. But “Taste” probably hits the spot for most cinematic connoisseurs and gourmets of fine dining.

“Taste” was shot on location at Anjou, east of Brittany, south of Normandy, and the film’s plot, which Trần loosely adapted from Marcel Rouff’s 1924 novel “The Life and Passion of Dodin-Bouffant, Gourmet,” is simple enough. In 1889, at the countryside mansion of the titular chef Dodin Bouffant (in French, the movie’s title is “La Passion de Dodin Bouffant”), from garden to kitchen to table, elaborate meals are exactly, exquisitely prepared, cooked and served, usually to Bouffant’s (played by Benoît Magimel, who won the Best Actor César for the 2023 Tahiti-shot and set “Pacifiction”) friends, a coterie of foodies and gourmands. Dodin, who *Paris Match* described as a “renowned historian and incorrigible epicurean,” presides over the preparation with his personal cook, Eugénie.

This being France and Eugénie being portrayed by the great French actress and beauty, Juliette Binoche (who won the Best Supporting Actress Oscar for 1996’s “The English Patient,” was Academy Award-nommed for Best Actress for 2000’s “Chocolat” and depicted Rodin’s wronged mistress in 2013’s “Camille Claudel 1915”), she is also Dodin’s long-time lover. Although they live under the same roof, they discretely have separate bedrooms. If Dodin wants to make love with her, nighttime he must traverse hallways and staircases in the mansion, and upon arrival at her chamber, he’s

only permitted to enter Eugénie’s boudoir if the door is unlocked. Tellingly, the entranceway is never locked, but this detail preserves a semblance of independence for Eugénie, who also demurs whenever Dodin periodically proposes to her. Perhaps by declining to marry him Eugénie craftily keeps kindling Dodin’s desire to continue pursuing her until they finally, fully, belong to one another...

There are subplots, including that of Pauline (newcomer Bonnie Chagneau-Revoire), nearby peasants’ daughter, who has a flair for cooking and yearns to become Dodin’s apprentice. In press notes, Trần says the young actress’s “formidable virtue is that she chews nicely.” In what may be a bit of European snobbery, another plot point involves a foreign potentate, Le Prince (Mhamed Arezki), who dares to become embroiled in a type of cook-off with the fictitious Dodin, who, according to *Paris Match*, “was inspired by authentic great names of the French gastronomy such as Camille Cerf or Anthelme Brillat-Savarin.” (It’s almost as if the Wizard of gastronomy is declaring: “Do you presume to criticize the great Oz, you ungrateful creatures? ... The great Oz has spoken!”)

Friendship, too, is a recurring theme of Taste, but the film revolves around the process of preparing of and then devouring of epicurean feasts and the simmering romance between Eugénie and Dodin. Both plot points are lovingly lensed by cinematographer Jonathan Ricquebourg. Some may find that the camera’s lingering over the cooking and then eating of sumptuous repasts for 20, 30 minutes is excessive, dull and repetitive. But I’d remind attention-span challenged ticket buyers that 1972’s action-packed “The Godfather” opened with a wedding sequence “you can’t refuse” that’s also exceedingly lengthy.

As for the love affair, which but of course mirrors the passion for the kitchen, as the table does for the bed, it is beautifully shot and acted. The nearly 60-year-old Binoche retains her captivating beauty and allure (unless that’s a stunt derriere sensuously unveiled onscreen). Eugénie’s occasional, passing spells are portentous and Taste’s romance becomes a rumination on the passing of time, aging – which the characters poetically evoke with seasonal references. Trần may be cautioning that he/she who hesitates is lost, we shouldn’t wait until it’s too late to seize the time...

If there are any politics in “Taste,” they are rather bourgeois. At a reception after a screening at the Four Seasons in Beverly Hills, I commented to the Da Nang-born Trần that Dodin’s quartet of gourmets are never seen paying for their lavish meals. Trần explained to me that this was because these four Musketeers were friends and guests of the independently wealthy Dodin, a landowner whose fortune freed him to devote his life to cooking and eating as an art form. I asked if “Taste” was going to be released in Vietnam and how his socialist homeland would react to this movie,

and the auteur was uncertain.

“Taste” may not be politically engagé in the sense that Godard and Costa-Gavras classics are, but the movie definitely has a point of view. It’s similar to the perspective found in the Impressionist canvases painted at the time “Taste” is set. One could almost imagine pointillist Georges Seurat daubing a scene at Dodin’s rural enclave and calling it “Sunday in the Kitchen with Eugénie.” The film’s wistful worldview might be summed up as “joie de vivre” – although such reveries aren’t lasting...

According to press notes, the three Michelin-star chef Pierre Gagnaire served as a consultant on the film, bestowing culinary authenticity. After the “Fall of Saigon” (or rise of Ho Chi Minh City – depends on your POV) 12-year-old Trần moved from Vietnam to France. Tr n previously directed 1993’s “The Scent of Green Papaya,” which was Vietnam’s official selection for the Academy Awards, nominated in the Oscar category previously called Best Foreign Film, and won two Cannes Film Festival awards, plus a César for Best First Work.

After a seven-year hiatus from the silver screen, last year Trần made a triumphant comeback with “Taste,” France’s selection for what’s now the Academy’s Best International Feature Film. Although it wasn’t Oscar-nommed, Trần won Cannes’ Best Director award and “Taste” was nominated for Cannes’ prestigious Palme d’Or, plus for three Césars. The César, but of course, is the French Oscar equivalent; the always eminently watchable Juliette Binoche has been nommed 11 times for Césars, and won for 1994’s “Three Colors: Blue.” Audiences can savor this still-gorgeous, gifted artiste again in her latest filmic foray.

“The Taste of Things” may not be to every theatergoer’s taste, but I thoroughly enjoyed Tr n’s tasty movie morsel. Here’s the secret recipe for enjoying Taste: See it with somebody you love, and as this film is absolutely guaranteed to wet your appetite, indulge at a splendid table at a favorite restaurant or kitchen afterwards. Then, after enjoying that luscious luau, the true gourmet – and glutton – who savors cinema à la mode, should finish the evening with a double feature by viewing Frederick Wiseman’s nonfiction “Menus-Plaisir – Les Troisgros,” another culinary paean to French gastronomy that’s only twice as long as Taste. Bon appétit!

The limited theatrical release of “The Taste of Things,” which is in French with English subtitles, opened Feb. 9 and went wide, appropriately, on Valentine’s Day, a time for chocolate and l’amour.

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 review originally appeared at Hollywood Progressive.

In the Fight Against Antisemitism, Robert Kraft Is Part of the Problem

The foundation run by the owner of the New England Patriots has purchased a Super Bowl ad titled “Stop Jewish Hate”–but it’s the foundation that is helping to fuel antisemitism.

The New England Patriots’ 81-year-old owner, Robert Kraft, writes seven-digit checks to the right-wing Israeli lobbying machine AIPAC, but his personal, political, and financial ties to Israel run deeper than the occasional donation. The multibillionaire married his late wife, Myra, in Israel in 1963 when Kraft, then 22, was older than the nation itself. Together they set up numerous business, athletic, and charitable ties to Israel, a record of which is proudly proclaimed on the Kraft company website. In particular, the Kraft Group boasts of its “Touchdown in Israel” program, where NFL players are given free, highly organized vacations to see “the Holy Land” and come back to spread the word about “the only democracy in the Middle East.” (Not every NFL player has chosen to take part.) Kraft also attends fundraisers for the Israel Defense Forces, currently—and in open view of the world—committing war crimes in Gaza.

Now, as Israel wages war against the civilians of Gaza—more than 25,000 Palestinian have been killed with at least 10,000 of them children—Kraft is again flexing his financial and political muscles in order to defend the indefensible. His Foundation to Combat Antisemitism (FCAS) will be spending an estimated \$7 million to buy a Super Bowl ad titled “Stop Jewish Hate” that will be seen by well over 100 million people. Under Kraft’s direction, the ad’s goal is to

create a propaganda campaign to counter the reports and images from Gaza that young people are consuming on social media. As Kraft said on CNN in December, “Fifty percent of what’s being spread is lies and not accurate, and young people unfortunately are believing.”

The content of the Super Bowl ad was not known at this writing, but FCAS afforded Kraft the opportunity to make the rounds on cable news saying things like, “It’s horrible to me that a group like Hamas can be respected and people in the United States of America can be carrying flags or supporting them.”

This is Kraft enacting the mission of FCAS: fostering disinformation. He is far from subtle: A Palestinian flag becomes a “Hamas flag,” and people like the hundreds of thousands who took to the streets of Washington, D.C., last month to call for a cease-fire and end the violence are expressions of the “rise in antisemitism.” Without a sense of irony or the horrors happening on the ground in Gaza, Kraft says he is giving \$100 million of his own money to FCAS, because “hate leads to violence.”

Let’s be clear: What Kraft is doing politically and what he will be using the Super Bowl as a platform to do is dangerous. He appears to think any criticism of Israel is inherently antisemitic. For Kraft, it is Jews like myself, rabbis, and Holocaust survivors calling for a cease-fire and a Free Palestine that

are part of the problem. Kraft seems to think that opposition to Israel, the IDF, and the AIPAC agenda is antisemitism.

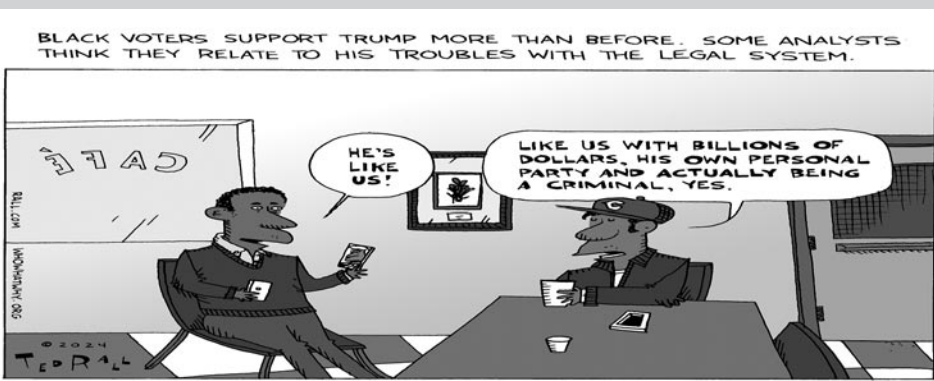
There is a Red Sea of distance, as I have written, between antisemitism and anti-Zionism. No matter the Orwellian resolutions that a compliant US Congress passes, these are different political currents. Antisemitism is the pernicious hatred of a beautiful religion and culture that has been with us for over 5,000 years. Anti-Zionism is opposing a once-negligible 125-year-old colonial project in the Middle East. Zionism was a minor strain in Jewish life until the Holocaust. In a state of trauma and immiseration, Zionism rose triumphant after World War II with a new state built on the backs and land of the Palestinian people: a new outpost of what McCarthyite columnist Bari Weiss—with shameless racism—calls “the West,” albeit located in the Middle East. For Kraft (and Weiss), building a highly militarized, nuclear state built on stolen land is the only true hedge against another Holocaust.

Cementing the idea that to be anti-Zionist means you are antisemitic has also been the lifelong project of Israel’s corrupt Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. He attempts to shame anyone on the left who dares criticize Israel as crypto-antisemites. Even the rabbis calling for a Free Palestine are not free from this slander. Opposition to Israel’s practices through boycott, divestment, and sanctions is now illegal in some states.

Right-wing Christian nationalists, with their belief in a Jewish state existing alongside their conviction that Jews are going to Hell, are welcome in Netanyahu’s Israel and Kraft’s coalition. Left-wing anti-Zionist Jews are not. The greatest foghorn of this evangelical right-wing “love Israel, hate Jews” perspective is, of course, Donald Trump. Kraft, while speaking of being troubled by events like the Charlottesville Nazi march and the right-wing massacre at the Tree of Life synagogue, counts Donald Trump as a close friend and even donated \$1 million to his presidential inauguration.

No one who provides cover for the most powerful, public antisemite in the history of US politics should ever be taken seriously on how to best fight antisemitism. No one who funds AIPAC and the IDF and opposes a cease-fire amid the carnage should be allowed a commercial platform at the Super Bowl. But given that the big game is always an orgy of militarism, blind patriotism, and big budget commercials that lie through their teeth, perhaps that ad could not be more appropriate. We can do better than Kraft’s perspective on how to fight antisemitism. Morally, we don’t have a choice.

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 documentary “Behind the Shield: The Power and Politics of the NFL.” Email edgeofsports@gmail.com



AMY GOODMAN



Secretary of State Antony Blinken's efforts to get a pause in hostilities was rebuffed by Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu

Biden’s Support for Israel May Cost Him Reelection

Israel’s bombardment of Gaza continues, as Palestinians trapped there share videos of their own annihilation in real time. The estimated death toll in Gaza since Israel’s military assault began on Oct 7 has exceeded 28,000, including 11,500 children, with an additional 8,000 people missing and presumed dead, buried beneath the rubble. Another 67,000, at least, have been injured. Despite the International Court of Justice’s Jan. 26 provisional orders to Israel to prevent genocide in Gaza, Israel’s assault has intensified.

Secretary of State Antony Blinken’s diplomatic efforts seeking a pause in hostilities in exchange for a complete release of Israeli hostages held in Gaza was rebuffed

by Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, pledging “total victory” over Hamas in Gaza. Netanyahu is facing increasing pressure from the families of the hostages and their allies, many of whom want such a deal.

“I am very afraid that if you continue on this path, to dismantle Hamas, there will be no more hostages to release,” Adina Moshe, 72, said this week, addressing Netanyahu through a news conference with other former hostages.

Meanwhile, in the United States, the political consequences of President Joe Biden’s unreserved support for Israel’s assault on Gaza are emerging.

Feb. 1, Secretary of State Antony Blinken participated in a roundtable discussion on Gaza in Washington, DC. Among those invited was Dr. Tariq Haddad, a cardiologist and member of the Virginia Coalition for Human Rights. He grew up in Gaza.

Haddad decided at the last minute not to attend. Instead, he sent Blinken a heart-wrenching, 12-page letter. It opened,

“After a lot of soul-searching, I have decided that I cannot in good conscience meet with you today, knowing this administration’s policies have been responsible for the death of over 80 of my family members including dozens of children, the suffering of hundreds of my remaining family, the famine my family is currently subjected to and the destruction of all my family’s homes.”

By the time Tariq Haddad appeared on the *Democracy Now!* news hour, several days later, his family’s death toll had climbed.

“I’ve had about a hundred family mem-

bers at this point who have been killed, including physicians, pharmacists, lawyers, engineers, dozens and dozens of children, multiple small babies,” Haddad said, choking up several times.

“On October 25th, 10 members of my family, all three generations of one side of my family, were all killed. My cousin Jamal El-Farra, his son, who is a physician, Dr. Tawfiq El-Farra, his wife who was pregnant, two of their beautiful daughters, Reem and Hala, Jamal’s brother Esam, wife Semad, and their daughters, Rusul, Tuqa and Nadian, all, multiple generations all killed in one Israeli missile strike. Tuqa, one of the younger women in the family, her wedding date was the day she was killed.”

Space does not allow for Tariq Haddad’s full account of family killed in Gaza since Oct. 7. His letter was illustrated with photos of many of those killed, while they were still living: smiling, celebrating marriages, births, and academic achievements, all despite Israel’s brutal siege imposed on Gaza in 2006.

Haddad is not alone in his anguish. The critical electoral swing state of Michigan is home to one of the largest Arab American populations in the United States. Many of them are lifelong Democratic voters who are now saying they can’t support Joe Biden in the upcoming election. Biden’s campaign advisors are getting worried.

In late January, Abdullah Hammoud, the mayor of Dearborn, Michigan and the first Muslim elected to that office, refused to meet with Biden campaign manager Julie Chávez Rodríguez.

“People feel betrayed,” Mayor Hammoud said on Democracy Now! “We were

promised in 2020 a president who was going to bring back decency to the White House, who led with humanity. And what we’ve seen since October 7th is anything but. We have seen an alignment with Benjamin Netanyahu and the most right-wing government in Israel’s history. We cannot, for the life of us, understand why.”

Hammoud is leading a movement to pressure Biden to demand an immediate ceasefire. “Michigan voters are sending Biden a clear message in the February 27 Democratic primary that he can count us out,” the movement’s website, ListenToMichigan.com, states. “We are filling out the UNCOMMITTED bubble because we strongly reject Biden’s funding war and genocide in Gaza ... Biden must earn our vote through a dramatic change in policy.” Over 30 elected Democratic officials signed the announcement.

On Feb. 8, the White House dispatched a delegation, led by US Agency for International Development head Samantha Power, to meet members of Michigan’s Arab American and Muslim communities.

If Biden wants to stop hemorrhaging electoral support, all he needs to do is stop the hemorrhaging of actual Palestinian blood in Gaza, stop arming Israel, and demand an immediate ceasefire.

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.”

Do MRIs Freak You Out? They Used To Scare Me Too, But Then I Learned This

By BONNIE JEAN FELDKAMP

I didn't know I was claustrophobic until I had to get an MRI of my knee when I was 32. The technician pushed the button that eased me into the tube, and all seemed to be going well, until a few minutes into it I felt my heart rate increase and proceeded to have a full-blown panic attack.

This intense reaction to an MRI is common – so common that the sheet you fill out prior to testing even has a box to check if you are claustrophobic. Some people have to take medication to help them keep calm and get through it. I coped by avoiding MRIs, and that seemed to be working for me until last year.

I have autoimmune arthritis, and X-rays give physicians limited information about what's happening with my joints. Turns out, I didn't just need one MRI; I needed three. I was in enough pain that I didn't argue.

A lot has changed since my first panicky experience. I didn't ask for medication; instead, I asked for advice. This is what I learned:

Close Your Eyes

This piece of advice came from an MRI technician, and it helped me greatly. Close your eyes before you go in and don't open them again until it's all over and you are out. Keep them shut!

Listen to Ambient Music

The technician may offer you headphones and ask you what kind of music you like. Headphones are nice, but MRIs are loud and the noise is random. It's startling. Like a car alarm, or horror movie security breach. I've also heard it described as sounding like a war zone. It is much louder than anything the technician can pipe through your complimentary headset. For this reason, I don't ask

for music; I ask to listen to a thunderstorm. Relaxing like this helps me stay inside my head and focus on lying still.

Meditate

Use the MRI as an opportunity to practice meditating. Focus on your breathing. When people think of meditation, they think of quiet spaces, but the same principles can bring you calm in chaotic or uncomfortable spaces – such as in the tube of an MRI machine.

If you're not used to meditating or have never done it before, look up a guided meditation on YouTube and practice beforehand. Basically, the goal is to keep your attention trained on your breathing during the MRI. When you feel your mind start to wander or worry, bring it back to your breathing. Talk yourself through it like you are your own best friend. What would you say if this was your child and you were holding their hand? Say those things to yourself. Take deep-reaching belly breaths that expand your abdomen, not your chest, and release each breath slowly.

Practice Gratitude

Remember why the MRI matters. It's to give your doctor the information he or she needs so that you can begin to heal, to feel better or to gain more clarity in a diagnosis. Without this detailed information, you cannot move forward with a care plan that makes sense. Feel that gratitude radiate from within you. Be grateful for your physician, for the technology allotted to you for your care and for the technician doing everything in their power to make you comfortable and obtain proper imaging. You deserve the chance to live comfortably, and the MRI is a tool to help your caregiver help you do this.

I've overcome my fear of the MRI. I know you can, too.

Bonnie Jean Feldkamp is a wife, mother and opinion editor at the Louisville Courier-Journal. She is the media director of the National Society of Newspaper Columnists. Find her on social media @WriterBonnie, or email her at Bonnie@Writer-Bonnie.com. Check out her weekly YouTube videos at https://www.youtube.com/bonniejeanfeldkamp.

Dispatches ...

Continued from page 5

“With you at my side, we will demolish the deep state. We will expel the war mongers ... We will drive out the globalists. We will cast out the communists. We will throw off the political class that hates our country ... We will beat the Democrats. We will rout the fake news media. We will expose and appropriately deal with the Rinos [Republicans in name only]. We will evict Joe Biden from the White House. And we will liberate America from these villains and scoundrels once and for all,” he said.

He gave an almost identical closing at a rally in North Carolina in June. And at an Iowa rally in September. And a New Hampshire rally in January.

These words, which seem so potently venomous written out as a single small block of text, aren’t some random, one-off firing of Trump’s jangled synopsis. This is his standard closing. This is what he is saying to millions of Americans. This is his promise to the nation.

Trump is promising to drive out globalists. He’s promising to cast out communists. He’s promising to throw off the political class. There is not one idea here that has not been expressed before. They haven’t just been written down on pages and cheered before adoring crowds. They have been etched across the world in blood and flames.

There is a word for what Trump is prom-

ising when he says he wants to expel, drive out, cast out, throw off, rout, and evict. That word is pogrom.

Trump posted this capsule summary of his plans in the same weekend in which he informed European allies that he intended to violate the NATO treaty requiring mutual protection and would “encourage [Russia] to do whatever the hell they want.”

Still, the front page of the *New York Times* on Saturday (2/10), had three stories about President Joe Biden’s age, and nothing about Trump’s repeated threats, or his claim that “they” were out to get Pennsylvania. On Monday (2/12), the *Times* did a little better, with a block of stories about Trump’s promise to break the NATO accords. And about how Republicans are falling into line to pretend that Trump doesn’t mean what he says.

POLL: MOST REPUBLICANS ARE FINE WITH TRUMP GETTING AWAY WITH ANYTHING. On the heels of a unanimous ruling of a federal appeals court panel that Donald Trump is not immune from criminal prosecution, a new NPR/PBS *NewsHour*/Marist poll finds that 68% of Republicans think Trump should have immunity for actions he took as president, such as fomenting an violent insurrection, Kerry Eleveld reported at Daily Kos (2/7).

But the Republican faithful who back Trump’s absolute immunity claim have basically sequestered themselves on an island of alternative facts.

Meanwhile, back on the “mainland,”

65% of Americans overall say Trump should not be immune from prosecution, including 91% of Democrats, 65% of independents, and even 31% of Republicans.

The survey is another reminder that Republicans and their voters are living in a completely different reality.

It’s also worth noting that many voters don’t seem aware of the sweeping immunity claim Trump is making, even if as president he were to order SEAL Team Six to assassinate a political rival.

The findings of Navigator Research swing-state focus groups released Feb. 1 revealed that Republican, independent, and Democratic voters alike were aghast when they learned the scope of Trump’s claim.

“It’s ridiculous,” responded an independent Wisconsin woman who leans Republican. “So he’s saying if he killed somebody, he’d be immune.”

“Yeah, I think that’s crazy too. That’s too much power,” said a male Georgia independent who leans Republican.

But crazy as it is, this new survey suggests nearly 7 in 10 Republicans are just fine with Trump getting off scot-free with any action he took as president.

With the ruling by the D.C. appeals court, Trump moved one step closer to facing trial for stoking a violent riot at the Capitol on Jan. 6, 2021 with the intent of blocking the peaceful transfer of power. But he also appealed that decision to the Supreme Court (4/12), hoping to further delay the trial.

TRUMP ATTACKS ANOTHER MILITARY FAMILY BECAUSE THAT’S WHO HE IS. Donald Trump continues to go low in his attacks against primary opponent Nikki Haley. During a rally in Conway, S.C. (2/10), Trump mocked Haley’s husband’s absence from her campaign appearances. “Where’s her husband? What happened to her husband? Where is he? He’s gone.”

In fact, Maj. Michael Haley is a commissioned officer with the SC National Guard and is deployed with the 218th Maneuver Enhancement Brigade at Camp Lemonnier, a military base in Djibouti, on the Horn of Africa.

Yes, Trump was mocking a member of the US military, Jessica Sutherland noted at Daily Kos (2/10). It’s not the first time he’s mocked the spouses of women who challenged him. It probably won’t be the last.

But Sutherland also noted that Melania Trump has not been spotted at Trump campaign appearances, either. As the *New York Times* reports:

“Cloistered behind the gates of her three homes, she sticks to a small circle — her son, her elderly parents and a handful of old friends. She visits her hairdressers, consults with Hervé Pierre, her longtime stylist, and sometimes meets her husband for Friday night dinner at their clubs. But her most ardent pursuit is a personal campaign: helping her son, Barron, 17, with his college search.

“What she has not done, despite invitations from her husband, is appear on the campaign trail. Nor has she been at his side for

Continued on next page

Crisis! Crisis! Crisis! Oh, Never Mind.

By DANA MILBANK

When House Speaker Mike Johnson invited President Biden to give his State of the Union address on the unusually late date of March 7, people were puzzled.

Now, the mystery can be revealed. House Republicans delayed the State of the Union so they could use the time to foment a state of disunion.

After the Supreme Court in January sided with the Biden administration in a dispute with Texas over border barriers, Rep. Chip Roy (R-Tex.) asserted that the high court’s order “is unconscionable and Texas should ignore it.” Never mind that two conservative justices joined in the order. Roy suggested that an appropriate response would be to “tell the court to go to hell.”

Reacting to the same ruling, Rep. Clay Higgins (R-La.) sounded a call to arms, posting on social media that “the feds are staging a civil war, and Texas should stand their ground.”

And Rep. Marjorie Taylor Greene (R-Ga.), nearing the one-year anniversary of her secessionist call for “a national divorce,” announced: “Now the Biden [administration] is at WAR with Texas.”

House Republicans continued the disunion theme in early February, staging a news conference and a hearing to encourage Texas to fight the administration - and the Supreme Court. Rep. Brian Babin (R-Tex.), implying treason by the Biden administration,

praised his state because it “stood its ground against an invasion and an administration that clearly wants the opposing forces to win.” And an earthy Rep. Randy Weber (R-Tex.) said of the Supreme Court: “Maybe we ought to tell them to go butt a stump.”

It’s not just words. These dime-store confederates are actively sabotaging the government they serve — by blocking it from mounting an effective response to the historic surge of migrants along the southern border.

Back in October, Biden requested \$13.6 billion in emergency funding for border protection, including the hiring of 1,300 additional Border Patrol agents and 1,600 asylum officers, as well as more funds to counter fentanyl smuggling. Because of Republicans’ objections, Congress still hasn’t approved a penny of it.

And now, even as House Republicans wail about a “crisis” and an “invasion” at the border, they are mobilizing to kill a bipartisan deal emerging in the Senate to reform asylum claims and to beef up border security — regarded as the toughest immigration legislation in decades. Biden says he would “shut down the border right now” if given the authorities in the proposal.

Instead of declaring victory and embracing the legislation they have long demanded, House Republicans moved to impeach the administration’s lead negotiator on the proposal — Homeland Security Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas — on charges so flimsy they do not identify a crime of any kind.

In lieu of allegations of high crimes or misdemeanors, the impeachment articles, approved early Jan. 31 by the House Homeland Security Committee, charge that Mayorkas “terminated asylum cooperative

agreements” with Central American countries. There’s just one problem with this: Secretary of State Antony Blinken is the one who terminated those.

The articles further charge that Mayorkas “willfully refused to comply with the detention mandate” in the Immigration and Nationality Act. In fact, that standard has never been met in the decades it has existed — because Congress has never provided the funds.

And the articles propose impeachment because Mayorkas “terminated contracts” for President Donald Trump’s border wall. Congress’s own investigative arm blessed the legality of the border wall “pause,” which, in any event, was Biden’s policy, not Mayorkas’s.

Underlying the slipshod articles is this fundamental absurdity: House Republicans tried to impeach Mayorkas Feb. 6 for “failure to enforce the law” at the border — while at the same time loudly encouraging Texas to ignore the law at the border, as well as the highest court in the land. [The impeachment vote failed, 214-216, as Republican leaders failed to anticipate Rep. Al Green (D-Texas) would show up after surgery.]

House Republicans’ usual legal allies have turned against them in their capricious attempt to impeach a Cabinet secretary for the first time in 148 years. Alan Dershowitz, Michael Chertoff and the *Wall Street Journal* editorial page have all criticized the Mayorkas impeachment, and even Jonathan Turley, House Republicans’ all-purpose witness, has said there is no “cognizable basis here for impeachment.”

In fact, there is only one, non-cognizable basis for impeachment, and that is Marjorie Taylor Greene. She has been calling for Mayorkas’s impeachment for 2½ years, raising

money off the effort, and she twice tried to force snap impeachment votes on the House floor last fall, until Republican leaders gave her a guarantee that they would schedule Mayorkas’s impeachment.

This produced a pair of hearings by the Homeland Security Committee to fabricate a rationale for impeachment.

At the first, on Jan. 10, Rep. Morgan Luttrell (R-Tex.) asked law professor Frank Bowman whether selling fentanyl that kills a lot of people could be “considered a high crime.”

“I’m unaware that the secretary has sold any fentanyl,” the professor replied.

The congressman then asked whether Bowman would “consider slavery a high crime.”

“Is there any evidence that Secretary Mayorkas has enslaved anyone?” the professor answered.

Thwarted, Luttrell abandoned his line of questioning. “This is getting a little bit more complicated than I thought it was going to be,” he said.

But the markup went on long enough — about 15 hours — to establish beyond a doubt that, despite their protests to the contrary, Republicans were impeaching Mayorkas because they disagreed with Biden’s border policies.

Even if Mayorkas is impeached by the House, there is zero possibility he would be removed by the Senate.

As with the border security bill that House Republicans are now killing, the purpose isn’t to fix a problem. It’s to exploit one.

Dana Milbank is a political columnist for the Washington Post, where this appeared. Follow him on Twitter @Milbank. Email dana.milbank@washpost.com

Elmo Experiences a Dark Night of the Soul

By ALEXANDRA PETRI

A bar. Night. There is an empty stool at the end. ELMO enters.

BARTENDER: Elmo?

ELMO: Hello, Mr. Bartender! Elmo would like something to drink, please!

BARTENDER: Sure, Elmo.

ELMO: The strongest drink you have.

BARTENDER hands ELMO a glass of lemonade in a sweatband that is visibly shoulder-pressing two enormous weights.

ELMO: Perfect! Elmo needed a strong drink to help him after this week.

STRONG LEMONADE: How can I help, Elmo?

BARTENDER: Do you want a non-anthropomorphic drink as well, Elmo?

ELMO: Yes, please! In addition to the strong drink, can Elmo have a non-anthropomorphic glass of ice water?

BARTENDER: Sure thing.

BARTENDER hands ELMO a normal glass of ice water.

ELMO: Thank you, Mr. Bartender!

STRONG LEMONADE: How can we help you, Elmo?

ELMO: Elmo is full of regret. Elmo is experiencing a dark night of the soul. Elmo asked on X —

STRONG LEMONADE: The letter X?

The LETTER X, also anthropomorphic, is sitting at the end of the bar nursing a vodka on the rocks.

LETTER X: No! Something different! DON’T TALK ABOUT IT.

ELMO: Sorry, X. Anyway, Elmo asked everyone how they were doing.

BIG BIRD enters with COUNT VON COUNT, and BERT and ERNIE.

BIG BIRD: How were they doing, Elmo?

ELMO: Not well. Not well at all.

BARTENDER: Oh?

ELMO: Everyone wanted to tell Elmo how they were doing. More than 60,000 people responded to Elmo! And everyone was doing very poorly. People said they were at their lowest point ... There were so many responses, and they were all so sad! Even the president responded and said it was hard to sweep away the clouds.

LEMONADE: That sounds tough!

ELMO: It was tough, Lemonade. Like being handed lots and lots of lemons.

ELMO: Elmo feels like Elmo is gazing into a big, deep hole from which nothing emerges!

BIG BIRD: Not even light?

ELMO: Not even light.

COUNT VON COUNT: Not even a bat?

ELMO: Not even a bat.

ERNIE: Not even a rubber ducky?

ELMO: Not even a rubber ducky.

A chime sounds.

BIG BIRD: Oh, Elmo, it’s time for the letter of the day!

ELMO: The letter of the day is ... “O.”

ERNIE: O is for octopus?

ELMO: Sure! And if you say O by itself, Elmo has discovered, it can be a cry of metaphysical distress. O! O!

BIG BIRD: It sounds like you’re gazing into the abyss, Elmo.

ELMO: Yes! Elmo is gazing into the abyss!

ERNIE: Oh, that’s no good, Elmo! All that emerges from the abyss is existential despair!

FOZZIE (Entering.): Bear? This bear?

ELMO: No. Existential despair.

FOZZIE: Oh.

FOZZIE leaves.

ELMO: Elmo doesn’t know what to do. Elmo wishes

he could help. But it is all so heavy, and Elmo is not strong enough, even with the metal rods holding his arms up. Maybe Elmo is experiencing this despair.

COUNT VON COUNT: One! One despair!

BERT: When you gaze into the abyss, the abyss gazes also into you. Friedrich Nietzsche.

BIG BIRD: Nietzsche? How do you spell Nietzsche?

COUNT VON COUNT: One, two, three, four, five! Five consonants in a row. Ah-ah-ah!

ELMO: Wait! Wait! Elmo wants to understand! If Elmo gazes into the abyss, then the abyss gazes also into Elmo? So maybe the abyss can see Elmo?

BERT: I guess.

ELMO: Hello, abyss! Everybody say hello to the abyss! Hello, abyss!

ABYSS: Hello.

ELMO: Abyss, are you sad, too?

ABYSS: Om-nom-nom! I am full of existential despair.

ELMO: Elmo thought he was alone! Big Bird, are you gazing into the abyss?

BIG BIRD: Oh, yes.

ELMO: Ernie, are you gazing into the abyss?

ERNIE: I am, and so is Rubber Ducky.

ELMO: And if the whole internet is gazing into the abyss, except Chance the Rapper, who said he was doing well, then — Elmo is not alone after all! Even the abyss is not alone! You can gaze into the abyss with me! We can all gaze into the abyss together.

BIG BIRD: Hooray!

BERT: But Elmo, we’re all still gazing into the abyss.

ELMO: Yes. But Elmo has to start somewhere.

They stare into the abyss together. The lemonade does more presses. We fade out except for the letters, “BROUGHT TO YOU BY THE LETTER O!”

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).”

Dispatches ...

Continued from previous page

any of his court appearances,” though she did endorse his re-election in May.

“These are the days of Melania Trump, former first lady, current campaign spouse and wife to one of the most divisive figures in American public life ...”

CHANGES IN CHILD TAX CREDIT WOULD HAVE OUTSIZED IMPACT ON RURAL CHILDREN. The families of more than a quarter of all children living in rural America would benefit from a proposed expansion of the Child Tax Credit that has passed the US House of Representatives and is now under consideration in the Senate, Claire Carlson reported at the Daily

Yonder (2/7).

The expansion would change the credit’s eligibility criteria to include low-income families who don’t get the full tax credit per child because they don’t pay enough taxes to qualify. The current credit phases in until family earnings reach a certain threshold. Most low-income families — usually ones who make under \$40,000 annually — receive partial or no credit.

“Because of that structure, it particularly disadvantages children who live in rural areas largely because pay is typically lower in rural areas,” said Stephanie Hingtgen, research analyst at the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities. “Clearly this is upside down.”

Under the proposed legislation, more than 80% of the children who don’t get the full credit would see a boost in their family’s income from the credit, according to Hingtgen.

The legislation would also increase the credit slightly, from \$2,000 to \$2,100 per child.

A study from a Harvard University research center found that when families are given a higher child tax credit — as they were in 2021 during the temporary COVID-19 pandemic relief effort — depression and anxiety rates among parents were lower, possibly because of reduced financial worries.

An estimated 27% of all rural children would benefit from the proposed expansion, compared to 22% in metropolitan areas, according to Center on Budget and Policy Priorities data.

The benefits could be even larger for rural families of color, who on average earn less than white families. In rural areas, 46% of Black children, 39% of Latino children, and 37% of American Indian and Alaskan Native children

would receive more money under the Child Tax Credit expansion. For each demographic group, a significantly higher proportion of children from rural areas would benefit than children from urban areas, the analysis showed.

The House of Representatives passed the legislation in a rare bipartisan vote. Now the Child Tax Credit expansion is being considered by the Senate. If passed, the change would go into effect for the current tax filing season (2023) and continue for three years, ending after the 2025 filing season.

“This is Congress’ only shot this year to pass legislation that would substantially boost the incomes of millions of children and families with low incomes and substantially lower child poverty,” Hingtgen said.

See more Dispatches at populist.com.

If you are a progressive populist...
Don't miss an issue!

Subscribe to
The
Progressive
Populist

Progressive 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.

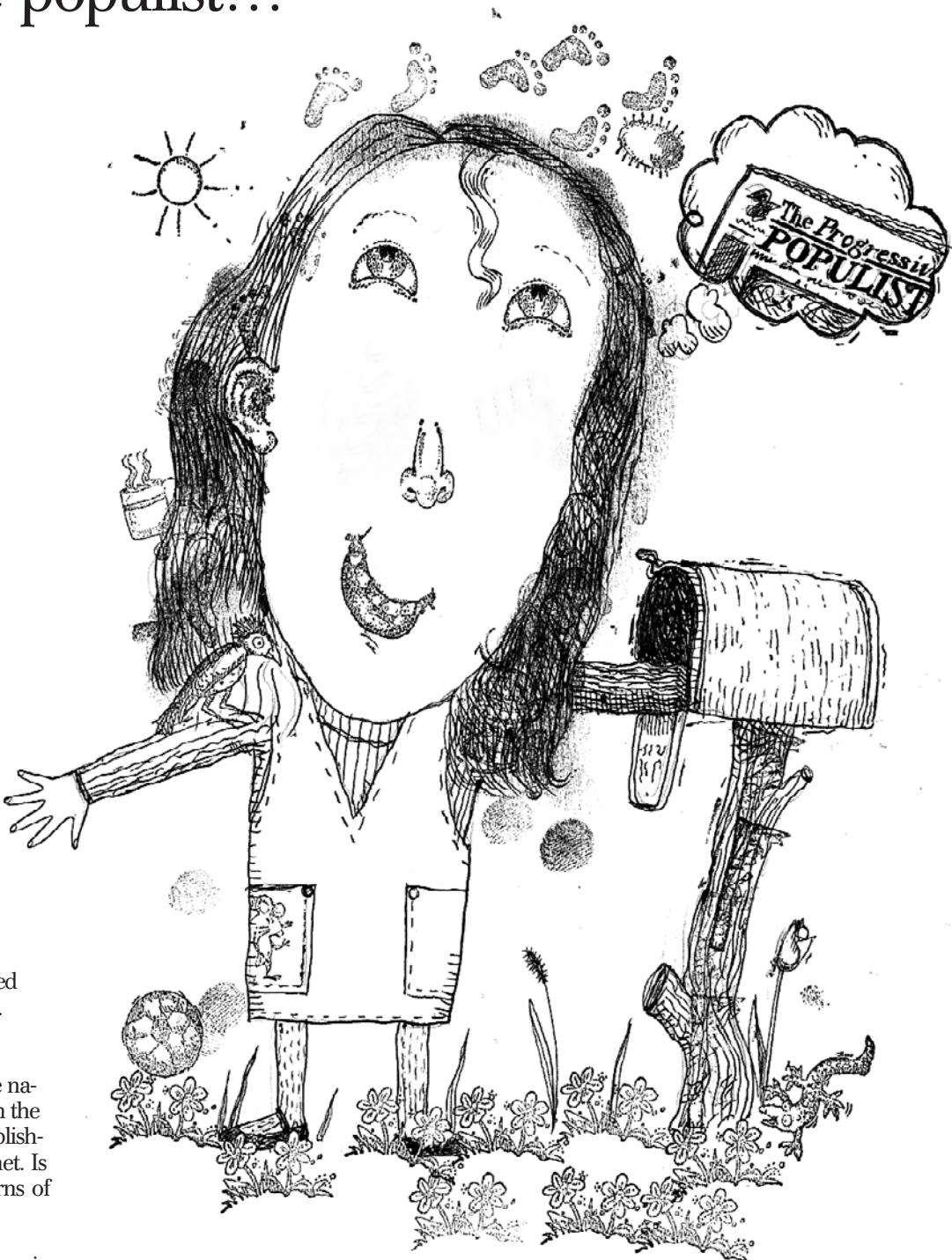
A handful of corporations are consolidating their grip on the nation's primary information sources. Megacorporations already own the major radio and TV networks, newspapers, magazines, book publishers and movie studios. Now they're moving to control the Internet. Is it any surprise that editors and news 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.
E-mail: 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.