



Tar Heel Trauma: Strange Times, Stranger Candidates

After a moderate half-century that produced anti-racist Presidents Johnson, Carter and Clinton, the South seems to be slipping back in the direction of Jesse Helms and Strom Thurmond.

By HAL CROWTHER

The part of North Carolina where I live, quite literally surrounded by prestigious universities, may be one of the most civilized neighborhoods in the South. Our recently retired congressman, David Price, was previously employed as a professor of political science at Duke. A progressive, highly respected leader among House Democrats, Price represented the Fourth District for 17 terms. His late wife Lisa was the state's most effective activist for gun control, and he was succeeded in office by a Black woman, Valerie Foushee, who defeated her Republican opponent by a 2-1 margin. The Fourth is not Trump country, and it never will be. But we're beginning to feel more and more isolated from the rest of the Tar Heel state, where Republicans have established veto-proof majorities in the legislature and elected a gun store owner to the US Senate. And in 2024 they're offering us some of the strangest candidates in the entire political landscape.

It was only a matter of time before the national media woke up to the bizarre career of our lieutenant governor, Mark Robinson, currently the Republican candidate for governor and the target of many recent articles expressing frank amazement. That Robinson is the most rightwing candidate to run for governor since we said good-bye to Jim Crow is hard to dispute. He first gained attention as an opponent of all gun control and all abortions. Among the groups who have suffered his contempt are Jews, homosexuals, transsexuals, women who vote, school shooting survivors ("silly little immature media prostitutes?"), and African-American communities who protest police violence. He has quoted Hitler on Facebook and rejects any separation of church and state.

None of this should be a big surprise in today's South where, after a moderate half-century that produced the anti-racist Presidents Johnson, Carter and Clinton, we

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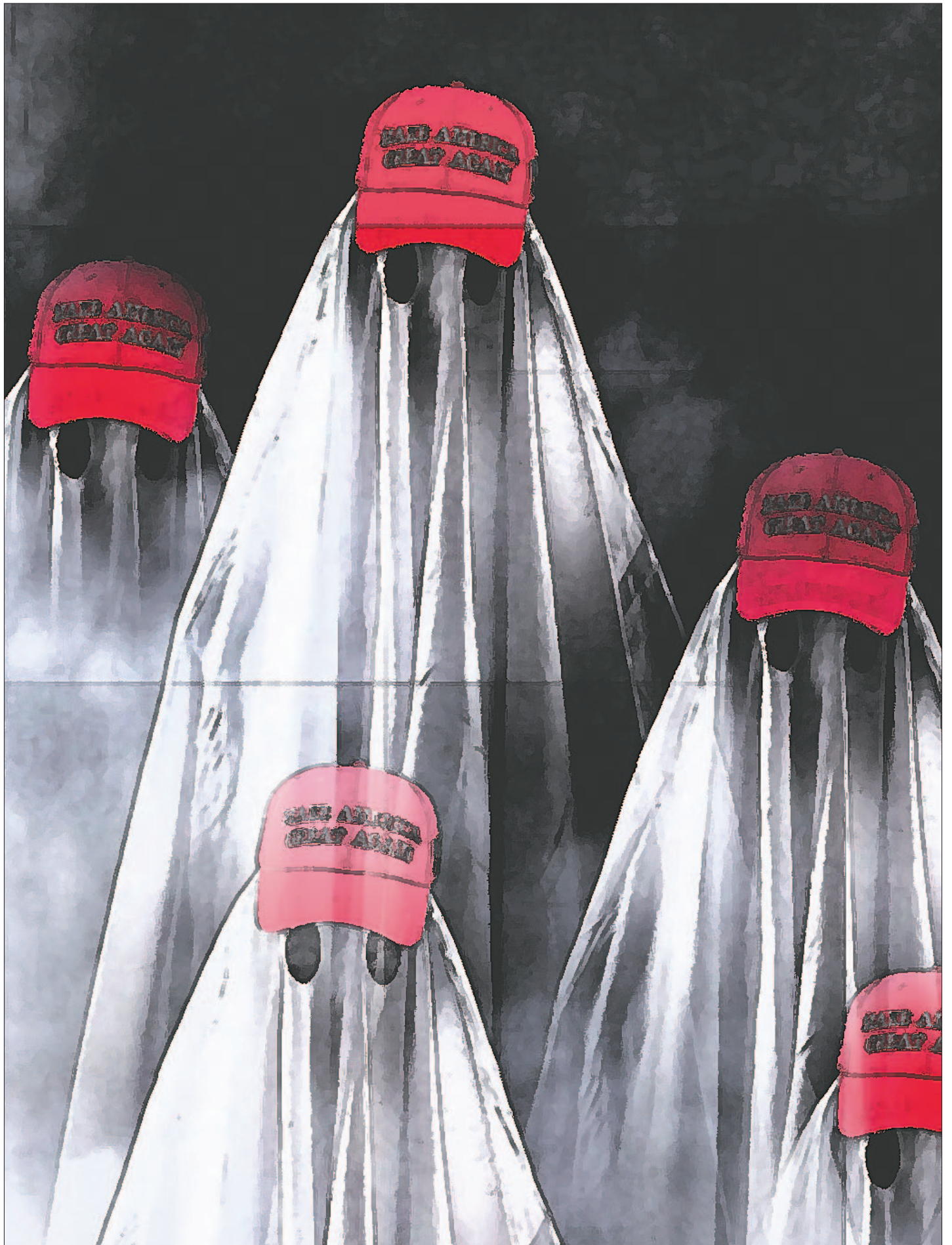


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AN EDITORIAL

Throttle Bibi to Beat Trump

Joe Biden has seven months to beat Donald Trump, the known adulterer and compulsive liar who has been found liable for sexual assault and fraud and fraudster.

All these character flaws — and more — were known before Trump's election in 2016, but they were not enough to stop the grifter and "reality" TV celebrity from winning the election through the Electoral College, as enough disgruntled progressives in swing states either sat out the election or voted for Green candidate Jill Stein to deny Democratic nominee Hillary Clinton the election, with a vacant Supreme Court seat to be filled.

Trump filled that vacant Supreme Court seat with right-winger Neil Gorsuch in 2017. Then he named Brett Kavanaugh to replace moderate conservative Justice Anthony Kennedy in 2018. And conservative Amy Coney Barrett replaced liberal Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg, who died Sept. 18, 2020. The Republican-led Senate rushed Barrett's confirmation, giving the Big Lie Party a 6-3 majority to overturn progressive achievements from the 20th century.

John Nichols, associate editor of the Madison, Wis., *Capital Times*, noted in *The Nation* April 4 that Trump has very real problems in the battleground state of Wisconsin, which he won in 2016 by roughly 22,000 votes, in what may have been a high-water mark for MAGA Republicans. Democrats won the governorship and every other statewide office in 2018, then Biden beat Trump in Wisconsin by almost 21,000 votes, which Trump never conceded, fighting the results in court and demanding a recount, and losing both ways, but he continues to insist he was robbed.

In the April 2 Wisconsin primary, Biden faced an organized challenge from activists who object to his policies regarding support of Israel in Gaza. The effort to get voters to cast ballots for an "uninstructed delegation" option, in order to send a message to Biden, was backed by a number of Democratic state legislators and local officials, as well as groups such as Our Revolution, Progressive Democrats of America, Democratic Socialists of America, Voces de la Frontera Action, and Jewish Voice for Peace Action.

On the Republican side, all of Trump's challengers had suspended their campaigns. Hence the victory lap, with a Trump rally in Green Bay April 2 before the polls were closed.

Turnout for the primary was roughly equivalent, with both sides drawing close to 600,000 voters. By any reasonable measure, Trump should have gotten the higher popular vote and the higher percentage of the total, Nichols noted. But that didn't happen.

Biden won 511,845 votes, with almost all the ballots counted, to 476,355 votes for Trump. Though their names appeared on different ballot lines for their respective primaries, that's still a margin of more than 35,000-votes—far better than Trump's in 2016, or Biden's in 2020, Nichols noted.

Biden also is doing better in polls of seven key battleground states, Nichols noted. A Bloomberg/Morning Consult poll March 26 showed Biden leading by 1 point in Wisconsin and tied in Michigan and Pennsylvania in head-to-head matches, but Trump leads by 2 in Nevada, 5 in Arizona, 6 in North Carolina and 7 in Georgia.

When Robert Kennedy Jr., Cornell West and Jill Stein are included in the poll, the results are complicated, showing Trump leading by 2 points in Wisconsin, and 4 points in Pennsylvania but still

tied in Michigan. Trump leads by 6 in Arizona, 7 in Georgia, 6 in Nevada and 5 in North Carolina. But the Big Liar still faces at least 88 felony charges in four jurisdictions, including New York on April 15.

To overtake Trump, Biden should distance himself from Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin "Bibi" Netanyahu, who has abused Biden's trust in pursuing revenge against Hamas terrorists in Gaza, regardless of the casualties among civilian residents of Gaza.

Biden was right to pledge support for Israel after Hamas and other Palestinian militant commandos broke the ceasefire between Israel and Gaza Oct. 7, 2023, by crossing a largely unguarded border to kill more than 1,000 people in Israel, most of them civilians, including participants in a music festival. The Gazans took approximately 250 hostages, including women, children and elderly people, with the stated goal to force Israel to exchange them for imprisoned Palestinians.

Biden assured Israelis that the US would continue to support Israel's right to defend itself against a movement that aspires to wipe the Jewish state off the map "from the river to the sea," but Biden warned Netanyahu not to give in to the demand for revenge.

Biden cautioned Israel against getting bogged down in Gaza, as the US did in Iraq and Afghanistan following the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks on the United States.

"Justice must be done," Biden said Oct. 18 in Tel Aviv. "But I caution this: While you feel that rage, don't be consumed by it ... After 9/11, we were enraged in the United States. While we sought justice and got justice, we also made mistakes."

Biden's pleas fell on deaf ears. Netanyahu ordered bombing of population centers, with the stated intention of hitting Hamas personnel who were embedded with the civilian population. He also shut off electricity, water, fuel and food distribution in Gaza.

Over the past six months, the war has cost the lives of more than 33,000 Palestinians, including more than 13,000 children and 8,400 women, Al Jazeera reported. More than 75,000 have been injured, and more than 8,000 are reported missing. The casualties include more than 300 aid workers, including seven World Central Kitchen workers killed by Israeli missile strikes April 1.

In the US, Muslim and Arab populations have turned sharply against Biden. Despite being a part of Biden's 2020 winning coalition, particularly in Michigan, they have been vial to the success of the 'uncommitted campaign' during the 2024 presidential primaries, which has sent strong signals that Biden has a realistic chance of losing the election in several battleground states in November 2024 if his administration does not shift its unwavering support for Israel.

Ironically, if Arabs sit out the election, it could put Trump back in the White House, who has been an ally of Netanyahu and has urged Israel to finish off the war to avoid bad "optics." Trump's son-in-law, Jared Kushner, praised the potential value of waterfront property in Gaza if Israel could move the Gazans into the Negev desert.

Biden already has gotten Israeli officials to approve the reopening of the Erez crossing between Israel and northern Gaza to allow more aid to reach starving Palestinians. He reportedly threatened to condition the transfer of weapons to Israel on limiting civilian casualties. He should demand that Israel restore water, electricity, food and fuel supplies in Gaza. Israel must negotiate a ceasefire that returns hostages. And Israel must replace Netanyahu, who has shown he can't be trusted as an ally.

—JMC

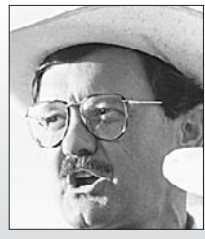
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JIM HIGHTOWER



In laissez-fairyland, allowing corporate giants to dodge billions of tax dollars gets executives to plow that money into new jobs and services.

Why Big Corporations Get Special Tax Breaks and You Don't

Free market ideologues fabricate some of the most preposterous yarns trying to justify their assertion of corporate greed over public need.

Consider their far-fetched of laissez-fairyland tale that by allowing corporate giants to dodge the billions of tax dollars they owe to our country, the top executives of those corporations will plow that money into new jobs, products and services for the common good. The ideologues assure us innocents that this is the "magic of the marketplace."

But remember: Magicians don't perform magic; they perform illusions. In this case, since the law does not require that such tax windfalls be invested for the public good, they aren't. Instead, the corporate barons simply pocket the money.

A diligent watchdog group, Institute for Policy Studies, recently documented this by analyzing financial data of 35 enormously profitable giants, including Tesla, T-Mobile and Duke Energy. Over a four-year period, these 35 lavished pay of \$9.5 billion on their honchos. Even for giants, that's an extravagant payout. Where'd the money come from? Tax dodging. Combined, these outfits paid zero in federal taxes and even extracted nearly \$2 billion in refunds.

To rationalize this handout, free market ideologues claim that corporations are just like ordinary taxpayers, merely taking a few legal deductions to lower their tax bill. But, wait — tax laws aren't handed down on stone tablets, applying equally to everyone. When's the last time Congress asked you to help write one law? Instead, America's tax code is an arcane work of gobbledygook literally written in back rooms by corporate lobbyists — which is why powerful corporations get special breaks to evade taxes and you don't.

To see through such corporate scams and help end this corruption, connect with the Institute for Policy Studies: ips-dc.org.

How Many Dead Firefighters Does It Take to Ban Asbestos?

If your home or business is suddenly being engulfed in flames, you count on a quick response from the fire department. But who rushes to aid firefighters when so many of the burning buildings they enter are contaminated with chrysotile asbestos — a cancer-causing product so deadly that it's banned in over 50 countries? So far, no one.

This nasty toxic (widely used in construction materials, car parts and even water systems), infiltrates lungs and kills some 40,000 Americans a year, especially firefighters. For the last 30 years, victims, health advocates and others have been pushing to stop using the deadly stuff — but chemical profiteers and the politicians they pay kept defeating these efforts.

In 2016, though, Congress finally empowered the Environmental Protection Agency to ban it.

Great! But that same year, Donald Trump happened. With his usual deep analysis, concern for workers and respect for science, he mindlessly proclaimed asbestos "100 percent safe," even declaring

that the movement to ban it was "led by the mob." Thus, his EPA did nothing ... and deaths continued.

Then came Joe Biden, and — Hallelujah! — EPA has now announced that it is "finally slamming the door" on manufacturing, importing and using chrysotile asbestos. When? *Twelve years from now*. What? Yes, that's a very sloooow-motion slamming. Biden wanted the ban to take effect in two years, but industry lobbyists screeched. So, our government chose not to "rush" to aid firefighters and others who'll be killed by this policy of putting corporate profits over their lives.

Remember this whenever political hucksters demand that you vote to eliminate "regulatory burdens." Burdens for whom — asbestos peddlers or firefighters? And beware: Here comes Trump again, promising to eliminate public regulations if he's elected. Really? Who will benefit from that?

Should We Be Polite as the GOP Stomps on Our Democratic Rights?

When a fox attacks a hen house, is it uncivil for the hens to raise a ruckus?

Two Supreme Court justices say it is. Elevating collegiality above social justice, right-wing extremist Amy Coney Barrett and progressive jurist Sonia Sotomayor have jointly been hailing America's top court as a model of genteel political discourse, claiming that the six Republicans and three Democrats disagree agreeably. "We do not interrupt one another, and we never raise our voices," Barrett primly lectured to a recent conference of civics teachers. Sotomayor chimed in that court decorum frowns on any internal comments that "could be viewed (by other justices) as hurtful."

How sweet that the Supremes are so judiciously cordial inside their marble sanctuary. But how bitter that the court's lock-step Republican ideologues are so crudely slapping down women's rights, running roughshod over our environmental protections, stomping on voting rights, enthroning plutocracy, imposing theocracy ... and so awful much more. Yet, when any of the three progressive justices do publicly assail these blatantly partisan, anti-democratic edicts, Barrett decorously decries their "stridency," demurely chiding that "the court should turn the national temperature down, not up."

Yoo-hoo, Madame Supreme, can you even hear yourself? Your very elevation to the High Court was a strident affront to our democracy and to the very idea of justice, rammed through in a flagrantly partisan power play by a lame-duck president and a corrupt Republican senator. Please, spare us your phony lectures on judicial propriety!

America would still be an English colony if the rebels of 1776 had not "stridently" risen up and impolitely confronted the kind of elitist governmental authoritarianism that Barrett & Co. wants to re-impose on us. Come on, progressives — get rude! Democracy demands that we be confrontational ... not courtly.

How Oily is Big Oil's Latest PR Campaign?

If you're concerned about fossil fuels and climate change, consider an energy source that, according to its backers, will make everyday living "comfortable and healthier."

What is this miraculous substance? Oil. Huh? Yes, that filthy scourge of our planet and health is being ballyhooed as our globe's energy and environmental salvation! By whom? Of course: The American Petroleum Institute, the powerhouse lobbying front for ExxonMobil and other petro-profiteers. API recently bragged that it will pour tens of millions of dollars into a PR blitz during this year's presidential election to demonize clean energy sources and demand that government promote more fossil fuel production.

API's campaign slogan is "Lights On Energy" — but the luminosity of its media

message is mighty dim. Start with the fact that Big Oil has zero public credibility, having routinely gouged us on prices for years and knowingly lied to us for decades about not causing climate change.

Second, the demand by oil barons that government "quit intruding into the free market" by encouraging alternative energy is a whiney embarrassment. Hello — for more than a century, oil corporations have gorged on billions and billions of dollars in taxpayer handouts, and the fossil fuel industry received \$757 billion of incentives in 2023! (Didn't their mommas ever teach them not to talk with their mouths full?)

Also pathetic is their partisan wail that President Joe Biden is restricting their pro-

State Of The Planet 2024

By FRANK LINGO

President Biden did a good job with his recent State of the Union address to Congress and the nation. For Earth Day 2024, I'll attempt to assess the State of the Planet.

OK, I'm not president or representative of anything. But for over 30 years I've been writing on ecology in an effort to face the problems caused by our mistreatment of the Earth — and suggest solutions we can use to repair the damage.

The list is long. There's extinction of hundreds of thousands of plant and animal species, including a cataclysmic loss of butterflies and bees, which pollinate an estimated 75% of fruit and vegetable crops. There's poisoning of oceans, lakes and rivers with our trash and industrial waste. There's environmental racism where toxic material is dumped on or near the lands where people of color live. There's the destruction of forests which support a wondrous web of life, which tree farms do not. There's the depletion of topsoil, which all crops depend on, due to poor farming practices.

But at the top of the list is the climate crisis, caused by humankind's burning of oil, coal and natural gas. As a result, the temperature of the planet keeps rising (2023 was the warmest year on record), air quality keeps dropping with death and damage to humans, and weather patterns have become dangerously extreme, like droughts for decades and a precipitous rise in hurricanes. The warmer temperatures are melting the polar icecaps and raising sea

duction and profits. Hello again: US oil production reached a record high last year, Big Oil's profits are soaring, and they're now jacking up our gas prices again. Meanwhile, 2023 was the hottest year our globe ever recorded.

Let's reflect the heat back on these greedheads. For facts and action items, go to fossilfree4health.org.

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levels, which will drown coastal cities.

There are bright spots in the haze of that pollution, mainly the advancement of wind and solar sustainable energies. The cost of these clean alternatives has plummeted while their efficiency has improved, making it a no-brainer to adopt their use.

Yet, like people hooked on cigarettes, we're still smoking ourselves into Earth emphysema. Drilling and mining for fossil fuels continues at a ferocious pace all over the world, including record production of oil in 2023 for both the world and the United States. The oil companies try to greenwash their public image with commercials claiming their commitment to renewable energies. The reality is that these fossil fools generally spend only about 1 or 2 percent of their corporate revenue on renewables.

Remember when conservative meant you wanted to conserve things like trees and rivers? Not anymore. Now conservative in America has nothing to do with conservation, it means conserving the status quo of keeping the oil companies in charge of fueling our cars and the coal companies in charge of powering our homes and businesses.

If you still live in a democracy, (I'm talking to you, America!) then you have the political process that could change policies from polluting to protecting the planet.

The state of the planet is precarious. But we have the means and the know-how to prevent worsening of the world's climate. It really is up to us. Do we have the will to make the transformation to clean energy? That's the question of the century.

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

MAGA Demystified

One of the joys of subscribing to *The Progressive Populist* (TPP) is when an essay by Hal Crowther shows up. While our politics may be different; (I believe he was a Republican at one point while I am a little left of Bernie... I'm told that makes me a moderate Canadian), his analyses of politics and culture are thoughtful and beautifully expressed.

In the 3/1/24 TPP cover story, "The Mystery of MAGA", Mr. Crowther tries to come to grips with the Trump phenomenon and like many of us is totally baffled how such an obvious villain can come to dominate our politics. He joins *New York Times* columnist Paul Krugman in concluding that "no one knows how this came about."

At the risk of being extremely pretentious in second guessing Mr. Crowther and Mr. Krugman, I would suggest we can at the very least offer partial explanations. The usual suspects are a disaffected working class whose lives have been hollowed out by neo-liberalism, austerity budgets and global free trade programs, such as NAFTA (although there is evidence that many Trump supporters are more well off than that analysis suggests); White folks who reflect the racism deeply embedded in society (although there were anywhere from 6.4 to 9.3 million 2012 Obama voters who voted for Trump); conservative evangelical Christians, for whom abortion was the only issue; an American political culture characterized by a mistrust of government (often for good reason); etc. While there is truth to all these influences, the one component that sticks out to me is the role of the Democratic Party, especially the "moderate" wing.

In 2016, there is an argument to be made that Bernie would have beaten Trump. We know that Bernie was denied a shot at the nomination in whole or in part by Democratic Party rules and actions that favored Ms. Clinton. We also know Ms. Clinton lost in the Electoral College because of losses in Michigan, Pennsylvania and Wisconsin by narrow margins; a total of around 115,000 votes for all three states. In addition, while Trump was the most disliked politician of the candidates (58% unfavorable), Ms. Clinton was right behind him (55% unfavorable). Sanders, on the other hand, had a favorable rating of 54%. It doesn't take much imagination to believe that Bernie would have done better in those states. Add in if just 3% or 4% of the Obama voters who voted for Trump were to vote Democratic, Bernie would have been elected and we would have been spared the national nightmare of Trump and MAGA.

There are many other examples of Democratic Party establishment officials acting to undermine progressive candidates... I haven't even begun to describe how the dominant moderate wing has controlled policy choices. Policies such as Medicare for All, popular with the Democratic base, can't make it into party platforms and legislative agendas. But the point is that, while not the only reason, it's certainly an explanatory factor to the "mystery" of a vile and criminal Trump, a MAGA base often at odds with reality, and a cynical and corrupt Republican Party.

IRA EDELMAN, *Springfield Mo.*

Our Deadly Habit

It's regrettable that our foreign policy is so sclerotic, myopic and disingenuous that we won't acknowledge the moral failure of any regime, so long as it buys our military hardware. In exchange, we gladly accept the specious rationalizations of such regimes that they are under constant attack from relentless, worse-than-death enemies that only understand violence.

This is the burn we received from Vietnam, from Central America, from Haiti, from the Philippines and from Indonesia. But burns like these fail to leave a mark on our worldview. We just keep touching the hot stove, expecting a better outcome.

Now it is Israel, a nation we still regard as a friend and a democracy, when it has actually fallen under the spell of a self-righteous cabal of rabid dogs. Their only abiding be-

lief is in the Manichean notion of total domination or total destruction, bombing their way to some chimera of peace.

And here we are, enabling our friend with their deadly addiction. Truly, we are addicts also, addicted to the notion that our military power is a force for good, which seemed evident from World War II. It's hard to unmake a bed that we've been lying in, lying for, and relying on for eight decades.

Our self-concept as the great defenders of freedom and democracy is like a coat of paint peeling away to reveal the bare wood of our imperialist intentions. We support Israel, like any colony or client, as an extension of our ambition; so it's hardly surprising that they have come to imitate our own settler-colonial *modus operandi*. Withdrawing our support, even now, would require us to forsake our imaginary principles for real ones.

JEFFREY HOBBS, *Springfield, Ill.*

Judge Not, But Follow His Words

David Quintero, in his 3/1/24 TPP letter, told how the "Lady of Guadalupe" began as a cult object in the Catholic Church. Our "Christmas" started as a pagan "Saturnalia" (Dec. 25) which the Church changed to Christ's birthday. Now He is celebrated every Dec. 25 and it made a pagan a Christian.

When one looks at the Bible, one sees a very different birth story. The first book in the New Testament, Matthew's, begins with prophesies of Christ's coming, concluding with His birth. Following Chapter 2, up to Chapter 7, which begins, "Judge not, lest ye be judged." And goes on to say, "Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them: for this is the law and the prophets." Verse 15 begins, "Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravaging wolves. Ye shall know them by their fruits." Christ goes on to say, "Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them."

It concludes, saying that he who does what Christ says, "I will liken him unto a wise man, which built his house upon a rock" — not on sand — and will not be destroyed by storms, unlike what happens with other men who doesn't heed what Christ says (verses 24-27). Verses 28 and 29 ends Chapter 7 with the audience response: "And it came to pass, when Jesus had ended these sayings, the people were astonished at his doctrine: For he taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes."

Timeless advice. Ignore it at your peril, even now.

CHERYL LOVELY, *Presque Isle, Maine*

The Word from Trump's Former Aides

All of the people quoted below are Republicans, most of them knew and worked with Donald Trump. If you are a Trump supporter, please reconsider your support of him in light of what they said.

"Trump is unfit to be anywhere near power ever again." Cassidy Hutchinson, aide to Trump Chief of Staff Mark Meadows.

"Make no mistake about it: What happened that day was a disgrace, and it mocks decency to portray it in any other way. President Trump was wrong. His reckless words endangered my family and everyone at the Capitol that day." Former Vice President Mike Pence.

"I don't think he's fit for office. I don't think he has the competence to carry out the job." John Bolton, former White House National Security Adviser.

Trump is a "threat to democracy as we know it." Former Trump Defense Secretary Mark Esper.

Alyssa Farah Griffin Pence's Press Secretary, claims Trump is, "wholly unfit for office" and "One of the most, if not the most divisive president in history".

Former Defense Secretary William Cohen said former President Trump is a "clear and present danger to democracy."

Trump is a "clear and present danger to US democracy," agreed conservative former US Circuit Judge Michal Luttig.

"Donald Trump is the first president in my lifetime who does not try to unite the American people — does not even pretend to try. Instead, he tries to divide us" and "We are witnessing the consequences of three years without mature

leadership." James Mattis, retired four-star Marine Corps general and Secretary of Defense in the Trump Administration.

Miles Taylor, Trump's former Homeland Security Department Chief of Staff, said, "The man that I interacted with years ago was very visibly unwell, was observably unstable, and he was the president of the United States then."

"A person that thinks those who defend their country in uniform, or are shot down or seriously wounded in combat, or spend years being tortured as POWs are all 'suckers' because 'there is nothing in it for them.' A person that did not want to be seen in the presence of military amputees because 'it doesn't look good for me.' A person who demonstrated open contempt for a Gold Star family — for all Gold Star families — on TV during the 2016 campaign, and rants that our most precious heroes who gave their lives in America's defense are 'losers' and wouldn't visit their graves in France." John Kelly, the longest-serving White House Chief of Staff for Trump.

Is Donald Trump the person you want to vote for to be president of the United States?

TPP readers, the above is what I am going to send as a letter to the editor to newspapers in my area. Consider doing the same in your area. Likely, the election will be close, every vote counts. Or as Trump put it in reference to Georgia, "I just want to find 11,780 votes."

ED GIBBONS, *Cedaredge, Colo.*

Divided Government Requires Compromise

The Founding Fathers had wisdom beyond their years. Steeped in the classics and cognizant of the failures of the ancient Greeks and Romans, they wrote our 1787 Constitution with the intention of succeeding where the Mediterranean democratic republics collapsed and fell into dictatorships.

The Founders were keenly aware that the *modus operandi* of Western civilizations after the fall was divine right monarchy. Omnipotent rulers with inherited titles of king, emperor, sultan, kaiser and czar claimed their power came directly from God. Their reign came from blood, not ability, was ordained by their religious leaders, and was absolute. Opposing them was both a crime and a sin, with brutal consequences for disobedience to their whims and dictates.

As visionaries, the Founders made the radical decision to divide power three ways—legislative (Congress), executive (President), and judicial (Supreme Court). Congress was further divided into the House of Representatives and Senate. Civics 101. The Fathers did not want a concentration of power in the hands of any potential dictator, especially after fighting The Revolutionary War to depose "the royal brute" George III, the British sovereign.

Why, then, do Americans every four years believe that electing a President is the only vote that matters? To become law, a bill must pass both houses before the President can sign it into law. If one party has the Trifecta (President, House, Senate), then success should be secure. Loss of one component means brokering deals through compromise. Since World War II, the Trifecta has been in place in only 18 of the 41 two-year terms of Congress. Bipartisan legislation is thus the rule, not the exception, in a democratic republic. Without it, expect stalemate and gridlock — like now.

Media know the public prefers discussion of the White House over Capitol Hill, so it plays to what the people like to hear: Good for their ratings, but bad for the separation of powers created to prevent the abuse of power.

If you spend copious amounts of time fixated on Presidential polls, be aware you are hearing only one-third of the electoral story. There is a reason the Founders listed Congress in Article I ahead of the President in Article II in the Constitution. Hail To The Chief if you win, To Hell With The Chief if you lose only tells one-third of the legislative process.

ED ENGLER, *Sebring, Fla.*

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Oxymorons and Why the Dems Need 'Em After All

By DON ROLLINS

"It's a strange kind of freedom, this freedom to go bankrupt because you couldn't afford to pay for the medical treatment that saved your life. Or the freedom to lose your home because the only job you know how to do is now done cheaper elsewhere." — John Speranza, organizer, Seattle Democratic Socialists of America

Oxymorons have long been a staple of

American politics, but few have inflicted as much havoc with the republic as the coupling of social liberalism with fiscal conservatism — an ongoing alchemy that could impact Democrats' chances this November.

Born of French neoliberalism during the late 1800s, this flawed philosophy posits a clean separation between the worlds of society and economics — a pretzel logic theoretical dichotomy that allows the true believer to appear pragmatic and responsible, yet a caring and engaged citizen.

But the consequences aren't nearly as theoretical, for central to this argument is the assumption Wall Street and Washington have something approaching a heart. That the vast array of for-profit businesses making up the US economic infrastructure

will do right by the Head Start kids five blocks from the White House. That health insurance and employment training and public transportation are quality investments.

This cognitive and moral dissonance seems lost on those who adhere to a social liberal/fiscal conservative ethos, freeing them to advance a free-market secular gospel the opposite of classic liberalism: privatization, free trade, deregulation, globalization and austerity budgeting. Little wonder so many with a neoliberal bent look to the Reagan years with admiring eyes.

Democratic officeholders are not blameless when it comes naming and reversing this doctrine of denial, but there will be time enough to take stock no mat-

ter the outcome of the 2024 elections. The immediate challenge is to remain authentic Democrats, yet have something to offer the 12% of "Ambivalent Right" voters, as tracked in a 2021 Pew study. (These voters poll closest to a social liberal/fiscal conservative philosophy. Although a strong majority broke for Trump, 25% voted Democratic.)

Reality has become weirder than fiction now that a voting bloc named for an oxymoron is under such scrutiny. But then, oxymorons have long been a staple of American politics.

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

CAFOs Slim Down, But That's Not Good News in Rural Areas



After driving hog farmers out of business, hog facility owners are losing money as costs of feed and equipment rise. That means rural communities are at risk.

Big headline in the *Wall Street Journal* on Feb. 10: "We're not eating enough bacon."

Really? Every fast-food restaurant is boasting about the bacon-loaded sandwiches they offer. But the pork industry is unfortunately over-producing. Too many hogs coming out of all those Concentrated Animal Feeding Operations (CAFOs) they've convinced farmers to build.

The article came from an Iowan and *Progressive Populist* reader, and as soon as I got it I shared it with my most business-savvy friends. One said, "That's odd. One would think the economic laws of supply and demand would send the prices down if we were actually in a free market. I haven't noticed any rock bottom prices in my neighborhood! Oh ... maybe free market rules don't apply here ..."

WSJ says pork demand is down 9% from 2004 levels. Pork Producers say they wish they hadn't used the tagline "the other white meat" with their checkoff money. They say it sends consumers the wrong

message. It implies that pork is as healthy as chicken which has long been touted as low-fat. And, the tagline persuaded hog raisers that their hogs should be skinnier, to imitate the health benefits of chicken. One consultant suggested another motto: "It's like beef, but cheaper."

At any rate, hog facility owners have been losing money as costs of feed and equipment rise. And that means that families are going broke and rural communities are at risk. That's a big fear for those of us that remember when the industry broke family farmers that had been raising hogs. The industry's incursion meant that our towns were shuttered.

What is the solution according to the pork producers? The industry is trying to make pork easier to use by supplying grocers with half-cooked bacon and other cuts that can be finished with a minute in the microwave. They are recommending pork farmers go to fatter hogs, like in the olden days. And they are hoping to export more pork, as export was one of the main ways the corporations built up years ago when China's pork production was hammered by

rampant disease in their facilities. Mostly, they'd just like consumers to want more bacon on our already bacon-laden sandwiches.

So will we see US hog facilities shut down, following the shut-downs of poultry facilities in the lower midwest? You might remember that, last winter, thousands of CAFO hens were euthanized when processors quit business suddenly. "I got a call from the live production manager at that point and time—I think it was around 7 o'clock that night—stating that the state would be coming in the next day to depopulate my birds. No reason why," an Arkansas grower told a TV interviewer.

Whether you love chickens or simply tolerate them, the thought of seeing a flock trapped in one end of the metal barn and sprayed to death with poison chemicals is heart-wrenching. Not to mention the expense to the farmer of cleaning up and of losing your livelihood overnight.

Here's a side note we don't often see when discussing confined animal systems: The manure is taken up by farms that pride themselves on their organic certification. Yeah, you read that right. Organic farms depend on poo from confined animal feeding operations. Sometimes the manure is composted. Other times, it's spread on the fields in a raw state. If there's a rain, the poo goes into the creeks. That's true of poo from poultry and hog facilities alike. So not only is the CAFO industry threatened, but organic growers are concerned about their inputs.

And then there's the taxpayer. According to Environmental Working Group, the hog industry has sucked up almost \$50 billion in USDA subsidies for livestock opera-

tors since 1995. EWG's analysis finds the USDA provided \$49.6 billion in payments to support livestock operators between 1995 and 2021, including more than \$11 billion in livestock disaster assistance payments during the COVID pandemic and during worries about disease spreading in the livestock facilities. We'll see more of it if avian flu makes an impact on dairy farms.

In this industry, subsidies are plentiful. Not only are there subsidies to help producers modernize with new equipment, lights, fans, pumps and the such, but there are subsidized grains available for feeding.

The USDA also provided nearly \$1 billion to offset the effects of former President Donald Trump's trade war with China between 2018 and 2020.

If you're wondering how those payments stack up with other USDA payments to industry, like, for example, the folks making fake meat products like Impossible Burgers, EWG says that since 2018 the USDA has spent less than \$30 million to support plant-based and other alternative proteins that may produce fewer greenhouse gases and may require less land than livestock.

Dedicated vegetarians and vegans may be puzzled by the efforts to create "alternative proteins" but here's another question for you ... aren't commercial efforts supposed to make money instead of sucking up tax money?

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."

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DISPATCHES

U.S. IS STILL AT 'FULL EMPLOYMENT,' 'CRISIS AT BORDER' APPEARS TO HAVE LITTLE IMPACT ON NATIVE WORKERS.

The American economy gained 303,000 jobs in March, the Bureau of Labor Statistics reported (4/5). The US needs 90,000 new jobs just to keep up with population growth, Kevin Drum noted at jabberwocking.com (4/5), which means that net job growth clocked in at 213,000 jobs. The headline unemployment rate ticked back down to 3.8%.

There was an odd racial cast to the unemployment numbers in March, Drum noted. The 3.5% unemployment rate for White workers didn't change at all, but it spiked up 0.8 percentage points to 6.4% for Black workers. At the same time it was down 0.5 points to 4.5% for Hispanic workers and 0.9 points to 2.5% for Asian workers. Those are extremely large changes for a single month.

"On an annualized basis, average weekly earnings were up a whopping 8% from February," Drum wrote. "Even accounting for [March's] inflation spike, that comes to 2-3% in real terms. Not bad."

That brought Drum to the question: How much are "illegal" immigrants paid on average compared to native-born Americans? As you can imagine, this is not an easy question to answer. It's not as if the BLS has a handy hourly wage time series for undocumented workers. They're undocumented!

The best answer Drum could find comes from a paper written in 2018. After cutting through the math and converting from log points, they conclude that when you compare workers with similar education, illegal immigrants make about 22% less than native workers. This is largely due to lack of bargaining power; English fluency; and limited job opportunities (i.e., the need to stay away from occupations that carry a risk of being discovered).

"Note, however, that this an average for all illegal immigrants, most of whom have been in the country for many years. It's very likely that recent immigrants make less, which suggests that the typical recent border crosser probably makes about 30% less than a similarly educated native born, Drum wrote.

"What does this mean for the theory that illegal immigrants are stealing jobs away from native-born workers? On the one hand, they're taking very poorly paid jobs that probably don't attract natives in the first place. On the other hand, 30% is a big incentive for employers to choose an illegal immigrant over a native. It's hard to draw a conclusion from this.

"So that leaves us to rely on other measures, most of which point to little effect from illegal immigration. The participation rate of the native-born population remains above its pre-pandemic trend:

"The unemployment rate of native-borns is 4.0% and the wages of the poorest tenth have continued to rise in real terms. Taken together, all of this suggests that the recent surge of illegal immigration has had very little impact on the jobs of native borns. Probably none at all."

IMMIGRANTS ARE PRETTY LAW-ABIDING PEOPLE. With all the right-wing claims that crime has been surging with the invasion of immigrants crossing the southern border, Kevin Drum

noted (4/4), he was browsing around at studies of crime committed by immigrants and came across this from the Heritage Foundation: "Increased Illegal Immigration Brings Increased Crime: Almost 2/3 of Federal Arrests Involve Noncitizens."

Heritage said a 2021 Department of Justice report revealed that 64% of federal arrests in 2018 involved noncitizens, despite them comprising only 7% of the population at that time.

"Shazam! Noncitizen immigrants comprise 64% of all federal arrests!" Drum mused.

"Well ... no," Drum added, explaining that number includes federal arrests for immigration offenses—which, by definition, are limited to immigrants. The number of immigrants arrested for ordinary federal criminal offenses in 2018, the final year of the DOJ report, was 9.8%, and has been declining since 1998.

A recent study of incarceration rates of men aged 18-40 (both citizen and noncitizen) that goes back more than 100 years shows that, for the past half century, the incarceration rate of Latino immigrants has been lower than that of native borns. In the most recent year studied, incarceration rates for first-generation immigrants were a full quarter lower than for native borns.

SUPERMAJORITY OF MERCEDES-BENZ WORKERS IN ALABAMA FILE FOR UAW VOTE. Alleged union-busting that Mercedes-Benz autoworkers in Vance, Ala., accused the car company of in a complaint to the National Labor Relations Board has not weakened the resolve of pro-union employees, a supermajority of whom now support a union election, according to the United Auto Workers.

The union announced that more than 5,000 workers at the company's nonunion plant have filed a petition with the

NLRB in favor of an election, with the workers aiming for a vote by early May, Julia Conley noted at [CommonDreams](http://CommonDreams.org) (4/5).

"It's time for change at Mercedes," said the UAW. "It's time for justice in Alabama. It's time for Mercedes workers to stand up. That's why Mercedes workers have filed for their vote to join the UAW, and to win a better life."

The announcement comes weeks after Volkswagen employees in Chattanooga, Tenn., filed for a union election that's expected to be held April 17-19.

Both union votes are the result of aggressive campaigning by the UAW, including union president Shawn Fain, in the wake of a historic "stand-up strike" that pushed the Big Three automakers to agree to new contracts for about 150,000 workers late last year.

After the victory, Fain announced the launch of the largest union organizing drive in US history, aiming to welcome 150,000 more workers at nonunion auto plants into the UAW.

Over 10,000 autoworkers in recent months have signed union cards, and the UAW said that employees at more than two dozen facilities are also organizing.

Mercedes' two US plants in Alabama and South Carolina are its only facilities in the world where workers are not represented by a union. Workers in Vance say they want better healthcare, retirement security, safety protocols, and paid sick days.

Jeremy Kimbrell, a measurement machine operator at Mercedes, said the union vote is part of an effort to ensure carmakers no longer view Alabama as a state where workers can be compensated unfairly.

"We are standing up for every worker in Alabama," said

Continued on page 22



FROMA HARROP



Trump got elected in 2016 without disclosing a plan to replace the A.C.A. Then he supported a bill to disable it. Now he wants to do it again.

For the Beneficiaries, Losing Obamacare Would Truly Suck

Donald Trump in March posted an item on Truth Social that broke new ground for incoherence. What got his fingers fumbling on the keyboard was Joe Biden's being out in the country warning Americans that another presidential

term for Trump would cost them their health care.

Trump wrote, "I'm not running to terminate the ACA, AS CROOKED JOE BUDEN DISINFORMATES AND MISINFORMATES ALL THE TIME," adding that he would make Obamacare "MUCH BETTER, STRONGER, AND FAR LESS EXPENSIVE."

That's what Trump said during the 2016 presidential campaign, albeit employing a better organized train of thought. He vowed to repeal and replace Obamacare with "something terrific."

He got elected without ever having to share details of a plan. And once elected, he tried to bulldoze the Affordable Care Act, first by removing bolts from the system for funding it. Then in 2017, he worked with congressional Republicans on a bill that would have left an additional 22 million Americans uninsured by 2026 and end protections for people with preexisting conditions.

The bill came within a hair of passing. Only a single "no" vote by Sen. John McCain stopped Obamacare from freefall. Recall that beautiful photo of the Arizona Republican on the Senate floor pointing his thumb down.

Needless to say, Trump had no terrific replacement for Obamacare. Actually, he had no replacement at all.

The Biden campaign barely broke a

sweat mocking Trump's recent post. It let Trump do the work by providing a video medley of his colorful threats against the ACA.

"I told the Republicans, look, if you really want to do something, just let it explode," was one. "Obamacare is a disaster," he belted.

At a recent campaign rally in Fountain Hills, Arizona, Trump hollered, "We're gonna win by knocking the hell out of Obamacare, terminating it, coming up with something much less expensive, much better." Interestingly, those last remarks, though delivered with Trumpian ferocity, drew the faintest of cheers.

"Obamacare Sucks!!!" he posted right after last Thanksgiving, in case you didn't get the message.

For the record, 45 million Americans now have health coverage under the ACA. Republican foes of Obamacare have dropped their previous insistence that it would be a job killer. Unemployment has been below 4% for the last 25 months, a job performance not seen since the 1960s.

And no, the cost of Obamacare is not out of control. On the contrary, it's credited with slowing health care inflation.

The tiniest of violins are being played for Republicans who voted in 2017 to ditch Obamacare and now worry that voters might not approve. One is Sen. Mike Rounds, a South Dakota Republican. "We

most certainly can do a better job," Rounds recently wrote, "but it would require us to start proposing what the change would be now so that we wouldn't be in a position of repealing without having a better replacement."

As for Trump, if he wins a second term, he would not be running again (we assume). Thus, he could take away the health coverage for millions with nothing politically to lose. And if Rounds and his Republican colleagues lose reelection as a result, he would lose not a wink.

Happy 14th Anniversary, Obamacare. You have guaranteed 230 million Americans free preventive care. You capped out-of-pocket spending in the Marketplace plans. You have improved the quality of coverage offered. You have vastly expanded community health services. Most importantly, you have brought the percentage of Americans lacking health coverage to an all-time low.

May you and the Americans you have kept healthy and alive have many more years together. There's a lot at stake this November for your beneficiaries. Losing Obamacare would truly suck.

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

Back From the Spiritual Desert

By ART CULLEN

I spent 20 days of Lent sitting in a heap of ashes reviewing my shortcomings again, wondering if death would beckon me from deep in my bottom.

This has never been my favorite season, and the hair shorts itch more as the years encroach. Seems that there is enough suffering, fasting, sacrifice and self-denial year-round that you shouldn't have to carve out a time to dwell on it. Nature and politics will impose themselves regardless.

A blood test for the prostate called the PSA during the first week of March took a big jump. I was already on the urologist watch-list. As a nurse prepared to insert a snake from behind for a biopsy last year, she said, "You can thank your brothers for this." Three of them have had the Big C.

The supposedly efficient, expensive medical system set me up for an MRI in Sioux City 20 days following my test results, which gave me ample time to stew until March 27.

Has it spread? What is happening down there? Every ache and pain has fateful reso-

nance. I know that the treatment for prostate cancer, if detected early, is tremendously successful, as it has been for my kin. But still ...

You dive down rabbit holes on the laptop. Oh my gosh my PSA score will kill me for sure. What does that MRI machine look like — I could not handle being John Glenn in that tube circling Earth. Might I never rock and roll again? Well, buddy, you are not Wilt Chamberlain or Donald Trump, so calm your libido and cool your jets.

To prove that I am not impotent I named son Tom managing editor to reflect what he already is doing. He is responsible. Call him. I'm busy thinking: Yeah, I could have been not such an irascible sloth, but there are no dead bodies in my trunk, and I will leave the campsite no worse than I found it.

That sort of introspection leads to a tight jaw, then lower back pain, and finally a splitting headache when I awoke the morning of March 27 to flush the system at 6 a.m. Tom drove me to Sioux City and I reported for duty. Name. Date of birth. Photo ID and insurance cards, please. Go sit over there and wait.

That magnet, I'm thinking, is so powerful it will pull your belly button out if you don't remove your stud. What will it do to my neurosis? The nurse cheerily greets morose me, and tells me it is like a hammer

pounding in there. They put ear plugs in me and headphones on me and slide me in. The hammers start pounding and buzzers sounding with Outlaw Country vying for attention. I could sure use a drink, Merle. At least I can see out the end of the machine.

The hammering stops. They pull me out. They have to do another gross indignity to me, cheerfully, thanks to my three brothers, and I am howling to the moon. Go ahead and scream, nobody can hear you in here. Nobody will come to your rescue. And then they slide me back in, whimpering, and the hammers start to pound and the beepers start to sound and it feels like my head is going to blow open.

This goes on for a half hour and they retract me, and send me on my way across the river to South Dakota, where there are no taxes, which is of course where the doctors are. The urologist there was very nice and seemed as up-to-date as Kansas City. He saw a couple spots. One turns out to require more inquiry. We wait. Life is a series of indefinite interregna strung together by the terror of not knowing. Most of the time.

No cause for alarm, it appears. Whatever it is, it is not advanced. Doctors have been watching me for years — you really should get the test, old man. Prostate cancer probably won't kill me but my bad habits and defective genes will catch up to me

someplace else.

My 20 days in the spiritual desert unveiled some epiphanies:

Rural health care stinks. Diagnostic equipment is in short supply, as is staff, and patients are lined up like lemmings to the sea. This vaunted private system of ours can't be better than Canada, unless you can afford the Mayo Clinic. The doctors are great when you can see them.

There are worse people than me, and probably even than you. I may have a little explaining to do in the end, but I don't think I am a hardened criminal beyond redemption after some earned time in Purgatory.

Miles remain before I rest. Keep it between the ditches and watch for deer. It's honestly the best most of us can do.

I came home from my Sioux City/South Dakota trip and passed out. An hour later I woke up with the headache pretty much clear and the back pain rapidly subsiding. The brain is a crazy thing. At least, mine is. Is that my fault, too?

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.

Another \$1 Billion to Refinance Status Quo Won't Stop Ag Pandemics

By ALAN GUEBERT

When word came out of Texas on April 1 that avian flu had made another unwelcome hop—this one from a dairy cow to a human—the news seemed like an April Fool's joke.

It wasn't. In fact, highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI or bird flu), the quick-killing disease that has led to either the death or slaughter of 82 million chickens, turkeys, and other birds in the US since 2022, had jumped not one, but two species in just two weeks.

The first reported instance of species jump came in mid-March after a handful of newly born goats died on a Minnesota farm that had had a bird flu outbreak in its poultry flock, according to state health officials. (Minnesota is the nation's largest turkey-growing state, raising between 42 and 45 million birds per year.)

Two weeks later, HPAI was detected in dairy cattle in five disparate states: Texas, New Mexico, Michigan, Idaho, and Kansas.

State and federal agriculture and food

safety officials raced to assure the public that America's dairy supply was not threatened because avian flu is not life threatening to ruminants like it is in birds.

Then, the week before Easter, a dairy worker in Texas who the Texas Department of State Health Services described to the *Washington Post* as someone who "worked directly with sick cows at the dairy," tested positive for the virus. His only symptom, however, was a treatable "eye inflammation."

But, the *Post* added, "The newly emerged case does not change the risk of the general public, which remains low, federal officials said."

America's poultry flocks—mostly egg-laying chickens, broiler (meat) chickens, and turkeys—remain highly vulnerable to the current strain of avian flu. Since its latest outbreak in February 2022, more than 80 million poultry (mostly egg-laying chickens) in 47 states have been killed by disease.

The high number is attributed to the protocol tied to HPAI's discovery in any flock: total depopulation in an attempt to limit its spread. It's both a costly and, to date, completely ineffective cure.

"Since bird flu outbreaks began almost two years ago," our friends at the Food and Environmental Reporting Network (FERN) noted Jan. 9, "the USDA [U.S. Department of Agriculture] has spent more than \$1 billion

to compensate farmers for lost flocks and to suppress the spread of the viral disease."

Compensation, yes; suppression, well, good luck with that.

In fact, this is the second USDA "compensation and suppression effort" on avian flu in just the last decade. The "2014-2015 outbreak," as USDA's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) explained, cost taxpayers "nearly \$850 million ... for response activities ... and indemnity payments."

And, added APHIS, after spending "another \$100 million ... for further preparedness ... it was the most expensive animal health incident recorded in U.S. history."

Until this one anyway, 10 years and at least another \$1 billion later.

That's mostly because USDA's "further preparedness" doesn't include changes to today's industrial poultry and livestock production systems that often stack, stuff, and stash as many birds, hogs, and cattle into disease-fostering confinement systems that can—and do—become breeding grounds for chronic ailments affecting both animals and humans.

And confinement means confinement. For example, USDA's 2022 Ag Census shows that 75% of all US egg production comes from 347 "facilities" that house, on average, 850,000 birds.

Likewise, reports the census, 834 dairy

operations with an average of 8,300 cows apiece, account for 42% of the national dairy herd.

Why would this precariously balanced, pandemic-fostering system ever change if taxpayer money—according to FERN, \$715 million of USDA's \$1 billion has been spent on "indemnities ... to producers, growers, and integrators for depopulated birds and eggs"—refinances the entire tottering enterprise every 10 years or so?

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

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The Anguished Courage of Chuck Schumer

By JOE CONASON

Nothing in politics is more difficult than breaking with longtime allies, friends and supporters over an issue of principle. In recent years we have seen the “Never Trump” Republicans take that painful step, sometimes abandoning their party and severing relationships built over a lifetime, with bitter consequences.

And in March we watched as Sen. Chuck Schumer made an equally fateful and agonizing choice when he stood up on the Senate floor to urge elections in Israel that he hopes will oust the Prime Minister Benjamin “Bibi” Netanyahu and his government. As the Senate majority leader, Schumer is not only the top Jewish American elected official but the highest-ranking member of his faith in this country’s history, which means his words carry weight not only in his party but among American Jews, who reliably vote for Democrats by overwhelming margins.

It was a decision that Schumer, as a devoted advocate of the Jewish state, could

only have made because he feels an unbearable burden of responsibility for the horrific death and destruction that Netanyahu is inflicting on Palestinian civilians. In the wake of the barbaric Hamas attack last Oct. 7, he supported military action to destroy the terror organization that controls Gaza — and yet he knows that just purpose cannot justify the reckless and inhumane conduct of that campaign, which is now causing the mass starvation of innocents.

“I’m anguished that the Israeli war campaign has killed so many innocent Palestinians,” Schumer said. “I know that my fellow Jewish Americans feel the same anguish when they see the images of dead and starving children — and destroyed homes.” No doubt he knows and laments the ruinous impact of this war on Israel’s international standing, just when much of the Arab world has come to accept its existence.

While Israel’s actions probably don’t constitute the “genocide” its enemies have claimed, there isn’t much question that the far-right government has perpetrated war crimes — and remains indifferent to Palestinian suffering. The rage provoked around the globe by their torment will not diminish for years.

For many Americans, and indeed many American Jews, including me, the outrages perpetrated in this war are simply unacceptable. For some of us, however, this

was no surprise but instead the inevitable result of American action, or inaction, that permitted Israeli right-wingers to thwart any progress toward an independent Palestinian state.

While official US policy supported the “two-state solution,” in practice presidents of both parties did little or nothing to insist that either side enter negotiations in good faith. Instead, most American politicians either cheered on Israeli intransigence, and Jewish settlements on Palestinian land, or looked the other way.

Meanwhile, as we have learned in recent months, the Netanyahu government used its own authority to bolster and finance the Hamas extremists, who provided an excuse for their own intransigence. Beyond irresponsible, that shady alliance led directly to the blood-soaked horror of Oct. 7, the vilest atrocity against Jews since the Holocaust.

Until the other day, Schumer endorsed the foolish consensus that has bolstered Netanyahu and his destructive policies for decades. That is why Jewish leaders who continue to back those policies reacted to his courageous speech with anger.

The Council of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations, which has routinely rubberstamped Israeli policy with little discernible thought, declared itself “distressed” that the Senate majority leader would interfere in Israel’s internal affairs, a

criticism voiced by Israeli officials and their Republican echoes. (Never mind that Netanyahu has routinely intervened in American politics and diplomacy without a second thought.) It was distressed, too, that Schumer would suggest the United States should “play a more active role in shaping Israeli policy by using our leverage to change [the] present course.” It accused Schumer of fostering “divisiveness when unity is so desperately needed.”

What those Jewish leaders fail to understand — and what the senator from Brooklyn has come to realize at last — is that there can be no unity premised on the indiscriminate violence and reckless aggression epitomized by the present government of Israel. As thousands continue to die, Netanyahu has no incentive to seek an end to this war, to negotiate the release of hostages held by Hamas, or to pursue the only real hope for peace and security in the region.

Let’s hope Schumer’s anguished bravery becomes contagious.

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.

Rents Are Unaffordable Nationwide. A Renter’s Tax Credit Would Help

A monthly tax credit that capped housing costs at 30% of income could keep millions of Americans — including me — in our homes.

By ASHLEY DINES

I spent my first birthday in a shelter. Decades later, after doing all I was supposed to do to lift myself up out of poverty, I’m sofa hopping with my children.

I’m a Parent Coordinator with the Children’s Cabinet in Las Vegas, Nevada, and an Expert on Poverty with the national advocacy organization RESULTS. I help low-income women and children find support to keep a roof over their heads and food in their bellies.

When I enrolled in the program, the supervisors recognized my ability to lead and offered me this job. I love my work, and the pay is solidly above minimum wage. Given my humble beginnings, anyone would say I’m a success story.

Yet, I’m currently homeless.

Rents are astronomically high. In Las Vegas, the average household now needs to make at least \$70,000 a year to afford rent. I make a decent full-time salary — but not that much.

It’s not a problem unique to me or to Vegas. According to the Low-Income Housing Coalition, there is no state or county in the United States where someone working full-time at minimum wage can afford a modest two-bedroom apartment.

When a huge chunk of your paycheck goes to rent or the mortgage, there’s little leftover for an emergency. And most Americans — 56% of us — can’t pay for an unexpected emergency of \$1,000. A surprise dental bill, medical bill, or car repair can send us spiraling into poverty.

That’s what happened to me. My mother had to be hospitalized, I separated from my children’s father, and my car broke down. I lost everything — almost literally overnight.

I first had to help my mother. She was my childcare provider, but she’s now disabled. Then my cell phone bill payments lapsed for two months, and I had to pay in full to keep my only source of communication turned on. I had to fix my car to get to work and get the kids where they needed to go. Legal bills piled up from trying to secure custody and child support.

I quickly fell behind on rent. The next thing I know, the constable was at my door — forcing me, my two kids, and my disabled mother out of the apartment and down the stairs. That proved too challenging for my mother, and

I had to take her back to the hospital immediately.

Again, I work full time and make decent money. But many people are like me — we fall into the gap where our income is too high for assistance but too low for living.

Often, just a little bit of help could keep us from falling into homelessness, joblessness, or worse. If rental assistance were expanded to people making less than a housing wage, or if the pandemic-era expanded Child Tax Credit were still in place, I wouldn’t have been evicted.

At RESULTS, we’re calling for a Renter’s Tax Credit.

Unlike homeowners who get a mortgage tax credit, renters don’t get any tax benefit for paying month after month. With a Renter’s Tax Credit, renters who pay more than 30% of our paychecks on housing would get a monthly credit to bring their housing costs down to that percentage.

That would help more of us stay in our homes, keep our jobs, and afford basics like food and child care. It could also reduce the need for more complicated safety net supports.

April was National Fair Housing Month. If we want everyone to have a fair chance to thrive, we can start now by ensuring access to stable, affordable housing.

Ashley Dines is a mother of two, a parent leadership coordinator at the Children’s Cabinet, and an expert on poverty with RESULTS from Las Vegas, Nevada. This op-ed was distributed by OtherWords.org.

If Donald Trump is a Christian

By JOHN YOUNG

Its handle is golden-sheathed. Its cup is bronzed and monogrammed. It’s the Trump Flush America plunger.

“The plunger is my favorite tool,” says the golden pitchman. “I use it daily.”

“Make your toilet great again.”

OK, that’s a joke. I need to make that clear. Considering what else Donald Trump has hawked — parts of the jacket in which he was indicted in Georgia, for just one ignominious example — nothing, absolutely nothing, is beneath him.

Stay tuned for that golden toilet tool. Have your credit card ready. Rest assured it will be priced with patriotic, just-scraping-by Americans in mind.

In writing this piece, thinking of how this man debases everything he touches, I looked up synonyms for “cheapen.” To my surprise, I found “trumpery.”

No joke. Look it up.

Webster has three definitions for trumpery: “Worthless nonsense.” Check. “Trivial or useless articles.” Check. “Tawdry finery.” Check.

The dictionary calls the latter definition archaic. That was before Mr. Golden Sneakers brought “tawdry” back into regular rotation.

It all checks out for the man who has

demonstrated there’s no “too low” for him to go.

Cheap cologne sold for a ransom. Moonshot-priced bottled water. Underarm deodorant. Specious wellness products.

Put concisely by Medium.com, the man has lent his image and brand to “a slew of crooked companies and poppycock products.”

Now comes The Donald’s “God Bless the USA Bible” (\$59.99). What a stroke of genius. No one in human history ever considered putting these sacred passages before the masses. Until him! And at such a bargain-basement price!

“I’m proud to endorse and encourage you to get this Bible,” he says. His goal? To “make America pray again.”

Trump’s professed devotion to piety assuages any notion that his only interest is to harvest someone’s loose change to help him fight off 88 felony charges.

“All Americans need a Bible, and I have many,” he says on video. “It’s my favorite book.”

Some may call it impolite to challenge one’s public piety, so let’s turn to the Book of Matthew:

“Beware of false prophets who come in sheep’s clothing but are ravenous wolves.”

Donald Trump says he reads the Bible often. He says Bibles are all over his residence.

Impressive. Inspiring. And just so you know, every wall in my house has an original Rembrandt.

Trump says religion is “very important”

to him.

Yes, and Shaquille O’Neal has size-4 sneakers.

Name every president in American history. Know just from what we can see — the criminal indictments, the impeachments, the sexual predation and adultery, the conning of taxpayers, the exploitation of laborers (including “illegals”) — Donald Trump is the least faithful of all presidents to the faith he professes. Last. Dead last. We know this because he talks about it the most.

All throughout Trump’s Bible are admonitions against lying, against cheating, against adultery, against obscene wealth.

Read it, Donald. You are no man of God. You are America’s foremost fraud.

Your former top aides and Cabinet officials will attest that you are not just a spiteful megalomaniac. You are unfit for office.

The Bible condemns murder. You wouldn’t even acknowledge officers who died and who carry grave injuries from having been pummeled at the hands of your ravenous wolves Jan. 6, 2021.

The MAGA crowd you incited wanted to neck-tie your second-in-command. Your response? Mike Pence should have gone along with your criminal scheme to subvert the people’s will.

“Religion is so important. It’s so missing,” pitchman Trump says on video, implying he’s found it. These things often happen in prison — rarely in advance of sentencing.

If there’s one message beyond “Love thy neighbor” woven throughout that Bible

it is this: Saying you’re a man of God doesn’t make you one.

So let me assert these things:

If Donald Trump is a Christian, I am the Dalai Lama’s spiritual advisor.

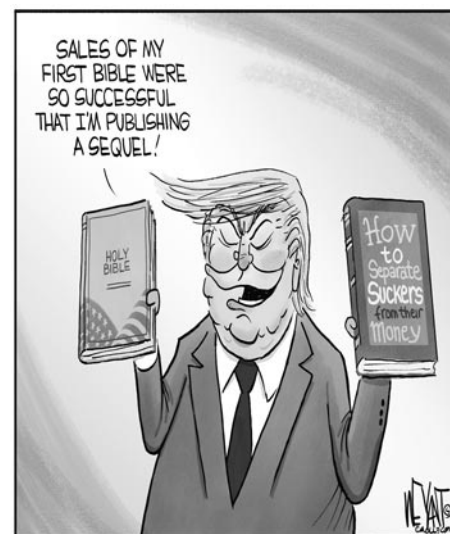
If Donald Trump is a Christian, the Pope and I are yachting buddies.

If you believe Donald Trump is a Christian, you’ve been hoodwinked into a for-profit franchise. If Christ walked among us, He would be picketing right now.

John Young is a longtime Texas newspaperman who now lives in Fort Collins, Colo.

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Cover Story...

Continued from page one

seem to be slipping back in the direction of Jesse Helms and Strom Thurmond. None of it would be a surprise except for one fact: Mark Robinson is a Black man. How he came to be, and came to be what he is, is not the easiest thing for me to explore. In these racially-charged times, a White man hesitates to judge a Black man who defies conventional wisdom. "You haven't walked a mile in his shoes," his supporters would tell me.

I haven't, I couldn't. All I know is that there's no one an armed White nationalist loves more than an African American who echoes his rhetoric and his obsessions. Remember those passionate Republican crushes on the pizza magnate Herman Cain and the neurosurgeon Ben Carson? In between criminal court appearances, Donald Trump himself came to embrace and endorse Robinson, and salute him as "Martin Luther King on steroids" — surely one of the weirdest compliments ever conceived in the hazardous waste dump that serves Trump for a brain.

It's possible that Robinson is just an odd duck and a troubled soul. Anyone whose favorite audiences are gun clubs and evangelical churches embodies so many contradictions that logic throws up its hands. But I can forgive myself for guessing that he might be a shameless opportunist who seized his chance to hitch a ride to (relative) riches with these crazy White Republicans. North Carolina's executive mansion would be a stunning career upgrade for a furniture factory worker with no evident qualifications for public office. It doesn't seem unfair when the late-night comedians mock him as a "Black White supremacist." Of course, the state of North Carolina takes a painful satirical beating, along with our unlikely candidate for governor.

And I'm afraid we deserve it. On the same ballot with Mark Robinson, voters will find a woman named Michele Morrow, the Republican nominee for state superintendent

of schools. Morrow, a registered nurse who home-schools her children, calls the public schools she hopes to supervise "socialist indoctrination centers." On Jan. 6, 2021 she joined the mob outside the US Capitol who rioted to overturn the election of Joe Biden. When CNN examined her history of social media posts, they found conspiracy theories, QAnon slogans and alarming fantasies about executing Biden, Barack Obama and N.C. Governor Roy Cooper.

"I prefer a Pay Per View of him in front of a firing squad," she wrote of President Obama. "We could make some money back from televising his death." She used the social media hashtag #DeathtoTraitors.

This is the woman a majority of North Carolina Republicans would put in charge of their children? We realize that there's no one like Ms. Morrow in Massachusetts or New Jersey, at least no one winning primaries. The wild creatures who drift in from the Far-Right reaches of Southern politics strain belief, and North Carolina suffers more than our share. There's no limit, especially when the "evangelicals" weigh in. In Monroe, N.C. — Jesse Helms' hometown — a Baptist minister named Bobby Leonard declared from his pulpit that rape should be legal if the victim was wearing shorts. "If I'm on the jury he's gonna go free," Rev. Leonard told his congregation. "Because a man's a man."

Leonard apologized, unconvincingly, when the Internet went wild and even the governor denounced him. We have learned to live with our embarrassment. But Mark Robinson is in a special category of concern, because he could actually win his election and expose us to national contempt. He could win because the White Republicans are locked down in their affection for an apparently captive Black man, and because many Black voters might vote their hearts instead of their brains. The idea of a Black governor ruling the roost in Raleigh might be hard to resist, in a state where your ancestors were enslaved. Our rolls must include at least a couple of living voters whose grandparents were born slaves, and

many whose great-grandparents were born before Emancipation.

This might be a powerful incentive to vote Republican, against your better judgment. I read recently that 80% of America's registered voters pay little attention to the issues and candidates, even in a presidential year. An ignorant voter is an impulsive one; ignorance and stupidity are always part of the electoral equation. Yet most Black voters must understand that the modern Republican Party is closer to the KKK than the NAACP, since the Republican share of the Black vote rarely rises much above 10%. But that share has been rising in recent polls, even as the GOP swings further Right. When Mark Robinson shakes Trump's puffy little hand, is he aware that this is a confirmed racist who joined the anti-Obama Birther cult, who lobbied for capital punishment for the Central Park Five, Black teenagers convicted of gang rape and fully exonerated after serving years in prison? Whose companies in New York accumulated thousands of complaints of racial discrimination?

When Trump and his daughter-in-law, Lara Trump, took control of the Republican National Committee in March and purged it of non-flunkies, the first wave of layoffs closed the "minority outreach" community centers that were established to court Black voters. The same week, with his typically uncanny insensitivity, the ex-president boasted to a Black audience that Black people love him because he is, like them, always in trouble with the law. Is Robinson aware of all this? In other words, is he a cynic on the make or a near-idiot like Trump? Don't we wish we knew? Of course the ultimate liberal fantasy is that Robinson will win, then tear off his MAGA disguise, scream "Gotcha!" at the Republican National Committee and reveal himself as the civil rights hero, the modern-day Dr. King North Carolina sorely needs. But we're not holding our breath.

The Black columnist Charles Blow argues cogently that Black voters have an equal right to lean conservative, and to vary

as much as Whites in their political allegiances. Fair enough. But The Party That Trump Ate is hardly conservative anymore. It's controlled by radicals who call themselves populists. They're actually White nationalists, a brand of nativism that's racist to its roots. You saw the swastikas and the Confederate battle flags on Jan. 6, 2021. If the United States of America was the country many of us thought and hoped it was, the MAGAified Republican Party would be as bankrupt politically as it is morally and intellectually. Its candidates would be rejected so decisively that it would be forced to disband, or at least re-form into something more mainstream and reasonable. But that's not the country we live in today. A venerable party that was an integral part of the American political system has morphed into a mortal danger to that system, and to the democracy it proclaims.

My friend Gene Nichol, the writer and legal scholar who serves as the liberal conscience of the Fourth Congressional District, states our crisis urgently, describing the Trump/Robinson alliance as "this partnership of hate and constitutional rejectionism." He labels MAGA Republicans "the sedition caucus," no exaggeration to my ear. If Trump is elected president and Mark Robinson is elected governor, the sane, orphaned progressives of the Fourth District—and our brothers and sisters statewide — will find ourselves as close to Hell as people like Pastor Leonard and the homicide-haunted Nurse Morrow always said we were headed. God help us.

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

We Are All Socialists (And Capitalists too)

By JAMES EGGERT

"Taxes are the price we pay for a civilized society" — Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes

Let's say that someone calls you a "socialist." What exactly does this mean?

According to the dictionary, if you were a socialist, you would favor "the collective ownership of the nation's productive resources." This "full-blown" socialism would include taking over both large corporations as well as small businesses — all of them to be owned and operated by a central government, as opposed to capitalism's competitive free market system emphasizing private ownership organized around the making of a profit.

Politicians are sometimes labeled "socialist," implying that they are out to destroy our economic freedoms. But the truth is that I have never heard a politician advocate for "full-blown" socialism.

On the other hand, I believe that you and I would probably support what we might call "small-scale" socialism, meaning that investments in public goods can be a desirable thing. These investments might include public schools, public roads and bridges, public parks, libraries, the court system, police, fire and so forth. These investments are made by government, because most people agree

that they add to our quality of life but are generally too cumbersome, or too unprofitable for private enterprise to initiate and economically maintain.

One might point out that most past presidents put forth a variety of "socialist" legacy initiatives. Examples include Teddy Roosevelt's push for national parks, while FDR presided over government programs that put people back to work during the Great Depression.

Eisenhower gave us the government financed Interstate Highway system, Kennedy proposed a new Peace Corps initiative and invested in NASA and the man on the moon program, President Johnson was responsible for the original Medicare bill, while Reagan vowed to preserve the "social safety net" for poor and elderly Americans.

Furthermore, Nixon proposed and helped pass the Clean Air and Clean Water Acts. And little known to most Americans, President Jimmy Carter protected some 100 million acres with his Alaska National Conservation Act. Obama's legacy was Obamacare and even Trump expanded military spending and invested in COVID vaccine research ("Operation Warp Speed") — all government or socialist investments as was President Biden's \$550 billion infrastructure bill designed to rebuild roads and bridges and improve the nation's mass transit system. Also consider Biden's multi-billion-dollar Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) designed to create financial incentives that help mitigate climate change and global warming.

Now what about you and me viewed from a local, small-scale level? Consider the following example — that is, taking the family (kids, grandma, and grandpa) to a local park and having a picnic. What part does socialism play in making their picnic possible?

First, the park itself is provided by the local government. The play equipment has been tested by a government agency for safety, as has their car (seat belts, child's safety seats, etc.).

Next, the road they took to the park is publicly owned like the park; the food they eat is safer because of government food safety regulations, the municipal water supply has probably been recently tested by a government employee. The air is cleaner (Clean Air Act), the near-by river is also cleaner (Clean Water Act) because of accretionary benefits of government regulations over time.

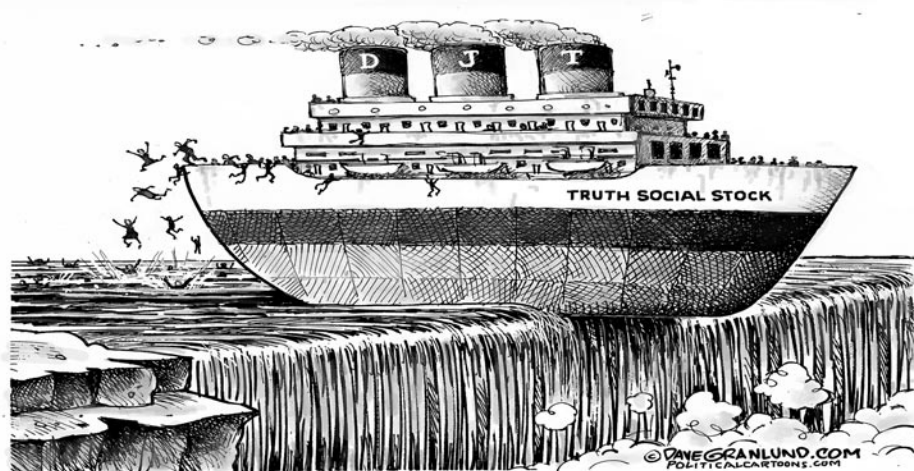
Furthermore, grandma and grandpa are probably healthier and have a higher quality of life, because of government sponsored Social Security and Medicare.

On the other hand, we could cite many examples — from giant auto companies to your down-town pizzeria and farmers' market — focusing on present-day capitalism in our lives as well. (Yes, we are all capitalists too!)

But socialism? I believe most Americans are indeed somewhere on the spectrum of approving of some public investments and some public programs. It does not, however, mean that we favor full-blown nation-wide industrial socialism.

Likewise, I think we can all agree that it is both inaccurate and grossly unfair to imply that our political opponent is somehow an "evil" socialist out to destroy our freedoms while taking over the economy.

James Eggert is an associate professor emeritus of the University of Wisconsin Stout. A version of the above essay appears in his book "Meadowlark Economics—Collected Essays" (2024)



If You or I Depicted the President Kidnapped and Hog-Tied, What Are the Odds We'd Skate Without Consequences?

By DICK POLMAN

The Bible salesman deemed it a Christian gesture Friday, March 29, to retweet some MAGA moron's depiction of the president of the United States trussed like a turkey in the back of a manly pickup truck. No surprise there; Trump's stinking sewage has long stressed our olfactory organs to the max. But what's infuriating is that the criminal defendant, who's out on bail in four jurisdictions, never gets held accountable for his incitements to violence.

Oh wait, Trump on April 1 sincerely apologized for posting the Joe Biden effigy photo. April Fool!

But seriously, folks. One hundred years ago in March, Adolf Hitler was sentenced to five years in prison for his central role in the failed Beer Hall Putsch insurrection. By contrast, our own home-grown thug has yet to suffer even a slap on the wrist. Our courts move with the speed of a swimmer in quicksand, and don't get me started (for the umpteenth time) about the Republicans and MAGAs who indulge and excuse every fascistic incitement.

At bare minimum, political commentator Michael Tomasky reminds us, "anyone else who incited an insurrection against the temple of our democracy and wanted his own vice president hanged would have been drummed out of politics the next week."

The weekend flap over the hog-tied Biden image was a classic example. Trump's defenders quickly flooded social media with condemnations of comedian Kathy Griffin. It was the predictable ButWhatAbout game – as in: But what about Griffin, who posted a shock-art pic back in 2017, when she posed with an effigy of Trump's bloody severed head?

Yes, she did. I won't link to that old pic because it was disgusting. Indeed, the MAGAs who seized on the Griffin episode – flying the flag of false equivalence – is that they ignored a slew of salient details. In ascending order of importance:

1. Kathy Griffin is not Joe Biden. If the president was posting violent images of Trump, that would be real equivalence. But he doesn't live in the gutter.

2. Griffin immediately apologized for

what she'd posted: "I crossed the line ... I went too far ... I beg for your forgiveness. I made a mistake and I was wrong."

3. Trump's critics quickly denounced her. Ex-Hillary Clinton aide Peter Daou, said, "I just saw the violent Trump imagery and I find it horrible." Liberal celebrity-activists piled on. Actress Alyssa Milano tweeted at Griffin: "I'm sorry but that is totally inappropriate and so very offensive. And I have to believe you're smart enough to know better."

4. Griffin suffered professional consequences. She was fired from her annual CNN New Year's Eve gig with Anderson Cooper. She lost a major sponsorship. Her 2017 comedy tour was canceled. She later said, "I lost about 75% of my friends that never came back."

5. And since threatening a president is potentially a federal crime, she got in big trouble with the authorities. She was visited by the Secret Service. She was targeted by the Justice Department in a two-month investigation. She was put on the no-fly list. She was questioned by Interpol.

Trump deserves that level of account-

ability, at minimum. I fail to understand how a criminal defendant who encourages and exploits violent imagery about the president – and who repeatedly attacks, by name, the daughter of a judge in one of his criminal cases – has not, by definition, violated his bail release conditions.

One last word about what happened 100 years ago today. Hitler's five-year jail sentence was a pittance. The German courts were intimidated by his violent followers, and he was released within nine months. You know the rest of the story. Joni Mitchell said it best, in lyrics:

Strong and wrong you win

Only because

That's the way it's always been

As we careen toward America's judgment day, are our stressed democratic institutions strong enough to win the future?

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.

Can You Slam Wall Street and Still Win an Election? Ask Sherrod Brown

It's hard for any of us to buck the conventional wisdom that downplays mass layoffs and extols billionaires, but the Ohio Democrat is doing just that.

By LES LEOPOLD

When I recently learned that Senator Sherrod Brown (D, OH) had reissued his 2019 essay, called "Wall Street's War on Workers: Stock Buybacks," I was shocked. My new book is called "Wall Street's War on Workers," and also focuses in part on the job-destructive impact of stock buybacks.

Who stole what from whom?

Senator Brown didn't know about my book; his essay was written before I started my book, and despite deep research I did not see his essay until two weeks ago. So, I was surprised, but I immediately understood why we both adopted the same big picture framework to understand the economy, and similar language to share our understanding with working people.

As a labor educator, I've found that the big-picture framework is as important, maybe even more important, than facts and figures. In our complex world, problems hit working people from all angles – job insecurity, job loss, the high costs of housing, discrimination, kids who can't afford to move out, and on and on. To make sense of this mosaic, a framework helps hold the pieces together. In our educational program we see clearly that working people are hungry for a coherent explanation that connects the dots. And without a compelling alternative, the pressing need for frameworks can lead towards conspiracy theories.

Brown and I are using the Wall Street War on Workers big picture framework for four reasons.

It's flat out true. Wall Street's insatiable desire to extract wealth via stock buybacks, leveraged buyouts, hostile takeovers, and the like, are destroying the livelihoods and the well-being of thousands of working people each day in every sector of the economy.

The framework rings true to working people. It's understandable. It makes sense of their reality. It explains why they, and so many others around them, have gone from one mass layoff to the other. And it explains why they feel so strongly that the system is rigged against them.

The framework breaks through fatal-

ism. The dominant media explanation is that mass layoffs can't be helped because technological change and globalization are unstoppable forces akin to natural laws. Wall Street's War on Workers highlights human agency. Laws and regulations were changed to enable Wall Street to kill jobs at will for reasons that have nothing to do with new technology or trade. In the high-tech sector, for example, more than 260,000 workers experienced mass layoffs last year, and another 50,000 are gone so far this year. Almost none of those jobs were lost because of globalization or new technologies, AI or otherwise.

It's good politics. Senator Brown wouldn't be pushing this framework in the middle of a tight reelection campaign unless he believed it could help him deepen his base of support among working people, especially in areas that became increasingly Republican over the past two presidential elections. It's one thing for Bernie Sanders and Elizabeth Warren to take on Wall Street in their very liberal states. No one will defeat them. But Brown is using the anti-Wall Street frame to get reelected in Ohio, which has become solidly red. In our labor education courses, working people of all political persuasions find the anti-Wall Street framework very compelling.

Clearly, Brown does not believe that Ohio working people are fixated on anti-wokeism and blinded by racism, homophobia, and xenophobia. He understands that working people of all shades and colors are much more interested in maintaining their livelihoods than railing against wokeism. My book provides compelling data that also shows increasing working-class liberalism, not illiberalism, on hot-button issues like immigration, gay rights, and racism. Ohio's embrace of a constitutional amendment in 2023 that wrote abortion access into the state's constitution confirms Brown's intuitions and my findings.

It's one thing, however, for a labor educator to use the "Wall Street's War on Workers" framework. To keep my job, I don't have to run against Wall Street's cash. But Sherrod Brown is taking a risk, maybe a big risk. And he's not running away from the challenge or being mealy-mouthed about how Wall Street is ripping off the working class.

His carefully documented essays show how big financial firms pressure corporations to hold down wages, please Wall Street through mass layoffs, and use stock buybacks to enrich Wall Street at the expense of working people. Recently, he has put out a statement called "Taking on Wall Street and Housing," which has a great deal in common with my Feb. 28 newsletter, "Wall Street to Working-Class Homebuyers: Fuggeddaboutit!"

Here are a few of Brown's passages that highlight his (our!) big picture framework.

"Wall Street's focus on wealth accumulation for the rich is often by explicit design

and comes at the direct expense of American workers."

"...Wall Street does not view the workers making burritos at Chipotle as real people with real families. It does not view pilots and flight attendants at American Airlines as important positions critical to the safety and functioning of our airlines. Instead, to Wall Street, all of these workers are merely a line in a company's budget to be minimized in the short-term and the long-term."

"Put simply, for the last several decades, companies have sought to please Wall Street so that their stock price will go up in the short-term. They know Wall Street analysts like it when...they lay off workers to show they're serious about cutting expenses.

"These data tell us that for decades corporations were getting richer by laying off their workers. It's still true today."

"It's no surprise that cost-cutting measures typically include layoffs but rarely if ever include scaling back executive compensation."

"...They fired workers but somehow found the cash to buy back millions of dollars, sometimes billions of dollars, worth of their own shares. The coordinated timing of layoffs and buybacks isn't a rare occurrence; it's happening regularly throughout corporate America."

"So next time you or someone you know loses a job at a profitable, publicly traded company, it's possible the layoff was part of a cost-cutting measure to please Wall Street and to make CEO paychecks bigger." "Stock buybacks are one way publicly-traded corporations redirect money from workers to their shareholders."

"Proponents of stock buybacks argue that companies purchase their own shares only after considering other value-creating investment options. That's ridiculous. Are we truly out of good ideas? Are all of our factories as updated as they can be? Are all workers getting family-supporting wages and being fairly compensated for the profits they create?"

"Stock buybacks are not good for workers. End of story."

Why aren't the Democrats learning more from Brown?

It seems like a no-brainer for the Democrats to use the Wall Street framework to reconnect to the working-class folks they have lost and are losing. In the research for my book, it became clear that about 15-20 million Republican and Republican-leaning white working-class voters are socially liberal. It is political malpractice to write them off.

A major part of the problem is that many Democrats believe there's nothing much that can be done about mass layoffs – that layoffs are the inevitable result of the unstoppable forces of new technologies and global trade. It's as if even liberal politicians don't want to look too closely at how the deregulation of Wall Street, aided and abetted by both political parties since the 1980s,

has enriched Wall Street at the expense of working people, and especially at the expense of job stability. It's far easier to blame AI and the like.

Clearly, the effort to create new jobs via infrastructure bills is far less controversial. In those bills, the government provides major subsidies for corporations while opening up new job possibilities for working people. Win-win!

But those investments won't stop the Wall Street-induced mass layoffs that are ripping through the economy each and every day. Nor are there any real brakes being placed on Wall Street's use of job-destructive stock buybacks and leveraged buyouts to enrich the wealthy. Win-lose!

Unfortunately, there may also be baser motives at play. The richer Wall Street becomes, the more it can influence politics through donations and lobbying. Some politicians, it seems, also have their eyes out for lucrative jobs after leaving office as a Wall Street lobbyist or private equity/hedge fund operatives.

Upton Sinclair identified this problem as he ran for the governor of California in 1934. In his book, "I, Candidate for Governor: And How I Got Licked," he famously wrote: "It is difficult to get a man to understand something, when his salary depends on his not understanding it."

It's hard for any of us to buck the conventional wisdom that downplays mass layoffs and extols billionaires. But Sherrod Brown is doing just that. If he beats the odds again in 2024 and wins, the Democratic Party should follow his lead.

For working people to gain the stable jobs and decent incomes they truly deserve, Wall Street needs to be reined in ... and soon.

Les Leopold is executive director of the Labor Institute and author of "Wall Street's War on Worker s: How Mass Layoffs and Greed Are Destroying the Working Class and What to Do About It" (2024). Read more of his work at substack.com/@lesleopold1. This appeared at Common Dreams.

Follow him on Twitter: @les_leopold.



A New Shipbuilding Era

By DAVID McCALL

James Crawford served five years in the US Marine Corps maintaining the radar systems on super-sophisticated warplanes built to fend off enemy attacks from air, sea and land.

But not once during his time in numerous ports as far away as Asia did he see a US commercial vessel plying the seas, a sign, he now realizes, of another kind of threat to the homeland.

America's security begins with skilled union workers manufacturing the goods, equipment and other essentials, including cargo freighters and tankers, needed to keep the nation independent and free.

And so Crawford joined fellow members of the United Steelworkers (USW) recently in taking action to resuscitate the country's decimated commercial shipbuilding industry and end a growing, perilous dependence on Chinese shipping.

The USW and other unions filed a petition with US Trade Representative Katherine Tai seeking an investigation into China's illegal predatory trade practices, unfair state support for its own commercial shipbuilding industry, and plot to dominate global logistics networks.

China's network of policies—including massive subsidies for the industry, such as cash payments, tax incentives and other handouts—continues to kill competition in America and other countries. As a result, China not only controls an enormous percentage of the world's commercial shipbuilding output but wields the power to cut off access to ships it builds and operates at any time, for any reason.

"You can't go somewhere to fight if you're weak at home," observed Crawford, unit president for USW Local 3372-07 who works at Hunt Valve in Salem, Ohio, noting that the US not only needs commercial ships to carry manufactured goods to the far corners of the world, but to pro-

vide seelift capacity to the military in times of crisis.

The United States once had about 30 major shipyards with 180,000 workers and contracts for more than 70 commercial vessels a year. But tens of thousands of those shipyard jobs disappeared since the 1980s as China hijacked the industry.

Some shipyards, like the USW-represented complex in Newport News, Va., began focusing entirely on military contracts. Others, like the Sun Shipping and Dry Dock complex in Chester, Pa., once the world's largest shipyard and a center of shipbuilding innovation, simply closed. A casino now occupies the property.

As of 2022, the handful of remaining American shipbuilders had just five commercial vessels under construction, while China had nearly 1,800, according to data collected by the Congressional Research Service (CRS).

And China is far from finished. Rather, it's turning an island into a "colossal shipbuilding base" for its military and commercial sectors, according to a report by the Center for Strategic and International Studies, a think tank in Washington, D.C.

"Nobody wants China to be taking our jobs," said Crawford, part of the delegation of USW members who gathered at the U.S. Capitol to request the investigation into China. "Everybody wants ships made, wants them produced, here. We need to be able to rely on American-made products."

The decline of shipbuilding also took a toll on numerous supply chains serving the industry.

After leaving the Marines, for example, Crawford returned to Salem and took a job at Hunt Valve partly because it makes components for Navy ships and submarines, offering a way for him to continue serving the country.

But he said workers there experienced weakening demand for the valves and actuators they produce for commercial ships as America's shipbuilding industry declined over the years.

Rebuilding the industry means more jobs at Hunt Valve, Crawford said, noting the strong union contract enables workers to provide health care to their families, buy houses, plan for retirement and live middle-class lives.

In all, a new shipbuilding era portends a boost for tens of thousands of workers nationwide who make the aluminum, cable, glass, pipe, steel, forged products, anti-skid grating material, waterproof cabinetry, motors, springs and numerous other items needed to build container ships and tankers.

"It would help us tremendously," said Steve Townsend, unit chair of USW Local 3261-01 at Rochester Metal Products in Rochester, Ind., pointing out that he and about 100 co-workers already manufacture components for personal watercrafts and supply several other industries with products weighing up to about 100 pounds.

"We can make just about anything having to do with iron castings. We're very versatile," said Townsend, citing hooks, brackets, water pumps and engine components as just a handful of the items he and other members of Local 3261-01 have the capacity to provide for commercial ships.

And the workers' craftsmanship is second to none, added Townsend, noting, "You want something that's going to hold up. If something is going on a cargo ship, you don't want it to break."

The International Association of Machinists and Aerospace Workers, the International Brotherhood of Boilermakers, the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers, and the Maritime Trades Department, AFL-CIO, all joined the USW's petition requesting the investigation into China's illicit efforts to dominate the commercial shipbuilding market.

A growing number of elected officials, including US Sens. Bob Casey Jr. of Pennsylvania and Tammy Baldwin of Wisconsin, also recognize the urgent need to re-shore the industry and break China's chokehold. "On a level playing field, American workers can out-compete anyone," stressed Casey.

Townsend, who's already rallying his co-workers around the trade case, views a reinvigorated shipbuilding industry as essential to America's future.

"It means jobs for American people," he said. "It's making the country stronger."

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

Meet the Secretive Rich Funding Efforts to Keep Others Poor

With both millionaires and homelessness on the rise in the US, right-wing donors are bankrolling a nationally coordinated move to end experiments in basic income.

By SAM PIZZIGATI

America, a new report details, is minting millionaires at a record pace. Some 37% of the world's millionaires, analysts at the wealth advisory firm Henley & Partners calculate, now call the United States home.

And these analysts are talking real millionaires, not those Americans who rate as "millionaires" only because they're living in homes that have wildly appreciated in value since their purchase decades ago. Those appreciations have left typical 50-something American homeowners, the latest Federal Reserve stats show, with personal net worths a bit over \$1 million.

The researchers from Henley and their partners at New World Wealth don't count these house-rich homeowners as millionaires. They only rate as millionaires those households with over \$1 million in investible assets—and the United States, their research finds, hosts far, far more of these honest-to-goodness millionaires than any other nation on Earth.

The numbers: Over 5.5 million Americans now hold liquid assets worth over \$1 million. That total has soared 62% over the past decade, "well above," observes CNBC analyst Robert Frank, the overall global real-millionaire increase of a mere 38%.

Rich people-friendly observers of America's economic scene, naturally enough, see stats like these as cause for nothing but celebration. The wealthier our wealthiest become, they postulate, the more jobs — and wealth — these rich create for everyone else. A rising tide, as they like to quip, lifts all boats.

But we are, in fact, seeing no significant rising of any sort for America's working

families. We are witnessing instead stunning increases in what America's rich are spending on themselves. One revealing recent stat: Our US well-to-do, researchers at Art Basel and the banking giant UBS report, now account for 42% of global fine art sales, well above China's 19% second-place share.

Another reflection of America's luxury-spending dominance: The world's top premium luxury brands—think glamorous retailers like Cartier, Bergdorf Goodman, and Gucci—all have flagship stores in Manhattan. Just this past December, the luxury powerhouse Prada announced plans to spend \$835 million buying up the building that hosts its current Fifth Avenue flagship and the building next door.

For America's poorest, meanwhile, "luxury" has come to mean keeping a roof over your head.

The number of Americans chronically homeless, the US Department of Housing and Urban Development reported out this past December, has been climbing since 2016—in what Jeff Olivet, the director of the US Interagency Council on Homelessness, likens to a "game of really vicious musical chairs." The United States, he explains, has "an incredible deficit of affordable housing units," with only one unit available for every three extremely low-income renters.

And "if someone has a medical condition, a mental health disability, a substance use disorder," Olivet adds, "it makes it all that much more complex for someone to exit homelessness."

The solution to this growing housing squeeze? America's most conservative lawmakers have one. Let's simply do our best, these lawmakers are proposing, to keep our nation's homeless out of sight.

In Florida, that approach has actually become law. Governor Ron DeSantis, fresh off his go-nowhere campaign for the GOP presidential nomination, has just signed into law legislation that makes it illegal for local municipalities to let homeless people camp or sleep on public property after this Oct. 1.

"Florida," DeSantis declared upon the bill's signing, "will not allow homeless encampments to intrude on its citizens or undermine their quality of life like we see in states like New York and California."

The new Florida law requires local governments without enough bed capacity for unhoused families to set up homeless camps far from parks and other public facilities—and the act also penalizes localities

that wink at rough sleeping outside these new hidden-away camps.

Diana Stanley, a top exec in Palm Beach charity circles, considers Florida's new approach "a statement that we've stopped caring about our brothers and sisters." The main message Stanley takes from the state's new homelessness legislation: "If we can't see them, then we don't have to help them."

Florida's latest homeless legislation, Stanley stresses, "does absolutely nothing to address the root cause of homelessness, the lack of affordable housing." The state's focus, agrees University of Central Florida sociologist Amy Donley, ought to be on "helping people into housing, not encampments."

Measures that would help do just that, meanwhile, have come under intense fire from right-wing lawmakers in other states. Those lawmakers are particularly aiming that fire at state and local experiments in providing low-income families with guaranteed, no-strings basic incomes.

In Iowa, one GOP state legislator is calling such basic-income efforts "socialism on steroids." The sponsor of another move to ban basic incomes, South Dakota's John Wiik, is charging that basic-income plans amount to "a one-way ticket to government dependency." In February, lawmakers in Arizona, home to the nation's fourth-highest homeless rate, passed a bill that bans "any program where persons are provided with regular, periodic cash payments" they can use "for any purpose."

As of the end of February, lawmakers in some four other states had introduced bills with similar bans.

Who's driving this nationally coordinated move to end experiments in basic income? Some of America's most secretive wealthy, charges a recent analysis by Scott

Sartens, a founding committee member of Basic Income Action.

These wealthy, Sartens notes, have been bankrolling an outfit that calls itself the Foundation for Government Accountability, "a lobbying group with a billionaire-fueled junk science record every American should know about."

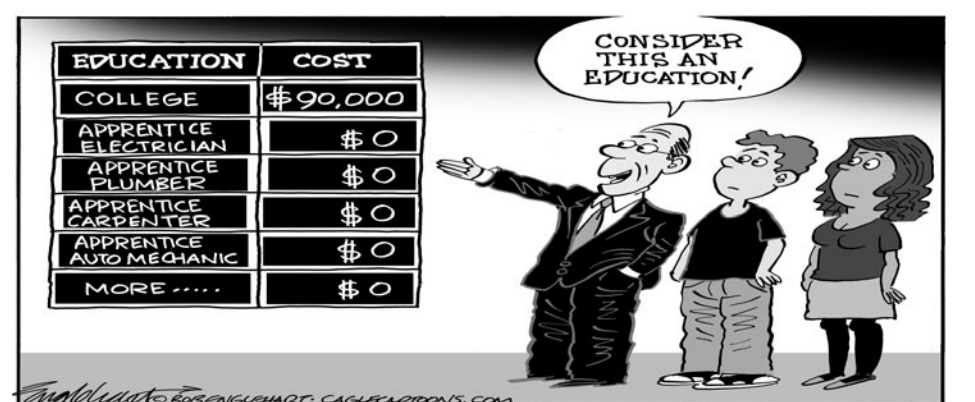
Among the Foundation's prime funders: the hard-right billionaires Richard and Liz Uihlein, the nation's fourth-largest contributors to political campaigns. The Uihleins have pumped almost \$18 million into the machinations of the Foundation for Government Accountability. Almost that much has come from the Donors Trust network, a powerhouse that has become what Mother Jones calls "the dark-money ATM of the right."

Other major Foundation for Government Accountability funders include assorted deep-pocket entities with a history, notes Climate Investigations Center director Kert Davies, of "hating regulation and trying to stop any progress on things like climate change because they see it as almost a step toward communism."

The billionaires underwriting all these entities, Basic Income Action's Scott Sartens believes, share a common fundamental outlook. They fear "a world where things are a bit less unequal," a world without so many average people "having no power to say anything but yes."

May those rich see emerge that new world they so fear. Soon.

Sam Pizzigati, veteran labor journalist and Institute for Policy Studies associate fellow, edits *Inequality.org*. His recent books include: *The Case for a Maximum Wage* (2018) and *The Rich Don't Always Win: The Forgotten Triumph over Plutocracy that Created the American Middle Class, 1900-1970* (2012).



MARY SANCHEZ



We can look to Baltimore for an indication of just how shrill, nativist and, let's just say it, plain old racist, this election season is poised to become.

A Bridge Collapsed, and Almost Simultaneously So Did Our Discourse

The world has now watched the stunning footage of the collapse in looping video feeds. The expansive bridge broke apart like a child's toy. The trusses appeared to crumble like an Erector Set, crashing into the water below.

Just as quickly, the worst of America reacted. They displayed some disturbing thought patterns, ideas that are being shaped by a wide range of cable news hosts, rightwing politicians, and everyday keyboard pounders.

Unfortunately, we can look to Baltimore for an indication of just how shrill, nativist and, let's just say it, plain old racist, this election season is poised to become.

This is no slight on Maryland, its people, or its political leadership.

The angry hordes throughout the country, always on alert, sniffed a new target and pounced.

Here is a taste of what swept through the Internet not long after the Dali cargo ship struck the bridge:

“BREAKING: Shipping company responsible for Bridge Collapse in Baltimore has EXTENSIVE Gender Diversity and DEI hiring practices and CEO awards to prove it!!”

If you're sane, rational and reasonable, you might wonder why widely practiced business efforts were cited at that moment.

Rather than thinking about what might possibly have caused a vessel that large to lose power, the foolish reached for these strains sweeping through school boards and statehouses, the same voices that have stripped public funds from any efforts around DEI (diversity, equity and inclusion).

DEI is a nod to achieving workforce diversity. It acknowledges that, indeed, humans are born into multiple races and ethnicities. But no, it is not to be tolerated, or so goes the backward thinking of its opponents.

Somehow the link was made that the crash surely had something to do with the DEI efforts of the company connected to the ship.

Never mind that a group of Latino immigrants, road construction workers, who were repairing potholes when the bridge collapsed, had already perished. They would become fodder in the coming days, with some people posing questions about their legal status and more surmising about the “horrors” of our increasingly diverse nation.

In those first few hours, the fact that the ship was owned by Grace Ocean Private Ltd and flew a Singapore flag raised red flags for

many online trolls: Singapore = foreign = Asian = bad.

Any negative incident, an accident and not, is now subject to this type of insanity. In reality, the massive cargo ship is simply a reflection of global commerce, the supply chains that fuel our economy.

According to the Associated Press, the Dali was built by a South Korean firm, Hyundai Heavy Industries, and had been chartered by a Danish firm to travel from Baltimore to Sri Lanka. The massive vessel had passed an inspection in Chile after some repairs in June of 2023. The US Coast Guard inspected it in September and approved it for operation.

Understanding these factors, illustrative of the inter-related and multiple layers of international governance that impact trade routes, apparently isn't nearly as interesting to these sleuths, who love to weave complicated conspiracy theories. Those efforts geared up when the ship's black boxes were recovered and the National Transportation Safety Board had barely begun what will be an exhaustive yearlong study to dissect the incident.

But wait, there's more!

Baltimore Mayor Brandon Scott was swiftly labeled the “DEI mayor” in social media slams posted after the crash. He's a Black man. Some blamed him for the crash. Shortly after the collapse, Scott appeared alongside Maryland Governor Wes Moore at a press conference and was ridiculed because he wasn't wearing a spiffy suit at the time, in the early morning hours.

Even worse, some GOP candidates for office around the nation jumped in, somehow twisting the incident to imply that it happened because Scott is Black.

The following day, March 28, Scott spoke strongly in an interview with

MSNBC: “But they don't have the courage to say the N-word, and the fact that I don't believe in their untruthful and wrong ideology, and I am very proud of my heritage and who I am and where I come from, scares them,” he said.

DEI has been stricken by the same fate as CRT before it, which stands for Critical Race Theory. Critics use the acronyms as a shorthand for racial slurs.

GOP Utah gubernatorial candidate Phil Lyman outdid himself. Rep. Lyman — yes, people have already foolishly voted him into elected office — pointed a finger at a Black woman, the Maryland port commissioner. He posted on social media the following: “This is what happens when you have Governors who prioritize diversity over the well-being and security of citizens.”

He later added: “DEI=DIE.”

The Francis Scott Key Bridge fell with shocking swiftness, a calamity created at least in part because cargo ships have massively increased in size in recent decades and sail by bridges built in different eras.

Engineering experts will pinpoint the causes, complicating factors and accurately place blame, if blame is due.

As for America, we must begin challenging what is happening to our discourse, fairness, and the respect we should show to our fellow Americans.

Calling out the madness is the first step.

The ease with which people reach for such racist diatribe is galling. The attacks are swift. But repairing the damage will take far longer.

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How Republicans Screw Workers

Efforts by Obama and Biden to enforce labor laws have been systematically undermined by right-wing courts and legislators. This should be a prime election theme.

By ROBERT KUTTNER

In 2014, after several years of work led by the Labor Department, the Obama administration issued a major rule to help government to keep track of chronic violators of a range of laws designed to protect workers. The laws included the Davis-Bacon Act, which requires certain public-works contractors to pay prevailing wages; the Occupational Safety and Health Act (OSHA); the Fair Labor Standards Act covering wages, hours, and accurate classification of workers; the Wagner Act guaranteeing workers the right to organize or join a union; and several more.

The idea was to make sure that repeat offenders did not keep getting government contracts, and thereby to encourage corporations to obey laws that protect workers. The rule, called Fair Pay and Safe Workplaces, also facilitated the creation of a government-wide database, so that different agencies with different recordkeeping systems could access the same information on contractors.

But today, that long-overdue government-wide enforcement system is a shambles. When Donald Trump took office in 2017, he repealed the rule. Even before he acted, contractors found a federal district court judge in Texas to issue an injunction against it.

In that case, *Associated Builders and Contractors of Southeast Texas v. Rung*, decided in October 2016, the judge enjoined enforcement of the rule on several grounds, including supposed violation of due process, administrative actions going beyond the intent of Congress, and even infringement on contractors' free speech.

By the time the Obama administration considered whether to appeal, Trump had

been elected and no appeal was possible. Then for good measure, the Republican Congress that came in with Trump acted under the Congressional Review Act to prohibit either Congress or a Democratic president from reviving the rule.

So, even though every one of the underlying laws has long been found to be constitutional, a serious effort to enforce them has been stymied. The Biden administration has been doing its best to salvage some aspects of the enforcement plan, consistent with what the courts will allow.

For instance, for several decades, every federal agency that contracts with the private sector has had one or more career civil servants specializing in labor issues. Back when unions were more powerful, these labor contracting specialists focused on such issues as helping expedite contract work in the aftermath of strike settlements. Now, the job of these labor advisers has been repurposed to expedite sharing of information and enforcement actions against contractors who violate any of several labor laws.

And as the federal government attempts to underwrite rapid rebuilding of the Francis Scott Key Bridge (dependent on whether the Republican House allows it), a project that would require payment of good wages under the Davis-Bacon Act, the administration also plans to use this effort as a model of Davis-Bacon enforcement.

As I've reported, the contractor on the bridge repair that killed six immigrant workers was non-union, and my sources say those workers were very likely paid as independent contractors. That would be a case of illegal misclassification. Among other consequences, it would leave these workers and their families outside the workers' comp system.

Joe Biden also successfully sponsored well over a trillion dollars of new infrastructure spending via the Inflation Reduction Act, the bipartisan infrastructure law, and the CHIPS Act. Creation of good union jobs is a central objective.

Key to this effort is the Biden executive order on project labor agreements, which promote labor-management cooperation on large federally financed construction projects, including enforcement of Davis-Bacon. PLAs help carry out Biden's pledge to create good union jobs.

But in March, the Florida branch of the contractors' lobby filed suit to have the PLA order declared unconstitutional, on the same

grounds that the Texas judge used to overturn Barack Obama's Fair Pay and Safe Workplaces rule. So it goes.

The tug-of-war, capital versus labor, never ends. Government is a major player. And it's all too clear which political party is on which side.

The details of this particular story are down in the weeds of the administrative state. I only learned about Obama's earlier rule and its evisceration in the course of looking into whether the workers killed in the Key Bridge disaster had been illegally underpaid.

But even though the details are complex and obscure, the headline could not be

Making Ends Meet is Hard Enough Without a Penalty for Coming Up Short

The good news? The Biden administration is cracking down on abusive overdraft charges and late fees.

By BRIAN CARSS

Poverty is expensive in this country. Few things illustrate that truism like overdraft charges and late fees, which are often little more than outrageous penalties for not having enough money. But there are plans in the works at the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau (CFPB) to rein in these abusive practices.

Overdraft fees occur when a customer attempts to withdraw more money from their account than is available, but the banking institution covers the transaction — for a fee. The CFPB is proposing rules to close loopholes in rules on overdraft fees by establishing a benchmark that banks cannot exceed.

Over a quarter of Americans live in a household that was charged an overdraft fee in the past year, but especially harmed are those who have the least to begin with. These overdraft fees are structured to prey on consumers already in a financially pre-

clearer: Democrats try to use the government to help working people. Republican legislators, judges, and presidents work to help corporate America evade or overturn those laws, at the expense of workers.

At a time when Biden is not getting enough credit for an improving economy, that story needs to be widely told and better understood. I can't think of a better theme for the Biden campaign.

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carious position. The impact skews toward low-income households and people of color. Young people are also more likely to be affected.

When banks hit people with an overdraft fee, they end up further in the hole — to the benefit of the bank. “Overdraft fees are not so much a useful service as they are a lucrative profit center underwritten by the most economically vulnerable consumers,” said Kimberly Fountain, consumer field manager at Americans for Financial Reform.

Overdraft fees affect credit scores and can even lead to account closures, leaving people without access to banking services altogether. More than any other group, Black Americans tend to be underbanked or unbanked.

As with overdraft fees, banks foist the burden of late fees on people living paycheck to paycheck, low to moderate income consumers, and people of color.

More than 80% of adults have at least one credit card — and these cards are full of junk fees. Late fees alone cost consumers \$14 billion a year — and low-income earners pay about twice as much in fees as higher-income earners.

These late fees are not based on any sort of need for the bank. The CFPB found that banks take a fee almost five times greater than the cost to the bank of a late payment.

These practices also reinforce the racial wealth gap. Data shows that banks have often charged those living in neighborhoods with populations of color a higher interest

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The Early Days of Fox: Losing Money to Gain Political Power

By THOM HARTMANN

Conservative commentator Brit Hume noted, in a 1999 interview with PBS, “This operation [Fox News] loses money. It doesn’t lose nearly as much as it did at first, and it’s—well, it’s hit all its projections in terms of, you know, turning a profit, but it’s—it will lose money now, and we expect for a couple more years. I think it’s losing about \$80 million to \$90 million a year.”

But that loss wasn’t viewed by these right-wing billionaires as a “loss”—rather, it was an investment.

It’s what Reverend Moon believed, as his *Washington Times* newspaper lost hundreds of millions of dollars, but spread right-wing perspectives that influenced the nation. It’s how the Koch brothers have referred to the hundreds of millions they shower on right-wing politicians and causes. And it’s what the people who started Air America Radio believed, although they couldn’t get big funders to understand the stakes.

While Rupert Murdoch lost hundreds of millions of dollars (Air America’s bankruptcy was for \$14 million) in

its first few years, Murdoch hung on and kept pouring in the cash. And it put George W. Bush in the White House, according to several independent analyses.

As Richard Morin wrote for the *Washington Post* in 2006, asking rhetorically, “Does President Bush owe his controversial win in 2000 to Fox cable television news?” The answer was an emphatic “Yes!” according to academics who did exhaustive research into what they called “the Fox Effect.”

As Morin reported:

“Our estimates imply that Fox News convinced 3 to 8 percent of its audience to shift its voting behavior towards the Republican Party, a sizable media persuasion effect,” said Stefano DellaVigna of the University of California at Berkeley [sic] and Ethan Kaplan of Stockholm University.”

In Florida alone, they estimate, the Fox Effect may have produced more than 10,000 additional votes for Bush—clearly a decisive factor in a state he carried by fewer than 600 votes.

The analysis looked at the vote from 1996 to 2004 in 9,256 American cities and towns where Fox was available on basic cable.

“They found,” reported Morin, “clear evidence of a Fox Effect among non-Republicans in the presidential and Senate races, even after controlling for other factors including vote trends in similar nearby towns without access to Fox.” The researchers added that “the Fox effect seems to [be] permanent and may be increasing.” And that was in 2006. This is problematic, because no democracy can sur-

vive intact when only one voice or political perspective overwhelmingly dominates any major branch of the media.

Literally hundreds of right-wing talk show hosts, both local and national, are broadcasting every day, all day, in every town and city in America.

Progressive voices, on the other hand, are few and far between; in most parts of America (and virtually all of rural America), the only radio signal that carries any progressive programming whatsoever is SiriusXM, which requires a subscription and special receiver—costs that are hard to bear among voters in the reddest states where Republican policies have destroyed unions and exported jobs overseas, thus leading to widespread poverty.

Jefferson made his comment about newspapers being vital to America just at the time he was being most viciously attacked in the newspapers. The core requisite of democracy is debate. When there’s only a single predominant voice in the media, American democracy itself is at greatest risk, be that voice on the right or the left.

It’s time to enforce antitrust in our media landscape and to bring back media ownership rules that both limit the number of outlets and prioritize local ownership.

Thom Hartmann is a progressive radio talk-show host and the author of “The Hidden History of American Oligarchy” and more than 30 other books in print. He is a writing fellow at the Independent Media Institute. This is an excerpt from “The Hidden History of Monopolies: How Big Business Destroyed the American Dream” and appeared at hartmannreport.com.

ROBERT REICH



Trump has not hidden his plans. You’ve heard him promise to ‘be a dictator for one day.’ History shows there are no one-day dictatorships.

Trump’s 5-Step Fascist Plan

On Friday, March 29, Trump posted a video featuring an image of President Joe Biden hog-tied — with hands and feet bound together.

Trump has previously posted doctored photos and videos depicting him physically attacking Biden, such as hitting Mr. Biden with golf balls.

It’s all part of Trump’s 5-step fascist plan.

In a previous column, I laid out the defining traits of fascism and how MAGA Republicans embody them, and I suggested that Trump and his lackeys shouldn’t be seen as simply “authoritarian.” They need to be understood as fascist.

But how could Trump actually turn America into a fascist state?

In five steps, which he’s already signaled he plans to take. Here they are:

Step 1: Use threats of violence to gain power.

Hitler and Mussolini relied on their vigilante militias to intimidate voters and local officials. We watched Trump try to do the same in 2020. Even before he incited the attack on the US Capitol, he said on national television: “Proud Boys, stand back and stand by.”

Now, Trump is vilifying his political opponents as “vermin” who needed to be “rooted out.” He shows an image of Biden hog-tied.

After Manhattan District Attorney Alvin Bragg requested a gag order, providing some 300 pages of exhibits documenting the real-world consequences of Trump’s attacks, Judge Juan Merchan found the filing persuasive. In late March, he said Trump’s statements: “were threatening, inflammatory, denigrating, and the targets of his statements ranged from local and federal officials, court and court staff, prosecutors and staff assigned to the cases, and private individuals including grand jurors performing their civic duty,” citing Bragg’s filing, [and had caused] “the assignment of increased security resources to investigate threats and protect the individuals and family members” of those Trump targeted.

After the gag order was issued, Trump attacked Judge Merchan’s daughter for running a political consulting firm that’s worked

with Democrats, saying it should disqualify Merchan from his case. On Friday night, March 29, Bragg asked the judge to “clarify or confirm” that the order applies to family members and order Trump to “immediately desist from attacks on family members.”

Also in late March, US District Judge Reggie Walton spoke out in an interview with CNN’s Kaitlan Collins about Trump possibly instigating violence:

“We do these jobs because we’re committed to the rule of law and we believe in the rule of law. And the rule of law can only function effectively when we have judges who are prepared to carry out their duties without the threat of potential physical harm.”

Meanwhile, Republican election officials have testified to the threats they faced when they refused Trump’s demands to falsify the 2020 election results.

Brad Raffensperger, the Georgia secretary of state who refused Trump’s demand to “find” the votes needed to flip the state into Trump’s hands, said “my email, my cell phone was doxxed.”

Rusty Bowers, the Arizona state speaker and a pro-Trump Republican who resisted pressure from Trump and Rudy Giuliani and refused to go along with an illegal scheme to replace Arizona’s legal slate of electors, remains a target of pro-Trump partisans. As he said, “They have had video panel trucks with videos of me proclaiming me to be a pedophile.”

Gabriel Sterling, the chief operating officer for the Georgia secretary of state who helped manage the 2020 presidential election and recount in Georgia that found no widespread fraud, has faced death threats. Sterling admonished Trump:

“Mr. President, you have not condemned these actions or this language. ... This has to stop. Stop inspiring people to commit potential acts of violence. Someone’s going to get hurt. Someone’s going to get shot. Someone’s going to get killed.”

Step 2: Consolidate power.

After taking office, a would-be fascist turns every arm of government into a tool of his will. One of Hitler’s first steps was to take over the civil service, purging it of non-Nazis.

In October of 2020, Trump issued his own executive order that would have enabled him to fire tens of thousands of civil servants and replace them with MAGA loyalists. He never got to act on it, but he’s now promising to apply it to the entire civil service if reelected.

Trump has urged making every executive branch employee fireable by the president of the United States. This has become the centerpiece of something called Project 2025, a presidential agenda assembled by MAGA Republicans, that would, as the AP put it, “dismantle the US government and replace it with Trump’s vision.”

Step 3: Demonize a group of people and establish a police state to round them up into detention camps.

Hitler used the imaginary threat of “the poison of foreign races” — mostly Jews — to justify taking control of the military and police, placing both under his top general, and granting law-enforcement powers to his civilian militias.

Now Trump is using the same language to claim he needs similar powers to deal with immigrants. Trump says they’re “poisoning the blood of our country.”

Recently, Trump warned that the country would face a “blood bath” if he lost the election (he then walked back the claim, saying he was referring to losing the auto industry). A few days later, he attacked Jewish Democrats in a radio interview, saying that Jews who vote for Democrats hate their religion and Israel.

At a rally on March 16, Trump baselessly claimed that other countries were sending gang members and other undesirable to the United States: “I don’t know if you call them ‘people,’ in some cases. They’re not people, in my opinion.” He then referred to them as “animals.”

Trump plans to deploy troops within the US to conduct immigration raids and round up what he estimates to be 18 million people who would be placed in mass-detention camps while their fate is decided.

Even though crime is actually down across the nation, Trump is citing an imaginary crime wave to justify sending troops into blue cities and states against the will of governors and mayors: “You’re supposed to not be involved in that, you just have to be asked by the governor or the mayor to come in — the next time, I’m not waiting.”

Trump insiders say he plans to invoke the Insurrection Act to have the military crush civilian protests. We saw a glimpse of that in 2020, when Trump deployed the National Guard against peaceful protesters outside the White House.

With promises to pardon Jan. 6 criminals and stop prosecutions of right-wing domestic terrorists, Trump would empower groups like the Proud Boys to act as MAGA enforcers.

Step 4: Jail the opposition.



JESSE JACKSON



President Biden warned Israel's government not to launch a planned offensive and instead allow humanitarian aid in Gaza, which Netanyahu has scorned.

Israel Does Not Have the Right to Reduce Gaza to Rubble

As the horror in Gaza deepens, anyone trying to follow announced US policy would suffer from whiplash. Faced with an unimaginable human catastrophe, the administration chose not to veto a UN Security Council resolution calling for a ceasefire in Gaza. Vice President Kamala Harris voiced support for a ceasefire. But the new clothes couldn't dress up the old policy. In late March, the administration preposterously certified that Israel was adhering to international law in order to provide

Israel with yet another arms shipment, including 25 more F-35A fighter jets and 1,800-2,000-pound bombs. The administration is denying reality, scorning global opinion and twisting itself into a pretzel to arm the indefensible.

No bridge can span the gulf between what the president says he supports and what his administration does. The US allowed the ceasefire resolution to pass the Security Council. President Biden has repeatedly warned the Israeli government not to launch their planned offensive against Rafah in the South of Gaza, the last refuge for 1.4 million Palestinians displaced by the Israeli bombardment. An assault, Biden says, would cross his "red line." The president has called for immediate humanitarian aid to Gaza, even directing the US military to build a temporary pier to allow provisions to come in from the sea. The president has called a two-state solution the only resolution of the crisis. He has warned against the expanding of settler assaults on Palestinians in the West Bank. He has stated that a revitalized Palestinian authority must take charge in Gaza when the war ends.

Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu scorns all of this. He has rejected the International Court of Justice, which ruled that Israel was on the path toward genocide in Gaza and called on Israel to do more to prevent a famine. He has ignored the growing demonstrations within Israel which accuse him of sacrificing the Israeli hostages in waging the war. He has stated that the two-state solution is dead. His government has aided and abet-

ted the violent expansion of settler activity in the West Bank. Israeli forces have struck in Lebanon, Syria, and Iraq. On Sunday, March 31, he announced that he had approved the operational plans for the offensive in Rafah, stating that "we will enter the city despite the opposition of US President Biden." In the Muslim holy celebration of Ramadan, Netanyahu is turning fasting into famine.

Biden's response? To approve yet another shipment of jets and bombs to Israel, literally arming the offensive that is coming. This policy makes the US complicit in what is one of the most brutal assaults on a civilian population since World War II. Even as the administration criticizes Russia for imprisoning and mistreating journalists, it says nothing about an Israeli assault that is responsible for the deaths of 75% of all the journalists killed in the world over the last year.

Israeli's assault has now killed 32,800 Palestinians in Gaza and wounded more than 75,000 more, most of them women and children. A staggering 85% of the population has been displaced from their homes. Sixty percent of the infrastructure has been reduced to rubble. Israel's crippling blockade now is on the verge of producing mass famine.

Biden's stated policy is sensible: ceasefire, emergency humanitarian aid, release of hostages on both sides, no regional war, an end to settler expansion in the West Bank, a two-state solution aided by the US and countries in the region. His operational policy is to provide the arms and aid that Ne-

tanyahu needs to sustain the ruinous course that is sabotaging every element of Biden's stated policy goals — and creating an indefensible human catastrophe.

This calamity was triggered by the Hamas terrorist attacks that killed nearly 1,200 Israelis and took another 214 hostage. Israel, as the Biden administration spokespeople say, has the right to defend itself. It does not have the right to reduce Gaza to rubble and the Palestinians there to starvation. The US has the right to give Israel the weapons to defend itself. Two thousand-pound bombs, however, are not defensive weapons.

Perhaps Netanyahu would ignore the US if Biden told him to stop. His ruling coalition is grounded in the extreme right. Netanyahu faces political and judicial peril if the war ends. Yet, Israel lacks the capacity to sustain its offensive for long without US armaments, aid and diplomatic cover. And whether Netanyahu listens or not, Biden can at least end US complicity in this horror. This catastrophe mocks the administration's "rules-based international order." Worse, it offends standards of basic human decency, of international law, of any respect of the opinions of humankind. This horror must be brought to an end.

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.

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Ill-Defining Antisemitism: IHRA Definition Will Chill Speech and Academic Freedom

By HANK KALET

Colleges and universities around the country are cracking down on what their professors are saying about Israel, Palestine, and Hamas. There have been suspensions of professors and student groups amid the privileging of pro-Israeli viewpoints, and a political push by to define any criticism of Israel as antisemitic.

A professor at Texas Tech University suspended Jairo Fúnez-Flores, an assistant professor of curriculum studies and teacher education, calling several angry posts to X (formerly Twitter) "hateful, antisemitic, and unacceptable," equating what should be protected speech on an outside platform with harassment and direct discrimination, the Chronicle of Higher Education reported March 5.

Supporters of these actions paint them as a defense of vulnerable students and faculty, but they are a chilling inversion the First Amendment protections of free speech, assembly, and religion, and a direct threat to academic freedom and the role of higher education in our culture.

I teach at Rutgers University. I am a journalist and a Jew. I am sensitive to the rise in antisemitism, and its history. It remains a pernicious, ingrained, and danger-

ous set of beliefs. Jews have been murdered, assaulted, spit on. Synagogues and Jewish schools have been defaced, threatened with bombs or fire. The number of antisemitic incidents — like nearly all categories of bias incidents — has been rising over the last eight years, though the numbers are not reliable. Only about four in five local agencies submit data to the FBI, which issues an annual report on all forms of bias, and flawed and competing definitions pushed by organizations with skin in the game like the ADL and AIPAC.

Consider numbers released earlier this month by the New Jersey Attorney General's office: The number of reported bias incidents jumped 23% — with antisemitic acts accounting for nearly half of the increase. Overall, reported anti-Jewish incidents jumped 59% (from 446 to 708). These numbers might seem alarming. But the vast majority of reported incidents were categorized as harassment or intimidation, vague categories that rely on our ability to define what constitutes bias in the first place.

This is the crux of the debate in the New Jersey Legislature, where two bills are on the table that would codify a problematic definition into state law and align the state with Republican-led states like Indiana,

Florida, South Dakota, Georgia, and Arkansas. The bills, which were pulled from a hearing on April 1, but are far from dead, use a definition developed by the International Holocaust Remembrance Association (and that is under consideration by the US Department of Education) that is overly broad, and accompanied by contradictory examples that equate Jews with the state of Israel even as it says that Jews, as a people, should not be judged by Israel's actions.

This kind of legislation calls out Jews, says they are exceptional, says they require special protections above and beyond what already exists in the law. Jews are separate, this kind of legislation says, and — to the extent that these bills equate antisemitism with pro-Palestinian criticism of Israel — codifies a longstanding antisemitic trope (dual-loyalty) into law. They say, essentially, that to be truly Jewish, one must support the state of Israel, to show a special brand of loyalty to Israel, and to criticize it is to be less than Jewish, to be what Natan Sharansky and Gil Troy have called an "un-Jew."

Many Jews were rightly horrified by former President Donald Trump's recent attacks on Jewish Democrats, who he accused of disloyalty both to the United States and to Israel. These Jews, he said, "hate their religion."

cents per minute. In a desperate attempt to block this pay floor, Uber and Lyft are threatening to leave the city, claiming the requirement would make rides too expensive for residents.

This argument — that higher driver pay would force big fare hikes — is one of Uber and Lyft's favorite scare tactics. As drivers across the country have protested poverty wages and organized for better pay, the rideshare giants have trotted out this line again and again — in Connecticut, Chicago, New York, and Seattle, to name just a few places.

We decided to test that claim. Our team analyzed over a billion rideshare trips, comparing four years of data in Chicago and New York, the only two US cities that make rideshare corporations report detailed trip data.

In New York, drivers overcame Uber's fearmongering and won a minimum pay standard that took effect in February 2019. In Chicago, drivers are organizing but haven't yet won pay protections. If Uber's argument were true, fares should have gone up more in New York after the pay standard took effect.

In fact, the opposite happened. Over the four years we studied, Uber and Lyft raised fares by 54% in Chicago, where drivers have no pay protections. In New York, they only increased fares by 36%. The reality just doesn't match Uber's scare tactics.

So if fares went up more in the city without a pay floor, what's causing these big price hikes? We looked at many possible explanations, but only one fits the data: pressure from Wall Street.

For years, Uber used money from the likes of Goldman Sachs, BlackRock, and Jeff Bezos to subsidize cheap rides and decent pay. But now that Uber dominates the market, its investors are demanding their cut. So Uber has jacked up fares and cut driver pay.

The strategy is working: just last month, Uber reported an annual profit for the first time ever — and promptly announced plans to give \$7 billion to shareholders.

Letting rideshare corporations bully and bamboozle to get their way harms all of us. Riders are forced to pay more to get around, while drivers have to work long hours and still struggle to cover the bills. Falsely claiming that wage protections will drive up fares seems to be a tactic to pit driv-

ers against passengers and obscure this massive transfer of wealth to Wall Street.

The good news is that communities are no longer falling for Uber's scare tactics. In Minneapolis, the city council stood with the city's drivers instead of giving in to Uber's bullying. And in Chicago, drivers are organizing for an ordinance setting a living wage and protections against unfair deactivations — and have the support of a majority of the city council.

These fights are far from over — already Uber and Lyft are turning to the Minnesota state legislature, which could pass a law banning the Minneapolis ordinance from going into effect.

But when drivers and communities stand together, these cities are showing we can say no to Uber's bullying, ensure drivers are paid enough to provide for their families, and shape a transportation system that serves us instead of Wall Street.

Mariah Montgomery is the national campaigns director at PowerSwitch Action. This op-ed was originally published at Inequality.org and distributed for syndication by OtherWords.org.

'Gaslighting and Greed': How Uber Overcharges Riders and Underpays Drivers

If you've taken an Uber recently, you've probably noticed it costs a lot more than before. Here's why.

By MARIAH MONTGOMERY

If you've taken an Uber ride recently, you've probably noticed it cost a lot more than a few years ago. Why is that?

PowerSwitch Action, my organization, conducted the largest-ever study of rideshare fares to find out. We discovered a story of gaslighting and greed that squeezes drivers and riders alike — while funneling our money to banks and billionaires.

In March, Minneapolis passed an ordinance requiring rideshare corporations to pay drivers at least \$1.40 per mile and 51

Opill: A Victory for Women (and their Male Partners)

Sex and procreation: the linkage between the two has been a source of joy, as well as anguish. Many people who enjoy sex do not want to be parents. In the United States, where “unwanted” children plunge into an abyss of poverty and despair, governments — Uncle Sam and his state minions — bizarrely often emerge as pro-natalist warriors, as though the country needs babies from unwilling and unable parents.

We have restricted abortion, with restrictions that vary by state, with a hodgepodge of rules: how many weeks after conception? How old the pregnant woman? How involved the father? Will insurance pay? What about the health-of-the-mother? What about rape? Fetal viability? ... Physicians, depending on the state, run a gauntlet of questions before performing an abortion. South Dakota legislators now want to issue a video expressly for physicians, clarifying the rules.

Contraception is less fraught with moral queasiness, moral quandaries; yet even with contraception some states have reared their pro-natalist banners, arguing that contraceptive devices are a variation of abortifacients.

For middle class women who live in “blue” states with no draconian restrictions, contraception is easy. A prescription from a woman’s regular obstetrician, a nearby pharmacy, insurance coverage — all render the quest for contraception simple. In New York City, Governor Hochul just signed an order letting women buy contraceptive pills, rings, or patches without a prescription.

But other women live in obstetrician deserts (thank you, United States Supreme Court for giving us that new demarcation, that new term) where obstetrician/gynecologists, fearful of legislators’ oversight, have decamped to friendlier states. Some women live in rural areas, far from physicians. Young women, old enough to be pregnant (sometimes from rape, sometimes from incest), may not be old enough to buy contraceptives.

As for pharmacies, depending on the state, pharmacists who think contraception immoral can cite a “conscience” clause that will let them refuse to fill prescriptions. Instead of “loco parentis,” we have “in loco pharmacist.” (Admittedly, the pharmacies themselves may be obligated to find a pharmacist willing to fill a specific woman’s prescription.) And health centers, like those administered by Planned Parenthood, face the funding cuts that have blocked women’s access to contraceptives (a legacy from President Trump). Power To Decide, which helps guide peo-

ple to birth control, estimates that more than 19 million lower-income women who need publicly funded birth control live without access to centers that offer a full range of contraceptive methods. We have spawned another new term: contraceptive deserts. (Stateline, “Some States Some States Already Are Targeting Birth Control, May 19, 2022)

So thank you to Opill, a progesterone-only pill. In much of the world, women don’t need a prescription for Opill. Ironically, higher income countries require prescriptions; lower-income ones, like China and India, do not, though the United Kingdom recently reversed course. But the United States and 44 other countries do require a prescription; 56 countries require a prescription in theory, not in practice; 35 countries allow access so long as the woman is screened for suitability.

Happily, change is afoot. The American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists, the American Medical Association and the American Academy of Family Physicians have OK’d measures to let women buy birth control without a prescription. At last it will happen. Women who want to escape the linkage between sex and procreation can take charge of their fertility. They can buy Opill (cleared by the FDA) easily at pharmacies or online.

This spring has brought bleak news on a host of political fronts. Let us savor this victory for women, and their male partners.

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

Be Afraid, Be Very Afraid of Republican ‘Reforms’

By SAM URETSKY

There is a classic joke (or is it a joke?): “how can you tell if a politician is lying?” The traditional answer is “When they open their mouth,” but some politicians are more trustworthy than others. That’s why the White House fact sheet, March 21, seems trustworthy. The heading is: “80% of House Republicans Release Plan Targeting Medicare, Social Security, and the Affordable Care Act, Raising Costs, and Cutting Taxes for the Wealthy.”

The original 180-page document, “Fiscal Sanity to Save America” is available at https://hern.house.gov/uploaded-files/final_budget_including_letter_web_version.pdf.

It promises things like:

Page 5: Ensuring Liberty Through Deregulation

Page 25: Creating Opportunity Through Tax Reform

Page 73: Protecting Conservative Values

Page 86: Personalized and Affordable Health Care

Page 97: Saving Medicare

Page 102: Preventing Biden’s Cuts to Social Security

Obviously there’s a lot more, but protecting Social Security is based on the realization that people are living longer, and if Social Security isn’t reformed, the trust fund will run out of money, and benefits will have to be cut. The Republican proposal is to raise the age at which people are entitled to full benefits from 67 to 69.

Now consider this, While Americans are living longer than previous generations, the wealthy are living longer than the poor. According to The Equality of Opportunity Project (<http://www.equality-of-opportunity.org/health/>) women at the lowest 1% can have a mean longevity of 78.8 years, while the wealthiest 1% have a projected survival of 88.9 years. Among men, the variation is even

greater. Men at the bottom of the scale have a survival of 72.7 years while the top 1% have a mean estimated survival of 87.3 years. In other words, the rich get more money each month, and they get it for a longer period of time.

Now protecting Medicare is a good idea, but, but Obamacare originally had a provision for expanding Medicaid, the program that provides healthcare for low income families at federal expense. The expansion of Medicaid wasn’t automatic, the states had to ask for it. It was a federal expense the first year, but then the federal funds would cover 90% and the states would have to pay the remaining 10%. Most state politicians would be anxious to get federal money, but Republicans were more concerned about giving the Democrats a win.

KFF.org wrote “... financial struggles among rural hospitals has focused attention on the gaps in Medicaid coverage in non-expansion states, and availability of temporary enhanced federal funding for states that newly adopt expansion has sparked renewed expansion discussions in some of these states.”

The Texas Tribune wrote “Eighteen percent of Texans don’t have health insurance — the highest rate in the nation — and Johnson had already filed five pieces of legislation that session to use Medicaid expansion to get as many as 1.2 million of those people insured.” Of course the problems of rural hospitals, which force closure, are largely due to the fact that many of their patients have no way of paying for care.

The White House fact sheet notes the Republican Study Commission (RSC) proposal:

- Calls for over \$1.5 trillion in cuts to Social Security, including an increase in the retirement age to 69 and cutting disability benefits.

- Raises Medicare costs for seniors by taking away Medicare’s authority to negotiate prescription drug costs, repealing \$35 insulin, and the \$2,000 out-of-pocket cap in the Inflation Reduction Act

Transitions Medicare to a premium support system that

CBO has found would raise premiums for many seniors.

- Cuts Medicaid, the Affordable Care Act, and the Children’s Health Insurance Program by \$4.5 trillion over 10 years, taking coverage away from millions of people, eroding care for seniors, children, and people with disabilities, and taking us back to the days where people could be denied care for pre-existing conditions and charged more for health insurance simply for being a woman.

Well, that’s a quick look at health and aging, but there are so many other topics such as PROTECTING CONSERVATIVE VALUES. The section lists proposed bills that support “conservative values” no matter the consequences. For example, Right to Life is apparently a conservative value. The proposed Republican budget endorses a bill that would provide legal protections “at all stages of life, including the moment of fertilization.” The bill that has been proposed makes no exception for in vitro fertilization.

There’s protection of the Second Amendment, and proposes that if a person lives in a state that has no licensing requirements for carrying firearms, they have the right to carry their guns in states that have strong restrictions. The RSC Budget would implement Rep. Michael Cloud’s (R-Texas) No Registry Rights Act. This bill would prevent the ATF from using records to create a federal firearms registry. Specifically, it would mandate the ATF destroy all firearm transaction records on file.

Freedom of religion: ... supports former Rep. Ted Budd’s (R-NC) Equal Treatment of Faith-Based Organizations Act, which would reverse the Obama-era policy that required faith-based providers of social services to disclose their religious affiliation and refer potential clients to other providers ...

Christopher Hitchens wrote “Why Orwell Matters,” and he does — and if you doubt it, read the RSC report. Now more than ever.

Sam Uretsky is a writer and pharmacist living in Louisville, Ky. Email sam.uretsky@gmail.com

State-Level Marijuana Legalization Has Been a Stunning Success

In the last decade or so, 24 states have legalized cannabis for adult use. There’s a reason none have turned back.

By PAUL ARMENTANO

It’s been over a decade since Colorado and Washington became the first two states to legalize marijuana for adults. With the benefit of hindsight, it’s fair to ask: Has this policy been successful?

Absolutely. A policy of legalization, regulation, and education is preferable to a policy of criminalization, stigmatization, and incarceration.

Let’s be clear. Legalization didn’t create or normalize the marijuana market in the United States. The market was already here.

But under a policy of prohibition, this market flourished underground — and those

involved in it remained largely unaccountable. They didn’t pay taxes, they didn’t check IDs, and they didn’t test the purity of their products. Disputes that arose in the illicit marketplace were not adjudicated in courts of law.

By contrast, under regulation, cannabis products in many states are now available from licensed manufacturers at retail stores.

Cannabis is cultivated, and products are manufactured, in accordance with good manufacturing practices. Products are lab tested and labeled accordingly. And sales are taxed, with revenues being reinvested in the community. Since 2014, retail sales of adult-use cannabis products have generated more than \$15 billion in tax revenue.

Most importantly, millions of Americans — many of them young adults — are no longer being arrested for possessing a substance that is objectively safer than either tobacco or alcohol.

According to data compiled by the Federal Bureau of Investigation, the annual number of marijuana-related arrests in the United States fell from 750,000 in 2012 to 227,000 in 2022, the last year for which data is available.

In short, these state-level policy changes have resulted in countless Americans being spared criminal records — and the lost opportunities that accompany them — in the past decade.

And contrary to opponents’ fears, cannabis use by teens has not risen in parallel with legalization.

According to data provided by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the percentage of high schoolers who use marijuana actually fell 30% over the past decade. Compliance check data from California, Colorado, Nevada, and other legal marijuana states show that licensed marijuana retailers do not sell products to underage patrons.

Also contrary to some critics’ claims, legalization states have not experienced any spike in either psychosis or mental illnesses.

According to findings published last year in the Journal of the American Medical Association, rates of psychosis-related health care claims are no higher in jurisdictions where cannabis is legal than in those where it’s not. Stanford University researchers similarly reported last year that residents of states where cannabis is legal exhibit no higher levels of psychosis than those in non-legal states.

Legalization is also successfully disrupting the illicit marketplace. According to a 2023 survey, 52% of consumers residing in legal states said that they primarily sourced their cannabis products from brick-and-mortar establishments. By contrast, only 6% of respondents said that they primarily purchased cannabis from a “dealer.”

Many consumers in non-legal states also

reported that they frequently traveled to neighboring legal states to purchase cannabis products rather than buying from illicit dealers in their own state.

Twelve years into states’ marijuana legalization experiment, public support for making marijuana legal nationwide has never been higher. To date, 24 states have legalized the adult-use market.

None of these states have ever repealed their legalization laws. That’s because these policies are working largely as voters and politicians intended — and because they’re preferable to cannabis criminalization.

After a century of failed policies and “canna-bigotry,” the verdict is in. Legalization is a success, and the end of cannabis prohibition can’t come soon enough.

Paul Armentano is the Deputy Director for NORML, the National Organization for the Reform of Marijuana Laws. This op-ed was adapted from an earlier version published at The Hill and distributed for syndication by OtherWords.org.

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WAYNE O'LEARY

Democrats Bite the Bullet

The word has come down from the Democratic establishment: It's time for progressives and other party dissidents to stop grousing and get behind Joe Biden. This time, the stakes are too high; the autocratic Trump can't be allowed within hailing distance of the White House or the trappings of power. Rallying around the president is the imperative of the hour.

Furthermore, all thoughts of challenging the incumbent, either from inside or outside the Democratic Party, must be set aside. After all (so the argument goes), Ralph Nader spoiled it for Al Gore, Bernie spoiled it for Hillary, and troublemakers like Marianne Williamson, Cornel West or RFK Jr. could spoil it for Biden.

The reason the alleged spoilers have traction, of course, is Biden's performance on the job. I'm not referring to age here. The president's verbal flubs, memory lapses, and physical appearance, while concerning, are not the real problem. His opponent Trump is nearly as old, and his public gaffes are as bad, if not worse. Moreover, if Biden is a candidate for a debilitating health incident — he had a near-fatal brain aneurism years ago — the obese Trump, with his lack of exercise and cheeseburger diet, is obviously headed for a major cardiac event at some point.

Biden's real problem relates to his policies, not his health, and they in turn are an outgrowth of his supposed strong suit, governmental experience. He's simply been inside the Beltway loop too long — 50 years and counting. He over-values archaic insti-

tutional customs and relationships that tend to block progress. He's internalized a centrist Democratic issues playbook that's out of date and ill-adapted to addressing the disruptive changes of the past two decades. He appears to believe the way things worked in the 1970s, '80s and '90s is the ideal model — the way things should work and can be made to work again.

There's no fundamental need, the president thinks, to challenge the existing order, no need to question the received wisdom. However, many Democrats beg to differ; they've shown their restiveness throughout the primary season, despite having no serious heavyweight standard-bearer to carry their flag.

The administration would have us believe it's only the young and foolish who won't happily jump aboard the Biden train, but the caucus of disaffected Democrats is much broader than that. It includes the progressive-populists who nearly seized the party's presidential nomination in both 2016 and 2020, writing much of its platform the latter year, but who have been marginalized for 2024. Anti-Trump Republicans have actually received more of a welcome into the Democratic fold than the party's own progressive insurgents.

Lack of grassroots enthusiasm for the prospective Democratic ticket was evident in recent primary results. "Uncommitted" received 13% of the vote in Michigan, 19% in Minnesota, 10% in Washington State, and 29% in Hawaii's caucuses, along with 7% for recent dropout Dean Phillips in Maine. Party dissidents in Michigan, especially motivated by the Gaza situation, kept an incumbent president from getting more than 81% of his party's vote, adding 3% tallies each for Williamson and Phillips to the uncommitted column, thereby producing a 19% anti-Biden result — not exactly a ringing endorsement of the lackluster administration.

Part of the lagging intra-party support

for the Biden-Harris team arises from the second half of the ticket. Vice President Kamala Harris, who registered a 36% positive rating in a March *USA Today*/Suffolk University poll (worse than the president at 41%), has become an obvious drag on the ticket. Joe Biden, whose energy and political skills have deteriorated with age, desperately needs a hard-charging, top-quality backup to take the fight to the GOP; Harris is not it. Her failings as a compelling speechmaker and message-carrier, plus the perception that she's a policy lightweight, raise thoughts of replacing her.

The possible choosing of a new running mate by Biden has historical precedent. Franklin Roosevelt himself switched vice presidents twice during his time in office. From 1933 to 1940, his veep was John Nance Garner, an old-time Wilsonian budget-balancer who gradually turned against the expansive New Deal. In 1940, FDR replaced him with Secretary of Agriculture Henry Wallace to solidify the farm vote. Wallace, a leftist New Dealer, was dropped in favor of the less radical Harry Truman in 1945 to appease party conservatives. Harris, who has become the Democratic Dan Quayle, would not, if similarly removed, be greatly missed by most of the country.

Of course, Biden would have a more complicated task in replacing Harris than FDR faced; the Democratic Party of today is an identity-politics party beset by the sociocultural demands of its multiple ethnic-gender constituencies. FDR's vice presidents were White men. Kamala Harris is female and of mixed race; three groups, feminists, Blacks and Asian-Americans, would undoubtedly clamor for her retention on the ticket regardless of qualifications.

Thinkers within Democratic Party circles and liberal academia are slowly coming around to an understanding that the obstacles presently facing the party largely emanate from the problem Vice President

Harris, chosen for who she is and not for what she's done, personifies — the triumph of political identitarianism over economic populism. Two recent books, Michael Kazin's "What it Took to Win" (2022) and John B. Judis' and Ruy Teixeira's "Where Have All the Democrats Gone?" (2023), clearly explicate the Democratic predicament.

By refusing to jettison an overwrought preoccupation with racial and gender policies, these authors suggest, the party has foreclosed reconnecting with the lost blue-collar constituency critical to rebuilding a majority movement of working Americans. Indeed, a case can be made that, by rejecting the economic-populist crusade of Bernie Sanders (in some ways, the last genuine New Dealer), Democrats shut the door on broad-based electoral success for the foreseeable future.

The party can still win intermittent, short-term victories by relying on its new base of socially liberal, upper-middle-class suburban Whites, activist women, and aspiring urban minorities, but constructing a more permanent Roosevelt-style coalition revolving around economic class will be hard to achieve. For one thing, FDR's eternal antagonist big business is an integral part of the Biden coalition, which extends through Silicon Valley. For another, as the president always stresses, he's "a capitalist."

For the immediate future, the Democrats should be able to survive through November. Lots of thoughtful Americans, including Democratic loyalists, would like to vote against Joe Biden for his mishandling of Gaza, immigration and inflation, but they can't consider it because of what awaits on the other side of the political valley of death.

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.

The End of Recessions in the United States?

By JOEL D. JOSEPH

What happened to the recession that most economists predicted last year? Why is the United States leading the world economy in economic growth while having lower inflation? The answer to both questions is that the United States economy is entering uncharted territory where recessions don't exist.

There have been 48 recessions in the United States dating back to the Articles of Confederation in 1777. Most economists believe that recessions are a natural and necessary part of every business cycle. However, there are four significant factors, which have all expanded in the past 20 years, that will resist recessions and make them a relic of history.

1. Continually Improving Technology

During the past 20 years technology has been rapidly reshaping the economy. Smartphones have had a significant impact on the economy that is fighting against recessions. For example, smartphone apps, like Uber and Lyft, have become a new safety net for unemployed workers.

In addition, artificial intelligence, ro-

bots and the Internet have increased productivity dramatically. A new study commissioned by the Interactive Advertising Bureau (IAB) and led by a researcher from the Harvard Business School, found that the Internet economy grew seven times faster than the total US economy. During the past four years the Internet economy now accounts for 12% of the US gross domestic product (GDP).

In a national economy that grows between 2 to 3 percent per year, the internet economy's contribution to the US GDP grew 22% per year since 2016. In 2020 alone, it contributed \$2.45 trillion to the United States' \$21.18 trillion GDP. Since the IAB began measuring the economic impact of the Internet in 2008, the Internet's contribution to GDP has grown eightfold, from \$300 billion to \$2.45 trillion. The study, "The Economic Impact of the Market-Making Internet — Advertising, Content, Commerce, and Innovation: Contribution to US Employment and GDP," also discovered that more than 17 million jobs in the US were generated by the Internet, 7 million more than four years ago. More Internet jobs, 38%, were created by small firms and self-employed individuals than by the largest internet companies, which generated 34%.

2. Higher Minimum Wages

California is leading the way with a \$20 hourly minimum for fast food work-

ers. "States with a minimum wage of more than \$12 an hour saw industrywide employment growth of 25%, compared with only 7% growth in states still using the federal minimum of \$7.25. Although there was some variation from state to state, there is a clear trend that states with higher minimum wages have seen more job growth," AmericanProgress.org reported.

3. The Gig Economy of Uber, Lyft and DoorDash

Uber was founded in 2009. It is based on a smartphone app. The first Apple smartphone was released in 2007. Uber, Lyft and DoorDash could not exist without wide smartphone distribution.

Uber reported that its "earnings," as it calls its drivers and food delivery workers, reached a record high of 5.4 million earners in the fourth quarter of 2022. DoorDash currently has more than 2 million monthly active Dashers, according to Jenn Rosenberg, a company spokesperson. More than 13 million Dashers have used the platform since it launched a decade ago. Flex, a trade association representing DoorDash, Grubhub, HopSkipDrive, Instacart, Lyft, Shipt and Uber, estimates that more than 23 million Americans have earned money through an online platform in the past year.

The Gig economy is a new safety net. Workers who quit or got laid off can often get income by using their smartphone and car to start earning instantly. Gig workers

can get income even faster than they could receive unemployment benefits.

4. Immigration

While former President Trump complains about immigration, immigrants have significantly contributed to economic activity in the United States. "Immigrants promote economic growth by moving to areas where businesses are forming or expanding and need more workers. As workers, consumers and entrepreneurs, immigrants promote business dynamism by adding their skills to the labor force, serving as a new group of customers and starting up new businesses," *Forbes* magazine reported Feb. 23, 2023. Not only do immigrants repair roads and pick vegetables, they create new businesses. Dov Charney (American Apparel and Los Angeles Apparel), Elon Musk (Tesla and SpaceX) and Andrew Grove (Intel) were all immigrants who created thousands of jobs.

The US economy has chugged along nicely, even with the Federal Reserve trying to slow it down. The economy has not only confounded the Fed, it has economists befuddled. This is all because for the past 20 years we have been creating a new economy based on new technology, the Internet, smartphones and gig workers.

Joel D. Joseph is a lawyer, an economist and author of 15 books, including "Inequality in America: 10 Causes and 10 Cures."

The Arrogance of Unaccountable Power

By GENE NICHOL

Students of the US Supreme Court were enthusiastic to note Justice Amy Coney Barrett's surprising concurring opinion in the Colorado presidential disqualification case. (*Trump v. Anderson*). Barrett agreed that "states lack the power to enforce Sec. 3 of the 14th Amendment against presidential candidates." But, she concluded, "that principle is sufficient to resolve the case." She would do no more. Barrett thus distanced herself from the majority's broader conclusion that detailed federal legislation is required to give force to Sec. 3. Well and good.

I was taken aback, though, by another of her comments. After chastising her three concurring female col-

leagues for "stridency," Barrett said: "All nine justices agree on the outcome of this case. That is the message Americans should take home." Thanks for the pat on the head.

Maybe it's because I grew up Catholic and even as a teenager didn't like being told by priests, when asked about the most crushing questions of life: "You're not meant to understand that. Don't ask questions. I'll tell you what you need to know." Really?

There is an odd arrogance in members of the Supreme Court telling us what we ought to think about their opinions. Frankly, I'm not much interested in their instruction.

Justice Samuel Alito famously wrote the *Dobbs* opinion, overruling *Roe v. Wade*. He adopted a theory of constitutional review — requiring a deeply held historical tradition to validate a constitutional right — that would also do in *Griswold* (contraception access), *Laurence* (gay sexual autonomy) and *Obergefell* (gay marriage). But he protested,

somewhat angrily, in *Dobbs* that "to ensure that our decision is not misunderstood or mischaracterized, we emphasize our decision does not cast doubt on other precedents." Take our word for it, he insisted, we adopt a rule only for abortion cases. (Some concession, that.)

Justice Brett Kavanaugh echoed the sentiment in his *Dobbs* concurrence. "I emphasize what the Court today states, overruling *Roe* does not threaten or cast doubt on those precedents." Even if all the world, and the English language itself, suggests it does. Their claims put me in mind of Donald Trump's rationale for believing Vladimir Putin instead of the US intelligence community about Russian interference with elections. "President Putin was extremely strong and powerful in his denial," Trump reported.

This is the Kavanaugh who told his Senate confirmation hearing that *Roe v. Wade* is "settled precedent of the

Continued on next page

Chef José Andrés' World Central Kitchen Accuses Israel of 'Targeted Attack' on 7 of its Aid Workers

By JUAN COLE

ANN ARBOR – Israeli fighter-jets routinely bomb dense urban areas, sometimes with massive bombs, in ways that President Joe Biden characterized as “indiscriminate.” Indiscriminate bombing of civilians is a war crime. On April 1, an Israeli airstrike hit an aid convoy mounted by Chef José Andrés' World Central Kitchen, killing at least seven persons – an American of Palestinian heritage along with Polish, Australian and British nationals. Yes, once again Israel has rubbed out an American.

The organization responded at X, saying, “This is a tragedy. Humanitarian aid workers and civilians should NEVER be a target. EVER.”

It seems pretty clear that the WCK believes that the Israelis deliberately struck

their food convoy. Such attacks on aid workers and attempts at food delivery are routine on the part of the Israeli Air Force, and have come to be known as “flour massacres.”

Chef Andrés himself lashed out at the Israeli government on X, saying,

“Today @WCKitchen lost several of our sisters and brothers in an IDF air strike in Gaza. I am heartbroken and grieving for their families and friends and our whole WCK family. These are people ... angels ... I served alongside in Ukraine, Gaza, Turkey, Morocco, Bahamas, Indonesia. They are not faceless ... they are not nameless. The Israeli government needs to stop this indiscriminate killing. It needs to stop restricting humanitarian aid, stop killing civilians and aid workers, and stop using food as a weapon. No more innocent lives lost. Peace starts with our shared humanity. It needs to start now.”

There's that charge of indiscriminate killing again, alongside an accusation that the Israeli government is deliberately starving the people of Gaza (“using food as a weapon”).

Andrés, trained in Spain, came to the US at the age of 21 to become a celebrity chef and renowned restaurateur. He began the World Central Kitchen in 2010 to ad-

dress the Haiti crisis of that year. Haiti is one of the more dangerous places on Earth and Haitian gangs are notorious for brutality, but even they never killed WCK aid workers.

At its website, the World Central Kitchen implicitly explained why it thinks its volunteers were targeted.

The site says, “The WCK team was traveling in a deconflicted zone in two armored cars branded with the WCK logo and a soft skin vehicle.

Despite coordinating movements with the IDF, the convoy was hit as it was leaving the Deir al-Balah warehouse, where the team had unloaded more than 100 tons of humanitarian food aid brought to Gaza on the maritime route.”

So that's it. The cars were clearly marked as WCK, and the organization had given its coordinates to the Israeli military (in retrospect perhaps a fatal mistake). Either Israeli fighter jet pilots are blind or they are deliberately hitting aid workers.

Marking oneself as a noncombatant in a war zone has long been problematic. I had friends who served in Vietnam who were convinced that medics wearing a red cross were actively targeted by the Viet Cong.

The CEO of World Central Kitchen, Erin Gore, lambasted the government of

Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu: “This is not only an attack against WCK, this is an attack on humanitarian organizations showing up in the most dire of situations where food is being used as a weapon of war. This is unforgivable.”

Just in case Israel and the US did not get the message, Ms. Gore laid it out even more explicitly:

“I am heartbroken and appalled that we—World Central Kitchen and the world—lost beautiful lives today because of a targeted attack by the IDF. The love they had for feeding people, the determination they embodied to show that humanity rises above all, and the impact they made in countless lives will forever be remembered and cherished.”

She concludes that it was a targeted attack.

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

Détente Again

By JASON SIBERT

The term detente was first used in diplomacy in the early 1900s when the French ambassador to Germany tried—and failed—to better his country's deteriorating relationship with Berlin, and in 1912, when British diplomats attempted the same thing. But detente became famous only in the late 1960s and 1970s, when Henry Kissinger, first as US national security adviser and then as US secretary of state, pioneered what would become his signature policy – easing tensions between the Soviet Union and the United States, as stated by writer Niall Ferguson in his story, “Kissinger and the True Meaning of Detente.”

It was not about friendship with Moscow but about reducing the risks that a Cold War would become hot. “The United States and the Soviet Union are ideological rivals,” Kissinger explained in his memoirs. Detente cannot change that. The nuclear age compels us to coexist. The deceased diplomat understood that the Cold War could have catastrophic consequences if it turned hot. For the former secretary of state, detente was a middle way between the aggression that had led to World War I, “when Europe, despite the existence of a military balance, drifted into a war no one wanted,” and the appeasement that he believed had led to World War II, “when the democracies failed to understand the designs of a totalitarian aggressor.”

To pursue detente, Kissinger sought to engage the Soviets on various issues, including arms control and trade. He strove to establish “linkage,” another keyword of the era, between things the Soviets appeared to want – better access to American technology - and things the United States knew it wanted – assistance in extricating itself from Vietnam. At the same time, Kissinger was prepared to be combative whenever he discerned that the Soviets were working to expand their sphere of influence from the Middle East to southern Africa. In other words, detente meant embracing “both deterrence and coexistence, both containment and an effort to relax tensions.”

Policy makers in Washington appear to have reached a similar conclusion about China, the country with which US President Joe Biden and his national security team seem ready to attempt their own version of detente. “We have to ensure that competition does not veer into conflict,” Biden told the Chinese leader Xi Jinping in California in November.

“We also have a responsibility to our people and the world to work together when we see it in our interest to do so,” said Jake Sullivan, Biden's national security adviser, made a similar point in his essay in these pages last year: “The contest is truly global, but not zero-sum. The shared challenges the two sides face are unprece-

dentented.” To paraphrase Kissinger, the United States and China are major rivals. But the nuclear age and climate change, not to mention artificial intelligence, compel them to coexist.

Kissinger has had his share of critics over the years, from both the left and the right side of the political spectrum. For the left, Kissinger's policies subordinated human rights in the Third World to containment. This was the aspect of detente to which US President Jimmy Carter objected. Many mention the overthrow of Salvador Allende in Chile as an example of Kissinger's policies at work. However, some on the right side of the political spectrum didn't like detente as well. As governor of California, Ronald Reagan spent the 1970s blasting detente as a “one-way street that the Soviet Union has used to pursue its aims.” He said the Soviets cynically exploited detente, such as when they and their Cuban allies gained the upper hand in postcolonial Angola. During his second presidential run in 1976, Reagan repeatedly pledged to scrap the policy if elected. I have a lot of mixed feelings about the former secretary of state, and I prefer the ideas of another realist thinker, Zbigniew Brzezinski, Carter's national security advisor.

The Cold War was a dangerous time for the US and the world. Kissinger said: “Both the Soviet Union and the United States have the capacity to destroy civilized life. We have a historic obligation to engage the Soviet Union and to push back the shadow of nuclear catastrophe.” Kissinger's views on nuclear arms weren't popular with conservative critics, particularly those in the Pentagon. They were infuriated by how he approached the Strategic Arms Limitation Talks, which began in November 1969 and paved the way for the first major US-Soviet arms control agreement.

America did promote its values with detente. Ferguson said: “By easing tensions both in Europe and across the rest of the world, detente helped improve the lives of at least some people under communist rule. Jewish emigration from the Soviet Union rose in the period during the years of detente. After Democratic Senator Henry “Scoop” Jackson of Washington and other congressional hawks sought to publicly pressure Moscow into releasing more Jews by holding up a US-Soviet trade deal, emigration went down. Kissinger's conservative critics vehemently opposed the United States' signing the Helsinki Accords in the summer of 1975, arguing that they represented a ratification of Soviet postwar conquests in Europe. But by getting the Soviet Union's leaders to respect certain basic civil rights of their citizens as part of the accords—a commitment they had no intention of honoring—the deal ultimately eroded the legitimacy of Soviet rule in Eastern Europe.” It must be noted that the number of state-based conflicts was lower in the Kissinger years (1969 to 1977) than in the years after and right before.

The detente policy recognized the limits of US power, reducing the risk of thermonuclear war by employing a combination of carrots and sticks and buying time for the United States to recover from hard economic times and withdraw from Vietnam. Just before his death, he warned that the new Cold War would be more dangerous than the first one because of advances in technology, such as artificial intelligence, that threaten to make weapons faster and more accurate and potentially autonomous. He called on both superpowers to cooperate whenever possible to limit the existential dangers of this new cold war—and to avoid a potentially cataclysmic showdown over the contested status of Taiwan.

What would a new detente look like? Ferguson stated it would mean engaging in

myriad negotiations on arms control (urgently needed as China frantically builds up its forces in every domain), trade, technology transfers, climate change, artificial intelligence, and space. Like SALT, these negotiations would be protracted and tedious.

Could a new detente allow China to switch sides and leave Russia isolated in the world? If so, it would save your country a lot of money. After all, China switched sides in the first Cold War and saved the US a lot of money in terms of security. Regardless of your views of Kissinger, let's hope we can remember what he did with detente as we live through this second Cold War.

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

Nichol...

Continued from previous page

Supreme Court.” And, he continued, “one of the most important things to keep in mind about *Roe* is that it has been reconfirmed many times over the past 45 years – most pointedly in *Casey v. Population Services*.” It is “precedent on precedent.” Then, of course, he overruled both *Roe* and *Casey* the first chance he got. No wonder he doesn't want his bona fides questioned.

Justice Alito has explained that us regular folk are only allowed to make limited criticisms of the most partisan Supreme Court in American history. “Everyone is free to disagree with our decisions,” he claims, “but to say the Court exhibits a lack of integrity ... crosses an important line.” That's deemed unacceptable – as they roll back vital civil liberties and intervene to

protect Donald Trump's campaign to end American democracy.

The theory of such justices, as they crush the viability of our most important judicial institution, seems to be that they made it to the high court – by hook or crook – and now the rest of us are supposed to simply accept whatever they tell us and smile. They rule, they write, we remain in thrall. Forgive me if I resist the invitation to pretend that they are actually judges.

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.

Carss...

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rate. And places with a higher Black or Hispanic population are charged on average more than \$25 in late fees, while in places where the Black population is nearly zero, people pay less than \$20.

In a new consumer protection action, the CFPB is limiting the amount companies can charge for a late fee to a more reasonable \$8.

Fee reforms work. In 2009, Congress passed the Credit CARD Act, which required banks to give consumers enough time to pay their bills, eliminated retroactive rate increases, and curbed excessive marketing to young adults. Careful study of the

CARD Act found that the market became more transparent and many fees went away. By 2013, the law was saving Americans \$20.8 billion a year.

Consumers will appreciate strong action on these issues. And consumers vote! About 82% of US adults support lowering the maximum late fee, 68% support the 15 day grace period, and 84% support requiring companies to remind consumers of late fees.

The CFPB should keep at it. Making ends meet in this country is hard enough without being charged for coming up short.

Brian Carss is a communications intern at Americans for Financial Reform and a recent graduate of North Carolina State University. This op-ed was distributed by OtherWords.org

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A Key to Baltimore's Broken Heart

By JAMIE STIEHM

A month ago, while Baltimore slept, the Francis Scott Key Bridge stood, its gorgeous and graceful truss lighting and spanning its busy global port. It is — was — a beloved landmark.

When the city woke in the dawn's early light, the bridge was not still there. A massive 21st-century cargo ship rammed it and it all fell down, severing a vital artery to the city's heart. Six workers, immigrants all, lost their lives in the frigid river.

A "cathedral of architecture," a Baltimore congressman, Kweisi Mfume, told the *New York Times*.

Bridges belong to everyone, and the deep loss is shared by all who crossed and viewed it shaping the skyline, core to the city's identity.

"Repeat that, Chief," the stunned mayor, Brandon Scott, said at 1:30 a.m. when the fire chief told him the bridge was "gone."

Knowing Baltimore almost by heart once as a newspaper reporter, I feel the in-

sult to its infrastructure, history and everyday working-class economy, the port a hive for stevedores and longshoremen.

Abolitionist great Frederick Douglass once worked on the waterfront as an enslaved young caulker.

Key, the wealthy lawyer, poet and enslaver who wrote the verses of the national anthem, "The Star-Spangled Banner," witnessed the 1814 British bombardment of Baltimore near the 1977 bridge's site while floating on a boat. His subject, the American victory, helped end the War of 1812.

"The flag was still there," flying over the star-shaped Fort McHenry on the water's edge.

Key's inspired verses, which he dashed off that day in Baltimore, gave the young nation symbolic new meaning. Flagmaker Mary Pickersgill, with her daughter, niece and an enslaved servant girl, Grace, had made the huge banner in record time.

I'll come back to why it would be wrong to name a new bridge after Key. We're starting to see him in antebellum light, not a pretty sight.

Unlucky Baltimore did not need this tragedy.

It was shaking off a recent spate of mayors sent to prison, stretches of empty row-houses and a high murder rate. The HBO series set there, "The Wire," painted a dark

Dickensian canvas. It's often seen as a country cousin to Washington, an hour south on I-95.

But there's much more to its story, I found on the beat.

I met the city griot, a storyteller in the African tradition. The museum of art has the country's largest collection of Henri Matisse paintings, thanks to a pair of sisters who knew the artist. Johns Hopkins' family invited me over to discuss Quaker history.

Baltimore has a surprising store of literary talent.

On assignment, I visited the tiny house where Edgar Allan Poe lived. From poet Ogden Nash to novelist Anne Tyler to filmmaker John Waters, unconventional creators roam there. The curmudgeon columnist, H.L. Mencken, was called the Sage of Baltimore.

The nation's first Catholic Basilica is perched downtown near the harbor. The vibrant Jewish community's mark is just as clear. I think of Terry, the interior painter who listened to opera while working.

Maryland was a slave state, so Baltimore has a stain on its soul. The Civil War's first blood was spilled there, when a mob attacked a Massachusetts regiment.

Gov. Wes Moore and Mayor Scott are both Black, charismatic new leaders.

Camden Yards, a beautiful brick ode to

old baseball parks of lore, led the way back to cities for a generation of baseball clubs.

The city is a mosaic of ethnic enclaves: Italian, Greek, Polish and Ukrainian all have their parts. Former House Speaker Nancy Pelosi grew up in Little Italy as the Baltimore mayor's daughter. Baltimore was second only to New York as a destination for Ellis Island arrivals. The Black majority is tight-knit over time.

Back to Key. Author F. Scott Fitzgerald was named after his ancestor and lived in Baltimore for a troubled spell.

The aging Key hated the budding abolitionist movement and prosecuted leaders as Washington's US attorney. Worse, he got President Andrew Jackson to name his brother-in-law Roger Taney chief justice.

Taney ruled Black people could never be citizens. His 1857 Dred Scott opinion enraged the North and helped set off the Civil War.

An avowed racist must be "gone" from bridge-building in the 21st century.

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.

Leaving Home

By BARRY FRIEDMAN

There were two polls released recently that were both depressing, if not altogether surprising.

The first, released in January, by Ranger Research Associates and Ipsos, found that only 27% of those polled agreed with the statement "if you work hard, you'll get ahead." That figure represents a 50% drop from 2010, when the question was first asked by the two polling organizations. Even darker, the poll indicated that 18% of those questioned said the American dream, its ethos of opportunity and success and a better life never was true, which was up 4% from those asked the same question in 2010.

To paraphrase Joan Didion, it isn't just the center that won't hold — the sepia-tinged America is no longer in focus.

The second, put out in March by Monmouth University, indicated that 34% of Americans would like to go settle in another country if they were free to do so. In 1950, that number was 5%. In the mid-1970s, it was between 9 and 12 percent.

Worst of all, it is the young who make up 50% of those who would leave if the circumstances presented themselves.

I'm not young.

Which brings me specifically to a recent trip to Portugal I took with my family, and generally to trips to Europe over the past decade. We've been to Iceland, my wife and

I, as well as to Norway and France, before this trip. My daughter and I were in Germany and Poland a few years back.

Vacations are a bad time to think about relocating — even when, as my daughter and I were, you're on a bus in the snow on the border between Germany and Poland and the bus is stopped for an hour while authorities check for drugs — and about how much better one's life would or might be in a foreign country. I have been going to the Bahamas every year for the past 30. I love it there. But what I love is where I stay and work as a comedian, the Atlantis Hotel and Casino in the Bahamas. The American Embassy in that country cautions travelers that "murders have occurred at all hours, including in broad daylight on the streets," so I always remind myself that sitting in the marina eating an overpriced pizza is not a true depiction of life there.

This, too, was how I felt when visiting Oslo and Reykjavik in spring — or Lisbon and Porto in March. It's as if these cities and countries put on their Sunday best. (I'm sure America does the same for Europeans when they visit Yellowstone, Wrigley Field, or Greenwich Village.) And, not to put too fine a point on this, Europe has its shares of skinheads and bigots — and they're gaining power. In Britain, more people with far-right views are under investigation by counter-extremist agencies than are those with extreme Islamic ideologies. In Germany, its Interior Ministry considers the biggest threat facing German society to be homegrown extremism. When my daughter and I were in Łódź,

a beautiful, vibrant city about 85 miles southwest of Warsaw, we took a cab to the train station. The driver reminded me of my grandfather, who was born in Łódź in 1903, and left with his family before World War I.

There were approximately 230,000 Jews who lived in the city at the beginning of World War II.

When the Soviets liberated the place in 1945, there were 877 left.

Charlottesville, Virginia, in 2017 was hellacious; Łódź in 1943 was hell. America's original sin was slavery. Europe's? Where do we start?

However ... however.

I have noticed each time I leave America, I have no great longing to return, no sense that I'm adrift in a foreign land or in any danger. Maybe it's the absence of the fear of gun violence, the access to universal health care and higher education, the vacation settings, the sense, backed up the World Happiness Report, that people in Europe are generally happier than are Americans. The continent holds eight of the Top 10 positions. (Australia and, surprisingly, Israel round out the top 10.) America comes in at No. 23 overall, and at No. 62 among those under age 30.

Europe's heterogeneousness is appealing. Morocco is closer to Lisbon than Chicago is to Tulsa.

But would I actually emigrate?

How does one leave the friends who take you to lunch, the family members who know when something's wrong, the books and films that don't have to be translated, the

grain-elevator museums in Illinois, the size-12 churros that are sometimes available at Subway, and a hundred million other things that remind you of where you are, who you are, and who you were?

When my family and I got home, there were packages on the porch and I needed to go to Reasor's, our supermarket. Because this is America, unlike Europe, you could buy Diet Coke and yogurt and dog food any time of the day or night.

Familiarity was all around.

Still, when I think of America these days, I wonder if consumerism, a familiar language, and dear friends are enough to keep me here. Loudon Wainwright III wrote in the song "Thanksgiving": "The sense of something has been lost/There's no way to replace it."

P.S. I, in fact, went to Reasor's and noticed new hours posted on the door — starting the very next day, it would no longer be open 24 hours.

*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 expected to be released in May. In addition, he is the author of "Road Comic," "Funny You Should Mention It," "Four Days and a Year Later," "The Joke Was On Me," and a novel, "Jacob Fishman's Marriages." See barrysfriedman.com and friedmanoftheplains.com.*

Walk This Way: Reviewing Anne Braden's Letters, Speeches and Writings

By SETH SANDRONSKY

Anne Braden (1924-2006) was a freedom fighter in the US South. She talked and walked left. Ben Wilkins' book "Anne Braden Speaks" (Monthly Review Press 2022) is a collection of her path-breaking advocacy to form a mass movement to challenge and transcend the economic system and its handmaidens of the color line, e.g., Jim Crow and white supremacy.

The book under review has an Introduction, three parts and an Index. In part one, we read a thoughtful letter that Braden penned to Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., urging him to reject anti-communism. That theme of the Cold War weakened unions and, Braden writes hamstrung the civil rights movement.

The following piece, "The Southern Freedom Movement in Perspective," is the longest in Wilkins' book. Braden tackles a

number of thorny issues. One, for instance, is employers' use of automation to weaken the working class via the threat of unemployment.

In her view, a solution is for unions and workers generally to organize and mobilize in way that address class and race barriers to emancipatory economics and politics.

That struggle continues in the era of artificial intelligence or AI. Braden would back the movement of artists demanding that AI tech firms, developers, platforms, digital music services and platforms end their use of AI "to infringe upon and devalue the rights of human artists," an open letter details.

There is an interesting piece of Braden's about the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee or SNCC in part two of Wilkins' book. A point that Braden makes and to which she returns throughout her career frequently is this. It is up to Whites to help other Whites to combat racism. Braden set an example of this approach in ways big and small while living and working in the American South.

In the third and final part of the book, Braden unpacks many key aspects of class and race from 1980 through 2006. Her perspective as an anti-racial capitalism activist and writer gives her a comprehensive, dare I say a dialectical, analysis of domestic and for-

eign policies. The bombs that Uncle Sam dropped on the people of Vietnam also exploded on Americans living in urban and rural communities experiencing poverty, as the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. came to understand in no small part because of Braden's advocacy.

Her prescient thinking puts into digestible context the systemic nature of racial capitalism's enduring force to destroy human beings for reasons of profits. Take Uncle Sam's paltry spending to end homelessness. Contrast that with Washington's tens of billions of Americans' taxpayer dollars for weapons to Israel and Ukraine to wage war without end.

Raytheon and other US monopoly war corporations are laughing all the way to the bank. As Braden hammers home, war and waste are central to—not peripheral from—the social order of profits first, people and the planet last. Her theory of class, race and power enlightens and informs the pages of Wilkins' book for a new generation confronting interlocked environmental and social crises.

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Is the Same Old Democratic Party Ready to Correct Course? In Time?

While calling this year's presidential election against Der Fuhrer Donald Trump the most critical ever, the Democratic Party is using the same old playbook for this year's campaigns.

The same old obsession with raising record amounts of money at the expense of presenting an authentic, vibrant agenda that will motivate millions of voters to vote for Democratic candidates.

The same old corporate-conflicted political/media consultants are controlling what the candidates say and do so as not to upset the monied interests and the lucrative consulting business for corporate clients.

We will see the same old exclusion of experienced grassroots and national citizen groups, with millions of members, who just might have some good ideas about policies, strategies, tactics, messaging, rebuttals, slogans and ways to get out the vote, that the "politicians" have never thought of or, in their arrogance, ignored. (See winningamerica.net).

Expect the same old retention of Party apparatchiks wallowing profitably in their sinecures, never looking themselves in the mirror and asking themselves why they can't landslide the worst GOP in history. Republican candidates are openly anti-worker, women, children, consumers and the environment. If your name ends in INC the

GOP might be on your side.

Get ready for the same old resistance to infusing the Party with energetic young leaders to start replacing older, smug, bureaucrats who lose to the GOP in eminently winnable races at local, state and national levels, yet have victory parties when their losses are less than the pundits or polls had predicted. (They celebrated their 2022 loss of the House of Representatives to the vicious, cruel, ignorant GOP.)

The same old scapegoating of Third Party candidates, spending gobs of money and filing frivolous lawsuits to block them from the ballot so as not to give voters more voices and choices, and to stifle any voters who might choose Third Party candidates, is in full swing. Instead of focusing on getting more of the 120 million non-voters to vote for Democratic candidates this year, the Democratic Party is focused on denying the First Amendment rights – free speech, petition and assembly – of Third Party candidates and their minuscule number of voters.

As Bishop William Barber, co-chair of the Poor People's Campaign, so cogently points out, just getting out 10 to 15 percent more low-wage/poor voters would easily help the Democrats win the national presidential election. Instead, the Democrats feed reporters material that leads newspapers to feature stories like the *New York Times* March 21, 2024, article titled "Democrats Prepare Aggressive Counter to Third-Party Threats." What they mean is being heavy on obstructing their access to the ballot.

The same old plans to waste huge amounts of money that allow media consultants to reap 15% on campaign ad buys instead of really going for the ground game are underway. For example, one pro-Democratic Party PAC announced it would spend \$140 million to put real-life voter testimonials on television praising Biden and

Too many employers, too lazy to sort job applicants from a broader pool, demand college diplomas even when the job they are hiring for does not require the relevant education and training, as a way of culling the herd. "More than half of Americans who earned college diplomas find themselves working in jobs that don't require a bachelor's degree or utilize the skills acquired in obtaining one," according to CBS News.

Requiring a superfluous college degree brazenly discriminates against poorer people, expanding and prolonging the class divide. Under a Left government, economic disadvantage would become a protected legal class alongside race, age, sex, gender identity, physical handicap and so on. Workers should be able to report job listings that seek overqualified workers to a federal bureau in the Department of Labor, which would have the power to impose substantial penalties, including fines and compensation for applicants who are discriminated against.

"Nearly two-thirds of American workers do not have a four-year college degree. Screening by college degree hits minorities particularly hard, eliminating 76% of Black adults and 83% of Latino adults," the *New York Times* reported in 2022. Yet 44% of all US employers required at least a BA or BS for all their openings.

A 2017 Harvard Business School study found that "60% of employers rejected otherwise qualified candidates in terms of skills or experience simply because they did not have a college diploma."

Requiring employers to do the right, logical and fair thing, and hire qualified high-school graduates, dropouts and GED holders will allow more Americans to avoid college debt traps, incentivize companies to train workers, give working-class families more opportunities and reduce the high-intensity competition for college and university acceptance.

Student loans are a \$1.7 trillion for-profit business which gives lenders the ultimate leverage: no matter what they do or how legitimate their inability to pay, dis-

his Party. They think that's a winner, right out of the practice of dramatized testimonials by Madison Avenue advertising firms.

Note the same old stories reporting periodic fundraising totals fed to eagerly waiting reporters comparing the Dems and the Reps money totals unattached to any programs, agendas, or commitments to the people. Thus, the March 20, 2024, *New York Times* dreary headline: "Outside Groups Pledge Over \$1 Billion to Aid Biden's Re-Election Effort."

They include environmental groups, labor unions and other "liberal PACs" that shell out the money without asking the Democratic Party to commit to any reforms or to address long-avoided necessities for the people. It's enough that the Dems are against Trump and the GOP – assuring a race to the bottom in the presidential election.

The lengthy *Times* article goes on and on reporting announcements by assorted Democratic moneypots and their GOP counterparts. Similar dreary 'cash-register politics' articles will appear in the coming weeks and months with ever more frequency.

Heaven forbid that reporters start writing about how all this money inhibits candidates from reforming the campaign finance system that is rotten to the core. Congress and the White House are for sale or rent! For example, the Democrats could – but do not – advance a much overdue agenda to curb the corporate crime wave, repeal anti-labor laws (like the notorious Taft-Hartley Act,) junk the corrupt tax system written by big corporate tax escapees, debloat the vast, wasteful, redundant military budget, and push for the popular Medicare-for-All legislation languishing for years in Congress – for starters.

Don't look for resignations from poor performers like the managers of the Democratic Senatorial Campaign Committee (DSCC). Imagine barely winning the Senate in 2022, when twice as many GOP Senators were up for re-election as Democratic Senators? How are these losers, given an encore, going to do this year when more

tressed borrowers cannot even discharge their college debts in bankruptcy. At this writing, the average interest rate on student loans is 6.9%. The highest rate at which banks borrow money, however, is 5.5%—and the rate for the much longer terms of student loans is lower.

Young scholars are bright, vulnerable citizens with endless potential, not a profit center for transnational lending institutions. If we must have a for-profit system of post-secondary education and student loans to afford it, those loans should be at zero profit to banks or anyone else. And they should be able to be discharged in bankruptcy, just like any other debt.

Because college dropouts do not enjoy the college wage premium, their loans should be forgiven entirely or heavily discounted.

But the duty of leftists is not merely to tinker at the edges to make a troubled system fairer or more efficient. We look at a situation and ask: do we need a complete overhaul? If we were inventing America's higher education system from scratch, is what we have now anything close to what we would come up with?

It's hard to imagine that anyone, regardless of their general political orientation, would say that we have the best possible way to educate young people and prepare them for the future of work and life in general. The average household with student loan debt owes \$55,000. Over a 10-year term at 6.9%, the total due including interest is \$76,000. That's the cost of a starter home in many parts of the country, and much more than students and their families spend in virtually any other nation.

Thirty-nine nations, including European powerhouses like France and Germany but also poor ones like Greece and Portugal, as well as developing socialist countries like Cuba and Brazil, currently offer their citizens college for free or for nominal fees.

We can, too.

Students and parents borrowed \$95 billion in the 2021-22 academic year. Going forward, then, replacing every penny

than twice the number of Democratic Senators are up than GOP solons?

The same old inability to confront shrinking support or turnout from their base – African Americans and Hispanic Americans – is inexcusable. The Democrats can't seem to convincingly say that the Party is not taking them for granted and to build the relationships that could motivate these voters to return to the fold.

How about not being able to recover the loss of many unionized workers to Trump, of all demons, and show all workers why their livelihoods would improve with a Democratic victory? The Dems don't even know how to use LABOR DAY to showcase their sincerity with events on the ground in every locality.

Same old Empire of lawless military forces, now growing with unconditional weapons shipments to Ukraine and Israel – the latter's genocidal war taking us into co-belligerent status under international law against defenseless Palestinian civilians in Gaza.

For a majority of American voters who reject Trump as a law-violating, unstable, narcissistic, liar weaving fantasies and fabrications that service what Rep. Jamie Raskin (D-Md.) calls "dangerous extremists" in Congress and state legislatures, this is what the Democratic Party and the two-party duopoly offer in November.

At the least, concerned, engaged voters should demand that unresponsive Party campaigns return their calls to receive their input. That's how primordial the situation is these days.

The same playbook will produce the same failed Democratic efforts. Change course before it is too late.

Ralph Nader is a consumer advocate, lawyer and author. His books include "Wrecking America: How Trump's Lawbreaking and Lies Betray All," with Mark Green. Contact Nader c/o PO Box 19312, Washington, DC 20036 or email info@nader.org. See www.nader.org, facebook.com/ralphnader or follow him on Twitter @Ralph_Nader.

TED RALL

How to Fix the College Mess

Learning is a societal and individual good. American businesses, however, have weaponized higher education into an overcredentialization racket that coerces millions of young people to borrow hundreds of billions of dollars in tuition, room and board, often to study subjects in which they have little interest, for the chance to be hired for a job. To add insult to usury, the diploma for which they sink into high-interest student loan debt reflects an education with no useful application to the position where they land.

It is tempting, from the standpoint of the Left, to dismiss the soaring price of college tuition, usurious student loan interest rates and overcredentialization as a first-world problem afflicting middle-class suburbanites who, after struggling after graduation, will soon enough pay off their debt and enjoy a significantly higher income than workers with high-school degrees. But no society can afford to ignore the plight of its most highly-educated ambitious young people who, as Crane Brinton reminded us in "The Anatomy of Revolution," are an essential catalyst to radical political change. College students are a diverse lot; nearly half are people of color and more than 60% are women. Despite the problems within higher education America has no bigger engine for upward economic mobility.

The problem is, the college income premium only accrues to those who finish all four years and get their degree, which includes very few poor and working-class people. Fifteen percent of students from the lowest quartile of wage earners make it all the way through, compared to 61% of those in the top quartile.

borrowed as student loans as a free federal grant would cost the government about \$100 billion—a tiny portion of the \$4.5 trillion a year we're currently wasting on the military and other misbegotten budgetary priorities.

There is also an argument for nationalizing public and/or private institutions of higher education. A college education, after all, will remain essential for a significant segment of the population even if we abolish employers' current obsession with overcredentialization.

Goods and services that are essential for contemporary human existence are, by definition, too important to be left to the fickle whims of a boom-and-bust marketplace. A college education surely qualifies. Higher education is too expensive a cost for cities and states to absorb. For the feds, however, it's not that big a deal. Moving to federal control would create economies of scale and countless efficiencies, such as the ability to negotiate discounted prices for textbooks and equipment, plus the ability to transfer professors and personnel throughout the system in accordance with educators' desires and regional 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

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Using disappearing ink is not what creating a "transparent budget process" means.

Culture Wars and an Embattled Utah Monument

By STEPHEN TRIMBLE

Utah's Bears Ears National Monument rarely leaves the news. The political tussle over this stunning expanse of red rock canyons exemplifies all the cultural dissonance in the rural West.

Three presidents have signed Bears Ears proclamations. Barack Obama established Bears Ears National Monument in 2016, but supporters were devastated when Donald Trump eviscerated the monument the following year, reducing its area by 85%. In 2021, President Joe Biden restored the original boundaries and then some.

What's clear is that Bears Ears remains reviled by Republican officials and cherished by Indigenous tribes and conservationists.

The monument, 1.36 million acres in southeast Utah, lies within San Juan County. The Navajo Nation covers 25% of the county, and Native people account for more than half of the 14,200-person population. Just 8% of the county is private land while another 5% is state trust land.

The rest — 62% of the county — is fed-

eral land owned by the people of the United States and administered by the Departments of Agriculture and Interior. This immense commons testifies to the sublime difficulty of the place — beautiful enough to warrant preservation as national parks, monuments and forests. But it's also arid enough to attract only a few 19th-century settlers to what had been Indigenous homeland for millennia.

I think it's fair to say that San Juan County's White residents never envisioned challenges to their political power. But in 2009, the feds came down hard on generations of casual pothunting by local White families. Then, after a century of oppressing their Indigenous neighbors, lawsuits strengthened Native voting rights. The county commission became majority Navajo from 2018 to 2022.

Native influence keeps expanding. The five tribes of the Bears Ears Inter-Tribal Coalition first envisioned a national monument and became co-stewards for these 1.36 million acres. They have a champion in Secretary of the Interior Deb Haaland, an enrolled member of the Laguna Pueblo tribe, but such historic changes make the dominant culture uneasy.

In February, Utah Governor Spencer Cox dramatically withdrew from a Bears Ears land exchange poised for completion. This swap of state trust lands for Bureau of

Land Management lands would hugely benefit the state. Details were already negotiated; each side compromised; the stakeholders were largely content.

But in 2024, Utah politics are stark, compounded by distrust and disinformation.

At statehood in 1896, Utah received four sections per township to support public schools and universities. The Utah Trust Lands Administration manages these scattered lands — blue squares on ownership maps — but blocking up these blue squares into manageable parcels means trading land with federal agencies.

Such trades aren't rare and can be grand in scale. A 1998 negotiation between Interior Secretary Bruce Babbitt and Utah Governor Mike Leavitt traded Grand Staircase — Escalante National Monument's 176,000 acres of school sections for BLM land elsewhere — along with a hefty \$50 million payment to Utah from the US Treasury. Utah Trust Lands still brags about the deal on its website.

But the old guard is up in arms about the draft Bears Ears Resource Management Plan released for public comment on March 8. The BLM's preferred alternative emphasizes traditional Indigenous knowledge and land health.

Any such gestures toward conservation elicit local outrage about the feds "destroying" the pioneer way of life. The subtext: the

people long in charge don't want to lose power.

Denouncing federal overreach is always a sure win for Utah politicians. In this year's Republican primary, San Juan County-based legislator Phil Lyman is challenging the incumbent governor with fierce anti-public lands rhetoric. Governor Cox will need to protect his right flank.

Meanwhile, school trust lands within Bears Ears remain at risk. The tallest structure in Utah, a 460-foot telecom tower with blinking red lights, could rise on state land in the heart of the monument. It's been approved by county planners, and the Trust Lands Administration could add poison pills on other lands proposed for exchange.

The elected leaders of Utah have decided that the monument's integrity and the needs of the state's children matter less than political gamesmanship.

The five tribes of Bears Ears know better: "It is our obligation to our ancestors ... and to the American people, to protect Bears Ears." Their big hearts will win in the end.

Stephen Trimble is a contributor to Writers on the Range, writersontherange.org, an independent nonprofit dedicated to spurring lively conversation about the West. He lives in Utah and will publish the 35th anniversary edition of his book "The Sagebrush Ocean: A Natural History of the Great Basin" next winter.

Bradley Cooper's Bernstein

By ROB PATTERSON

I'd doubted that Bradley Cooper's Leonard Bernstein biopic "Maestro" would win the Best Picture Academy Award. But on emotional, musical and cinematic terms, it grabs that honor from me.

It's only natural that it moved me so deeply, as Bernstein was a towering and pervasive presence in my home as I grew up. My father's dearest passions were classical music and opera. Mom loved the best popular music of her youth and the current day along with the great Broadway musicals. My brothers and I enthralled by the musical supernova unfolding on our transistor radios, 45s and LPs.

And astride it all, like a contemporary colossus, was Maestro Bernstein. An icon, yet somehow seeming touchable, one of us, with as much passion for the glorious rainbow of music and true artistry as any public figure. In a musical way, Bernstein mentored me. Credit "West Side Story" arriving just as I was coming into consciousness, and his Young People's Concerts series and other shows on TV as I came of age. Through them, Bernstein turned me on to the splendidly visionary New York Rock & Roll Ensemble in 1968 (the group's Michael Kamen went on to compose superbly smart film scores). On another show, I first heard Janis Ian sing "Society's Child."

I didn't know Bernstein. Yet he still *felt* like someone I knew. Did meet his daughter, Jamie, a very prominent character in the film, in the early '80s. It was a double date. She was seeing my very musical writer friend Brian Cullman. He fixed me up with his cousin Claudia. We all went to hear

music at the landmark Forest Hills Stadium in Queens, NY.

Jamie was cool, delightful, and likely an even smarter gal in the proverbial room with two rather brainy lads. She and her siblings now preside with grace over her father's staggering artistic legacy. In *Time* magazine, she wrote how what resonated for us, more than anything, was the all-embracing warmth Bradley brought into every space, and to every person. That was the Lenny-est thing about him. Bradley's hand was right over his own heart, throughout the making of "Maestro. Nothing could have moved us more."

As much as "Maestro" is about an illustrious man of music whose creativity and personality suffused my younger world, it's even more so a story of love and family. His love for the woman he married, actress Felicia Montealegre, played with magnetism, charm and empathy by Carey Mulligan, is a strong through line to Bernstein's story, even if another one was his dalliances with men. I don't know if the maestro defined himself bisexual, gay, pansexual or whatever; no matter. Such fluid sexuality is an eternal fact of human nature and character.

It's also a movie about passions, most fulsomely expressed when Cooper nails Bernstein's fervently zealous flair atop the conductor's podium, feeling the music with a full-body brio. As I watched Cooper recreate the ardor, genius, drama and effusive humanity of the heralded composer, conductor and so much more, it hit dead home, right on the bullseye for me. Not just robust thespian greatness; he channels the man.

Cooper's direction is deft and canny, cleverly mixing color segments with black and white to show how Bernstein helped bring a rainbow of hues into the largely conformist era not just with music, but in who he was. The movie enchanted and touched my soul, intellect and heart.

And sang in a way to my musical muse where the creative breezes of the classics, Great White Way and the rock, pop and soul music of the 1960s and after plus so much more swirl together. In a year blessed with some stunning works of cinema, it merits at least a few more hosannas even beyond the accolades and awards.

Leonard Bernstein was a man of his times, a man of the times to come, a man for all time. Yet for all his cultural greatness, the maestro who flew so high on the wings of music was as well very human and of this mortal coil, with all his flaws, foibles and seeming contradictions. The film feels as real as he was. And I will cherish it in my cinematic pantheon for the rest of my days.

Populist Picks

TV DOCUMENTARY: "Tulsa Burning: The Fire and the Forgotten" — The Greenwood neighborhood in Tulsa was one of the most prosperous African-American communities in the US in the early 20th Century until a White attack burned down 35 blocks and killed hundreds of its residents. This film, available on PBS, examines the event and how it affects the city today to moving impact.

TV SERIES: "Reacher" — I didn't see the Tom Cruise movie in which he played novelist Lee Childs' hero. But the Amazon Prime series with a strong lead and team of Army comrades arounds him offers a smart and fun diversion. Available on Amazon

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SATIRE/Rosie Sorenson

Golden Boy

At a recent rally in Dallas, Donald Trump, the nation's most Famous Perp, strolls to the podium wearing his shiny golden sneakers.

He juts out his chin and thrusts his new "God Bless the USA Bible" into the air, shouting, "Isn't this a great day? Trump wins again. Have you seen these sneakers?" he says as he lifts his right leg and tugs up his pant leg to show them off.

He dances around as the crowd screams, "Trump, Trump Trump!"

Trump holds up his new "God Bless the USA" Bible and hollers, "My favorite book—read it every night, yes every night, not many know Trump to be a Bible reader, but despite the lies told about me, I'm very religious. I do not own a copy of Mein Kampf, don't even know much about Hitler, guess he was a bad guy, very bad, if Trump had been President, he would have shut Hitler down much sooner, you know, like in a few months, over, done, out, would have saved millions of lives and billions of dollars, but, sadly, you didn't have Trump around to protect you then.

"But I'm around now, and what a year it

has been! The Biden witch hunts? So far, nothing, just corrupt judges. The E. Jean Carroll thing? Total bogus. Biden bought off the jury, you know that. And now you and I have to pay for it! Disgusting!"

The crowd screams, "Four more years, four more years!"

"They bought the bitch off. Still appealing it. Wrong, shouldn't have been charged, don't even know her, never even met her, not even once. Well, about that photo. She did look a lot like Marla, so how could I tell? They tricked me with that photo, doctored her up to look like Marla. Scum, I tell you scum. But you know that, already. You listen to Trump.

"Anyway, I'm here to announce my latest and possibly greatest offering for my most loyal fans."

A murmur of excitement ripples through the crowd.

"Women. You know, the women love me, am I right? I mean, look around at all my beautiful fans." He holds out his arms in a faux embrace.

Women scream the screams meant only for rock stars and Jesus Christ.

"They want to crowd around me all the time," he points at women in the front row, "don't you? All the time hugging me, wanting to kiss me."

"Yes! Yes! Yes!"

"And they come up to me and say, 'You know, President Trump, I'd like to spend more time with you.' Well, I'm flattered, of

course, but, darlings, I can't be in a thousand places at once, especially since I have to show up at these filthy shameful Biden sham shams, so, I says to myself, 'Trump, what can you do to make your greatest fans happy?'

"And then it hit me. Women's History Month! So, I'm announcing tonight that I'm honoring you during this time of Women's History Month, with my new, elegant Trump Golden Tampons."

A sharp intake of breath from the crowd.

"Oh, I know it sounds icky to say, but this will make you, my fans, happy about your monthly friend. The tampons themselves are made from a specially created silk blend. Smoothie. Nothing too good for my gal, and, get this—the applicator is 24 ct. gold. Can you believe 24 ct gold?!! Worthy of the name Trump."

"Yes Yes."

"So, now, for you, my dear MAGA women who love me more than life itself, you deserve this product, you will love this product, because once a month, for several days at a time, you can hold me close."

Screams, Meg Ryan style: "Oh, Yes! Yes! Yes!"

Within 24 hours of the announcement, the entire stock of Trump Golden Tampons sells out. The company, "Trump's Special Friend," reported a run on the Golden Trump Tampons, and now they are on back-order.

No telling when China will be able to deliver.

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. Email Rosie at: RosieSorenson29@yahoo.com. See RosieSorenson.com



FILM REVIEW/*Ed Rampell*

New Left Ex-Fugitive Lived Underground After Prison Shootout

Catherine Masud's "A Double Life" was screened at L.A.'s Black-themed Pan African Film Festival – even though its protagonist is White. Why? Because this documentary involves legendary '60s/'70s African American revolutionary icons: Angela Davis, and George and Jonathan Jackson. Ex-fugitive Stephen Bingham was interviewed by phone at Marin County, California, about "A Double Life," for an article that originally appeared at Truthout.org.

Ed Rampell: *What can movements fighting against White supremacy and capitalism learn from studying George Jackson's life and writings?*

Stephen Bingham: George's book, "Soledad Brother," was incredibly popular and brilliant ... Although George's death in 1971 temporarily set back the budding prisoners' rights movement, the seed remained there. Angela's "Critical Resistance" is the logical outgrowth of the movement around George's death.

What was your relationship with George? What happened at San Quentin?

George was interested in filing a civil suit about prison conditions in San Quentin's euphemistically called "Adjustment Center," where prisoners were held 23-and-a-half hours a day. My early visits with George were to talk about these conditions. Aug. 21, 1971 I was requested to accompany Vanita Anderson, a Soledad Brothers murder trial investigator, to San Quentin to ensure she could visit George to review final galleys of his second book, "Blood in My Eye." Authorities had been clamping down on George's numbers of visitors ... her visit was denied.

She asked if I could take in the materials for him to review; I agreed. As I was going in with the papers to the attorney's visiting room off the main visiting room, the guard asked, "Aren't you going to take the tape recorder?" I had no need to, so Vanita said I could take the tape recorder. That's a key piece of evidence, of course, as the authorities' whole theory of what happened [the ensuing shootout] is that a gun was inside that tape recorder. There was also a wig, and I had carried all that in to be used by Jackson for some kind of escape attempt. Which of course is nonsense, [given the high] wall, and the Adjustment Center is a maximum security prison within a maximum security prison.

So, escaping from San Quentin then and now is virtually impossible. But that was their theory.

I took the papers in, George made some notes, I brought them out and gave them to Vanita ... I got home around 10:30 and [the San Quentin shootout] was all over the news. About 20 lawyer friends were waiting for me to arrive, because the National Lawyers Guild was targeted by the FBI; consensus was I had to immediately disappear.

How?

I went to a nearby house hoping authorities would announce a complete investigation into what happened, but that never happened. From the first hours they targeted me, which fit in with a pattern of targeting movement lawyers. I decided with the consensus of radical lawyers I needed to disappear because my life was in danger. If I'd felt I wasn't likely to get killed I would have stayed and taken my chances. But having been accused of mass killing that included three guards, I was convinced I would not survive in custody. Friends helped me disguise myself; I went to Philadelphia.

You fled America and started living what the documentary calls "A Double Life."

I got a passport in another name, went to Eastern Europe within 10 days after Aug. 21. The governments were aware of the presence of "Robert Boarts" [Bingham's pseudonym], but not Stephen Bingham ... I came to Italy in '72, '73, and spent almost a year there, working legally. In June '74 I moved to Paris.

Why?

If I was going to be living somewhere underground for a long time it had to be a very big city ... The French had been receiving exiles and people living underground for centuries.

Describe living underground in Paris?

By the time I got there I was fully comfortable with the story I'd created around my name. I never said or heard my [real] name, I really became Robert Boarts, with an inner shell preserving who I was and my political commitment to work for change ... I got into filmmaking, and house painting, which corresponded to my politics of the working class and wanting to identify with them.

What's your impression of the French left versus the American left?

In major elections every credible party is entitled to time on national TV ... In France, the left's strongest party were Trotskyists ... they would get their candidate eight minutes on national television to say what their program was. There was a national exchange of ideas, a continuum from far right to far left, and there weren't these huge doors the two parties in America close off to anything that's not one of them. France has a different electoral system, proportional representation; depending on the percentage of

votes you get, parties get X seats in parliament. So, even if the Greens only get 5%, they might get a couple of seats. I found France's whole political structure and debate much richer. Our two-party system is not democratic, it stultifies – like none of us, right now, want to vote for Biden or Trump.

Tell us about your documentaries?

I studied at the University of Paris' film school. I joined Front Paysan, a collective making films for small farmers, who were constantly being screwed by the system and turned into radicals. I wanted to make a film ... about this extraordinary battle in a small town, Longwy ... the heart of Alsace Lorraine and Europe's steel industry ... The struggle was over a steel mill to be shutdown...

There's a much stronger identification with unions in France than in America. In Longwy, CGT, the Communist Party-organized union, was not as aggressive and radical as CFDT, which had more of an association with the Socialist Party. They did this incredible "fist in the face" actions, like a forklift full of lime crashing into the police station ... These 16mm films were meant to be used as organizing tools for their struggles – not for festivals and big theaters.

Why'd you voluntarily return to America July 9, 1984 to face charges?

All this time I was away I know I'm going to go back – the only question is when. The only way I could convince people I didn't do what I was charged with was to come back and have a trial ...

After winning your 1986 trial what did you do?

I worked in a pension law firm for a couple of years. Then I went back to my original work from 1970, working for ... San Francisco Neighborhood Legal Assistance Foundation ... I did lots of advocacy work ... until retiring in 2013. I joined NLG in 1964 and became local chapter president in the '90s ...

What's the legacy of movements you were a part of?

The Civil Rights movement in Mississippi in 1963/1964, Freedom Summer, which shook me awake and resonates to this day in an extraordinary way. One of my Mississippi housemates was the Berkeley Free Speech Movement's Mario Savio ... I was in the antiwar movement, which continues to reverberate.

My daughter Sylvia was killed [biking] in 2009. I spend most of my time now doing road safety advocacy.

Info: www.doublelifemovie.com.

Ed Rampell is a film historian and critic based in Los Angeles. He is author of "Progressive Hollywood, A People's Film History of the United States" and he co-authored "The Hawaii Movie and Television Book." The full interview was published March 10 in Truthout.org. See the full interview at <https://truthout.org/articles/once-a-fugitive-attorney-for-black-panther-member-recounts-his-life-underground/>

EDGE OF SPORTS/*Dave Zirin*

Online Gambling Has Swallowed Professional Sports

Sports leagues partnered with legal gambling operations to fill their coffers. The deals are bringing in millions, but now they threaten to undermine what makes sports special.

Gambling is not just essential to the economy of sports and sports media; it has, in essence, become the economy of sports and sports media. Faced with an aging and fragmenting television audience, the sports world turned to partnering with legal gambling operations to fill its coffers. From a dollars-and-cents perspective, this has been wildly successful, and the revenue just keeps growing. But in the process, sports executives ushered a fox into the henhouse. It's not the growing addiction epidemic among fans—particularly younger ones—that concerns and threatens the corner office. It's the scandals of the athletes themselves. In March, players allegedly used inside information to place bets, allegedly fixed individual and team outcomes, and not-so-allegedly damaged the credibility of their sports. These stories, once incredibly rare, now come out with the regularity of a metronome.

One of March's scandals involves Ipeei Mizuhara—the translator for the greatest baseball player on Earth, Shohei Ohtani. Mizuhara was caught betting \$4.5 million with an illegal bookie operation that was raided in California. But Ohtani's name was found on the betting slips. Mizuhara initially said that this was because Ohtani was helping him pay off his debts. But Ohtani says that Mizuhara stole the money from his accounts and that he was shocked—shocked!—to find that gambling was going on. People

are skeptical of Ohtani's account and wonder whose bets Mizuhara was really placing. No matter the truth of the story, it has tarnished Ohtani's reputation and brought the outcomes of games into doubt. It also caused Pete Rose, the all-time hits leader who was banned for life for betting on baseball, to say, "Well, back in the '70s and '80s, I wish I'd had an interpreter. I'd be scot-free." Anytime Pete Rose is able to roast you, then you know you messed up.

Then, as we were still getting our heads around the Ohtani scandal, Cleveland Cavaliers coach JB Bickerstaff came forward to say that he has been threatened by people betting on games. All-Star Indiana Pacers guard Tyrese Haliburton said he feels like a gambling "prop" and, "To half the world, I'm just helping them make money on DraftKings or whatever."

As hoops writer Tom Ziller wrote, "The question is what happens when a scandal inevitably hits the NBA again. Will the league continue to push growth of sports betting, as is its capitalistic imperative? One presumes that a study will hit in the next couple of years showing an enormous uptick in gambling addiction. Will the NBA still be lowering the barrier to entry at that point? Something truly dangerous will happen at some point. What's the league's response going to be? The reckoning will come. Who will it take down when it arrives?"

He wrote that just days before another gambling fiasco, this one involving Toronto Raptors bench player Jontay Porter, came to light.

Pro athletes are some of the most competitive people on Earth; they have disposable income, a lot of downtime; and they are—like the rest of us—on their phones constantly. This will keep happening. It's easy to "game a bet" since you are not just betting on wins or losses. You can bet upon the performances of individual players, which is far easier to manipulate.

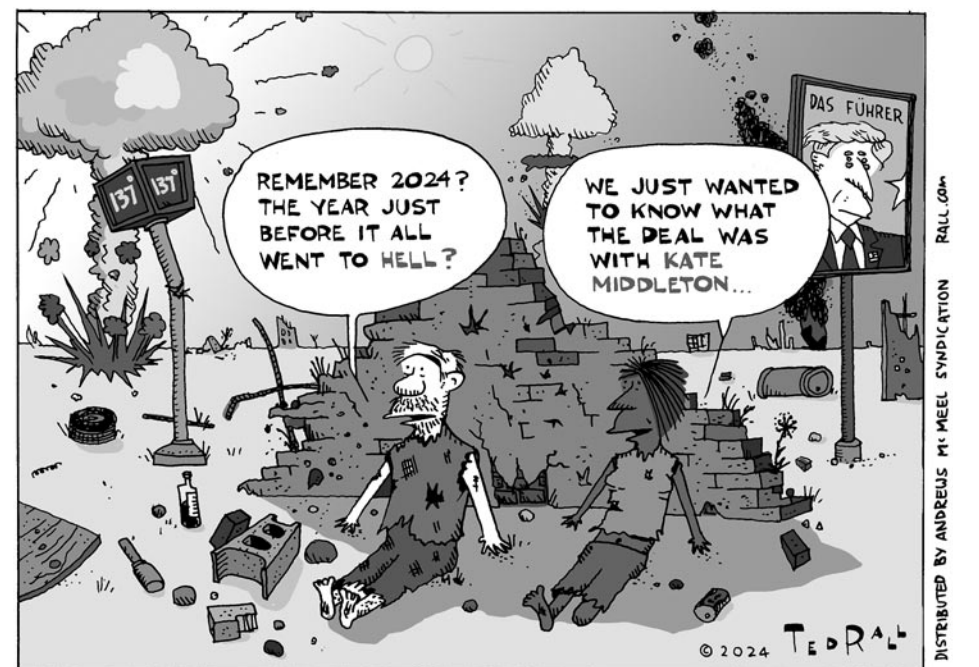
The media has normalized the hyper-focus on gambling. Big-time, award-winning broadcasters talk betting lines with the relish with which they used to talk about touchdowns and slam dunks. ESPN's Rece Davis, after one gambling segment, said, "You know what? Some would call this wagering, gambling; the way you've sold this, I think what it is, is a risk-free investment."

How are we supposed to trust inves-

tigative sports media to examine the corrosive effects of gambling on the sports world when its economic lifeblood depends upon more bets, more addicts, and more scandals? The thing that sports has over other forms of entertainment is the undetermined outcome. If people start to believe that the situation is rigged, they will turn away, and sports will become pro wrestling.

There is no good answer for this, because sports executives believe that to terminate the media's and the league's partnerships with legal-betting operations would be to kill the golden goose. But gambling is no golden goose—it's the fox coming for their throats.

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



The seven World Central Kitchen workers killed in three missile strikes April 1 were among 196 humanitarians killed in Gaza since Oct. 7.

Israel Is Wielding Starvation as a Weapon of War

Israel is wielding starvation as a weapon of war, imposing a famine on the more than two million Palestinians trapped in Gaza, one million of whom are children. Twenty-seven children have already starved to death since Israeli Defense Minister Yoav Gallant declared, on Oct. 9, “There will be no electricity, no food, no fuel, everything is closed ... We are fighting human animals.”

On April 1, Israel attacked a World Central Kitchen humanitarian convoy with three separate missile strikes while on a so-called “deconflicted” route in Gaza, killing

seven of the aid group’s workers as they coordinated the delivery of hundreds of tons of food.

“Unfortunately, in the last day there was a tragic case of our forces unintentionally hitting innocent people in the Gaza Strip,” Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said in a video message. “It happens in war.”

The world-renowned chef José Andrés, founder of World Central Kitchen, who has worked in many conflict zones, told a different story. He said the convoy had coordinated their route with the Israeli military. He told Reuters, “They were target[ed] systematically, car by car ... we were targeted deliberately, nonstop, until everybody was dead in this convoy.”

Israeli newspaper *Haaretz* published a timeline of the attack, describing at least three missile strikes. After the first strike, *Haaretz* reported, “some of the passengers were seen leaving the car after it was hit and switching to one of the other two ... seconds later, another missile hit their car.” Then, “the third car in the convoy approached, and the passengers began to transfer to it the wounded who had survived the second strike in order to get them out of danger. But then a third missile struck them.”

The World Central Kitchen workers killed were Saifeddin Issam Ayad Abutaha, 25, of Palestine; Zomi Frankcom, 43, of Australia; Damian Soból, 35, of Poland; Jacob Flickinger, 33, a dual US/Canadian citizen; and three British military veterans providing security: John Chapman, 57,

James Henderson, 33 and James Kirby, 47.

Of course, these are not the only aid workers killed so far in Gaza. Jamie McGoldrick, the UN’s Humanitarian Coordinator for the Occupied Palestinian Territory, stated, “As of 20 March, at least 196 humanitarians had been killed in the Occupied Palestinian Territory since October 2023. This is nearly three times the death toll recorded in any single conflict in a year ... There is no safe place left in Gaza.”

The vast majority of those killed were Palestinians who worked for UNRWA, the UN’s principal relief agency in Gaza. +972 *Magazine* reported in early April that the Israeli army has been using AI-driven targeting systems, one called “Lavender” and another called “Where’s Daddy?” that “systematically attacked the targeted individuals while they were in their homes — usually at night while their whole families were present.” Thus, entire families are wiped out.

José Andrés criticized sending “weapons provided by America, not to defend Israel itself from missile attacks, but just weapons that are killing civilians,” José Andrés told Reuters. “I think the best and only way forward to have hope of a peace deal that can at least allow the parties to start talking. I will not say we will just keep bombing every single person that moves inside Gaza, killing every single child. And if you are not killing them by bombs, you are starving them by lack of food.”

Neve Gordon, a third-generation Israeli, is an international law professor at Queen Mary University of London and the vice president of the British Society for Middle

East Studies. In a recent *New York Review of Books* article titled, “The Road to Famine in Gaza,” he wrote,

“Like most famines, it is also the product of a longer history. Since 1967, when Israel first occupied the Gaza Strip, it has controlled the Palestinian food basket, engineering the nutritional intake of its inhabitants and using food as a weapon to manage the population. For decades Israel has systematically damaged the Strip’s capacity to produce its own foodstuffs, decreasing its access to drinkable water and nutritional food. Understanding these longer-term policies is crucial for making sense of the famine unfolding in Gaza now.”

World Central Kitchen has suspended its work in Gaza, where the Israeli-imposed famine is worsening. Chef Andrés grew emotional in his interview with Reuters. “This looks like it’s not a war against terrorism anymore. It seems it’s a war against humanity itself. You cannot be destroying every building. You cannot be destroying every hospital, every school. You cannot be targeting humanitarians. You cannot be targeting children. You cannot be fighting the basis of what humanity should be standing for.”

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.”

When Information Isn’t the News

By CASSIE McCLURE

The alert on my phone tells me that my package is seven stops away. Clicking into the app, there’s a little outline of a truck, but what pulled up was a white sedan, someone’s personal car with a few years and more than a few miles on it.

I’m of two minds. Sure, if you’re in a neighborhood where you might question whether your package will still be there when you get home, and you happen to be in range, this seems useful. But if you’re not, it feels like micromanaging an employee I didn’t know I even hired.

The car also reminded me that sometimes, a constant influx of information, updates, and notifications doesn’t always deliver what we expect, and the need for instant gratification — particularly in being the first to know the truth of a situation — can often lead us down unexpected paths.

While I was writing this, another alert popped up. The UK’s Princess Catherine released a statement about her surgery where cancer was discovered. Here we all were in our

theories, distracting us from the doomscrolling. Depending on my blood sugar, I pulled for the growing out bangs theory or midlife crisis. I related to those more than the more morbid versions.

But in just a few weeks, authorities on these theories were established which almost took on a life of their own.

What was interesting to me, as someone who enjoys watching the optics of situations play out (because everything is communication!), was how little awareness of incorrect information spreading eroded trust that was collected, curated, and maintained for years. Maybe the queen was much more in the approval process of public relations than we thought, because it’s currently a hot mess across the pond.

Speaking of which, I have a bit of schadenfreude. It shouldn’t just be us wily colonies with the strange conspiracy theories.

As we’re confronted by ungrounded theories, and, in many places, we live in news deserts where local news has been driven down to one or two frazzled reporters, how we find and trust information will need to be a skill we train. We are inundated with a ceaseless stream of data, bombarded by notifications that demand our attention and beckon us to stay perpetually connected, but we’re not any

more informed. Constant knowledge consumption does not always lead to enlightenment.

There is a difference between information and wisdom, between the superficial satisfaction of instant updates and the deeper understanding that comes from introspection and contemplation. Being more glib about it, I’m reminded of this quote: “Knowledge is knowing that a tomato is a fruit. Wisdom is knowing that you don’t put it in a fruit salad.”

In our relentless pursuit of information, we must not lose sight of the importance of discernment, critical thinking, and the ability to navigate the vast sea of information that is dumped in our laps. We’ll see what lessons the crown takes away from this debacle, but the lesson I’ll take is that I’ll never attempt to photoshop a portrait of me and my kids.

Editor’s Note: Bonnie Jean Feldkamp was off this week. Cassie McClure is a writer, millennial, and unapologetic fan of the Oxford comma. She can be contacted at cassie@mcclurepublications.com. To find out more about Cassie McClure (or Bonnie Jean Feldkamp) and read features by other Creators Syndicate writers and cartoonists, visit the Creators Syndicate website at www.creators.com.

Dispatches ...

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Kimbrell. “At Mercedes, at Hyundai, and at hundreds of other companies, Alabama workers have made billions of dollars for executives and shareholders, but we haven’t gotten our fair share. We’re going to turn things around with this vote. We’re going to end the Alabama discount.”

The growing pro-union movement across the South represents “huge stakes,” said Lauren Kaori Gurley, a labor reporter for the *Washington Post*. The UAW has faced resistance from right-wing politicians across the South for decades as it has attempted to unionize factories.

Alabama Gov. Kay Ivey (R), said (4/4) that the UAW’s efforts are a “threat from Detroit” that “has no interest in seeing the people of Alabama succeed.”

Ivey’s comments indicated that the governor “thinks so little of Alabama workers, that we’re only good for cheap labor,” Kimbrell told AL.com.

ECONOMY HAS DONE BETTER UNDER DEMOCRATS FOR 75 YEARS, REPORT FINDS.

Josh Bivens of the left-leaning Economic Policy Institute took a look at economic performance back to 1949, Meteor Blades noted at Daily Kos (4/4). What did Bivens find?

“There is a pronounced Democratic advantage in nearly every measure of macroeconomic performance. Positive indicators like growth in gross domestic product, income,

jobs, and wages are faster, while negative indicators like unemployment, inflation, and interest rates are lower.”

Bivens also quotes from a 2016 peer-reviewed study in the *American Economic Review*—“Presidents and the US Economy: An Econometric Exploration” by Alan S. Blinder and Mark W. Watson:

“The US economy has performed better when the president of the United States is a Democrat rather than a Republican, almost regardless of how one measures performance ... The superiority of economic performance under Democrats rather than Republicans is nearly ubiquitous: it holds almost regardless of how you define success. By many measures, the performance gap is startlingly large.”

Not only does the economy perform better under Democratic presidents, the gains from economic growth are distributed more equally even when researchers exclude most government safety net and income support payments. Bivens notes that data are so obvious that “it is striking that public opinion polling has consistently shown that voters rate Republicans more highly as the party that is better at managing the economy.”

Indeed striking. And not a little of the blame for this unconformity of data and opinion falls on the mainstream media.

Better doesn’t mean perfect, of course. It’s not as if there aren’t still gaps in economic well-being. Chronic problems in that realm need serious attention. But if the history Bivens lays out is any guide, it won’t be Republicans who come up with solutions.

As any economist will tell you, Bivens in-

cluded, presidents don’t have anything close to total control over the economy, and luck plays a role in economic outcomes. But luck can’t be assigned all the credit when the performance record covers three-quarters of a century.

Since 1949, the beginning of Harry Truman’s first elected term, during Democratic administrations, combined job growth in the public and private sectors has averaged 2.5% a year and just over 1% during Republican administrations. Calculate that based on today’s workforce, and this would mean 2.4 million more jobs created every year when Democrats are president.

The top five presidents for jobs created (in raw numbers) since 1949, in order, are Bill Clinton (18.6 million), Ronald Reagan (16.5 million), Joe Biden (15.4 million), Jimmy Carter (9.8 million), and Barack Obama (8.9 million).

Here’s another Bivens elaboration:

“Real personal income excluding transfers per capita (annual % growth) is a measure of market incomes, excluding the effect on personal incomes of tax changes or public benefits (like Social Security). Again, to the degree that Republican rhetoric reflected actual results, there should be a Republican advantage in generating greater growth in market-driven incomes. Yet again the Democratic advantage is large in this category, with market-driven personal incomes rising at almost double the pace of growth compared with times when Republicans hold the presidency.”

Bivens concludes:

“The matching of economic policy decisions and real-time economic performance is far from perfect. Some presidential administra-

tions enact smart policies and run into bad luck, and others enact short-sighted policies and are blessed with good luck. Some might even get the results their policy decisions deserve. One would expect that the large role of chance would (almost by definition) cut uniformly across the partisan composition of presidential administrations. And yet the Democratic advantage in economic performance by partisan control of the presidency is striking.”

RFK JR. OFFICIAL ADMITS GOAL IS TO ELECT TRUMP.

Robert F. Kennedy Jr.’s platform in the 2024 presidential race centers on promoting an “honest government,” a “clean, healthy environment,” and the protection of civil liberties—but his New York State director recently boiled down the Independent campaign’s true goal at a meeting with Republican voters: ensuring former President Donald Trump wins the election, Julia Conley noted at CommonDreams (4/8).

Speaking at an April 4 meeting, Rita Palma first checked to make sure there were “no Biden voters in the house” before telling her audience that her “No. 1 priority” is to ultimately take electoral votes away from President Joe Biden.

“The Kennedy voter and the Trump voter,” said Palma, “our mutual enemy is Biden.”

States including New York, California, and “most of the Northeast” are likely to vote for the Democratic president, she continued, but if Kennedy, whom Palma referred to as Bobby, is on the ballot in New York, the campaign could help “get rid of Biden.”

She urged the assembled GOP voters to

Continued on next page

Trump Can't Remember Much. He Hopes You Won't Be Able to, Either.

By DANA MILBANK

The Very Stable Genius is glitching again.

Recently, he announced that he is not — repeat, NOT — planning to repeal the Affordable Care Act. He apparently forgot that he had vowed over and over again to do exactly that, saying as recently as a few months ago that Republicans “should never give up” on efforts to “terminate” Obamacare.

“I’m not running to terminate the ACA, AS CROOKED JOE BUDEN DISINFORMATES AND MISINFORMATES ALL THE TIME,” the Republican nominee wrote on his Truth Social platform. Rather, he said, he wants to make Obamacare better for “OUR GREST AMERICAN CITIZENS.”

Joe Biden disinformates and misinformates? For a guy trying to make an issue of his opponent’s mental acuity, this was not, shall we say, a grest look.

The previous day, Trump held a news conference at which he nailed some equally puzzling planks onto his platform.

“We’ll bring crime back to law and order,” he announced.

Also: “We just had Super Tuesday, and we had a Tuesday after a Tuesday already.”

And, most peculiar of all: “You can’t have an election in the middle of a political season.”

If he can’t recall that elections frequently do overlap with political seasons, then he surely can’t be expected to remember what was happening at this point in 2020. “ARE YOU BETTER OFF THAN YOU WERE FOUR YEARS AGO?” he asked last week. The poor fellow must have forgotten all about the economic collapse and his administration’s catastrophic bungling of the pandemic.

Or maybe he didn’t forget. Maybe he’s just hoping the rest of us will forget. In a sense, Trump’s prospects for 2024 rely on Americans experiencing mass memory loss: Will we forget just how crazy things were when he was in the White House? And will we forget about the even crazier things he has said he would do if he gets back there?

In March, the Supreme Court heard arguments from antiabortion forces who want to ban mifepristone, the pill used in about 60% of abortions. But just as the justices were taking up the case, Trump’s own proposal to ban the abortion pill vanished.

The Heritage Foundation-run Project 2025, to which Trump has unofficially outsourced policymaking for a second term, said that a “glitch” had caused its policies —

including those embracing a mifepristone ban — to disappear from its website. The Biden campaign said it was “calling BS on Trump and his allies’ shameless attempt to hide their agenda,” and the missing documents returned — including the language calling abortion pills “the single greatest threat to unborn children” and vowing to withdraw regulatory approval for the drugs.

About 7 in 10 Americans believe the abortion pill should be legal. So it’s easy to see why Trump might wish to erase his plan to ban the pill — just as he would like to erase his calls for the repeal of Obamacare, which has the support of 6 in 10 Americans.

The extremism isn’t just at Project 2025, stocked with former Trump advisers. The House Republican Study Committee, which counts 80% of House Republicans as members, put out a budget in April that would rescind approval of mifepristone, dismantle the “failed Obamacare experiment” and embrace a nationwide abortion ban from the moment of conception.

Trump and some vulnerable congressional Republicans might wish that Americans will forget such things by November. But it’s all there in black and white.

TRUMP IS A MAN OF GREATNESS. So says Trump. “It is my great honor to be at Trump International Golf Club in West Palm Beach tonight, AWARDS NIGHT, to receive the CLUB CHAMPIONSHIP TROPHY & THE SENIOR CLUB CHAMPIONSHIP

TROPHY,” he proclaimed over the weekend. “I WON BOTH!”

So much winning. “Congratulations, Donald,” President Biden tweeted. “Quite the accomplishment.”

Trump won a more significant victory on Monday, March 25, when an appellate panel reduced the bond he needs to post as he appeals a fraud verdict against him to \$175 million from \$454 million. Trump didn’t have enough cash to secure the larger bond. But at a news conference he assured reporters that he was still really, really rich: “I have a lot of money ... I don’t need to borrow money. I have a lot of money. ... I have a lot of cash. ... I have a lot of cash and a great company. ... I have very low debt. ... I built a phenomenal company that’s very low leverage, unbelievably low leverage with a lot of cash, a lot of everything else.”

Give that man another trophy. Trump seemed particularly hurt that the judge in the fraud case valued Mar-a-Lago at \$18 million, he said, when “half of the living room is worth more than that. So it’s worth anywhere from 50 to 100 times that amount.”

Give that man \$1.8 billion for Mar-a-Lago, and another trophy.

Dana Milbank is a political columnist for the Washington Post, where this appeared. Follow him on Twitter @Milbank. Email dana.milbank@washpost.com

Who Needs the Bible? Try the Book of Trump!

By ALEXANDRA PETRI

“Happy Holy Week!” former president Donald Trump wrote on Truth Social. “Let’s Make America Pray Again. As we lead into Good Friday and Easter, I encourage you to get a copy of the God Bless the USA Bible.” The God Bless the USA Bible costs \$59.99.

I recently got a peek inside, and some things seemed a little different. You would think that a book in which all the parts about loving your neighbor as yourself had been removed and all the “not’s” omitted from the Ten Commandments would be cheaper than a regular Bible, but that shows what I know. Here are just a few classic stories in their improved Trump Bible retelling!

The Creation: In the beginning, God created Mar-a-Lago. And then God said, “Let there be Light,” so that people could look at Mar-a-Lago and admire it. And then God said, “No, that Light is too much. Do

not pay the lighting guy.” And then God created lots of other places, plants and birds and lots of things like that, and lots of real estate, but God ruined it by filling it up with animals. Some call them people. But we don’t, do we? Not everyone is people.

Cain and Abel: And Cain did smite Abel, very peacefully and very patriotically, and God said, “We like this Cain fellow, don’t we, folks! We like the ones who don’t get smote, don’t we.” And Abel’s blood cried out from the Earth, from wherever. Very weak, we hate to see it. And God said, “Let’s have Cain sing at my rally.” And God was so happy about Cain, he said, “Get me more guys like this guy! Cain is from central casting.” And he promised to pardon him the first chance he got.

The Tower of Babel: It was no Trump Tower.

Abraham: Abram had a very old wife. Much too old! Much too old. Embarrassing for Abram, the age of this woman. And she wanted to have children, which, disgusting. But Abram said, “Why not!” And God said, “Sure.” And they had a son. Fine for them, I guess. God said, “Sacrifice me the son!” And Abraham said, “Sure.” That’s loyalty, folks. We love to see loyalty.

Jacob’s Dream: Jacob did lay his head upon something hard and uncomfortable

like unto a stone, and Jacob did say, “Wow! I love MyPillow!”

Joseph’s Coat: Joseph got a coat from his father. Very ostentatious! Maybe too ostentatious. And he had dreams. Sleepy Joe, we call him. Bundles of grain bowing down and fat cows coming up out of the river, I mean, what the hell is this guy talking about? Some call them nightmares, like the American Dream has become.

The Plagues of Egypt: Plagues, folks! Ten of them! Hail, locusts, frogs, darkness, death of the firstborn, pestilence, lice, flies, boils and, of course, the bloodbath, folks. The water turned to blood, and it was a bloodbath for the whole country. A metaphor for the auto industry, of course.

Numbers: [The book of Numbers is mostly preserved, except none of them are accurate any longer, according to the New York attorney general.]

King Solomon Splits the Baby: Two women, folks! Arguing over a baby. And King Solomon said, “I have an idea! Let’s cut the baby in half!” Shall we do it, folks? Let’s cut one in half. Who has a baby?

Jesus’ Ministry: There was a man named Jesus. Satan offered him a lot of real estate one time, which also happened to Donald Trump, but Jesus wasn’t smart

enough to make the deal. Unlike Donald Trump, he got along well with tax collectors, owned no Manhattan property and was born in a barn. “Suffer the little children,” he said. “Suffer the little children.” But he meant it the opposite way.

The Wedding at Cana: Jesus went to a wedding, and they ran out of wine, but there was water. And he did touch the water and nothing happened to it, but he charged \$10.99 for it anyway because it was Water Touched By God.

The Beatitudes: Blessed are the poor, but I think the rich are more blessed. Even more blessed to be rich. The poor, they say the poor will inherit the earth. Maybe! The poor had better have good lawyers. Blessed are the meek? Mm, I don’t think so. I’ve never heard of them. I don’t think they can be all that blessed. Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy. No, thank you. No mercy. Who wrote this? This is no good.

The Golden Rule: Love your neighbor as yourself.

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

give their “vote to Bobby and at least get rid of Biden and give those 28 electoral votes to Bobby rather than to Biden, thereby reducing Biden’s 270 [electoral votes].”

Palma, who was hired by Kennedy’s campaign after she canvassed for Trump in 2016 and 2020. “If nobody gets to 270 [electoral votes], then Congress picks the president, so who are they gonna pick if it’s a Republican Congress? They’ll pick Trump, so we’re rid of Biden either way.”

Political observers have noted in recent months that Kennedy has drawn support from right-wing billionaires, but Palma’s blunt description of her plan to “block Biden from winning the presidency” left critics stunned as the video of the event circulated on social media April 8.

“Whole thing is an epic fraud. Kennedy is spouting Russian propaganda, is now openly betraying the country,” said political strategist Simon Rosenberg, referring to the candidate’s recent comments about Russia’s claim that it aims to “de-Nazify” Ukraine.

“RFK Jr.’s campaign is saying the quiet part out loud,” Matt Corridoni, spokesperson for the Democratic National Committee, told CNN. “As the saying goes, when people show you who they are, believe them: RFK Jr.’s campaign isn’t building a plan or a strategy to

get 270 electoral votes, they’re building one to help Trump return to the Oval Office.”

CAMPAIGNERS CHEER FCC PLAN TO RESTORE NET NEUTRALITY RULES. Open internet advocates welcomed the Federal Communications Commission’s plan to vote on reestablishing FCC oversight of broadband and restoring net neutrality rules on April 25. Jessica Corbett noted at CommonDreams (4/3).

“The pandemic proved once and for all that broadband is essential,” said FCC Chair Jessica Rosenworcel, who announced the restoration effort in September, shortly after the US Senate confirmed Anna Gomez to a long-vacant seat on the five-member commission. The following month, the pair joined with Commissioner Geoffrey Starks to start the rulemaking process.

“After the prior administration abdicated authority over broadband services, the FCC has been handcuffed from acting to fully secure broadband networks, protect consumer data, and ensure the internet remains fast, open, and fair,” Rosenworcel explained. “A return to the FCC’s overwhelmingly popular and court-approved standard of net neutrality will allow the agency to serve once again as a strong consumer advocate of an open internet.”

The three Democratic commissioners aim to reverse a deeply unpopular rollback that happened under former Republican President Donald Trump by reclassifying broadband as a public service under Title II of the Communi-

cations Act and preventing internet service providers (ISPs) from blocking legal content, creating fast lanes, and throttling speeds.

“We’ve been fighting for this moment since Trump’s FCC threw out strong Title II rules and abandoned net neutrality back in 2017—and really for nearly 20 years since net neutrality first came under threat,” Free Press Action co-CEO Craig Aaron said of the upcoming vote. “We welcome and celebrate the FCC’s decision to move ahead and make sure that internet users will again be protected against harms by big phone and cable companies like AT&T, Comcast, and Verizon.”

NEW BIDEN PLAN WOULD PROVIDE STUDENT DEBT RELIEF TO MILLIONS. President Joe Biden announced a plan to help tens of millions of Americans burdened with educational debt.

Biden announced his new plan at Madison Area Technical College in Madison, Wis., less than a year after the US Supreme Court struck down his previous program, which would have provided relief to 40 million borrowers by canceling up to \$20,000 in debt per person, Julia Conley noted at CommonDreams (4/8).

The president’s new plan would wipe out the entire debt amount held by about 4 million people, give debt relief of at least \$5,000 to 10 million borrowers, and reduce the undergraduate and graduate student debt of 23 million people whose interest would be eliminated.

The plan would allow millions of young people to “finally get on with their lives in-

stead of their lives being put on hold,” said the president.

Student debt is “not just a drag on them, it’s a drag on our local economies,” Biden said in Madison. “When you can’t afford to buy a home, start that small business, chase that career that you’d been dreaming about for a long time.”

Aissa Canchola Bañez, policy director of the Student Borrower Protection Center (SBPC), said in addition to bringing “tens of millions of borrowers one step closer to realizing the life-changing impact of student debt cancellation,” Biden’s announcement “also offers a roadmap for how this administration should deal with a hostile Supreme Court majority captured by right-wing special interests.”

“Call the high court’s bluff by aggressively using the full power of the law and delivering for working people,” she said. “For too long, student debt has blocked homeownership, inhibited savings, limited career opportunities and economic mobility, and choked at the promise of entire generations. Taken together, the Biden administration’s actions are setting a path to a debt-free, brighter economic future for more than 30 million Americans.”

Americans who now owe more in student debt than the amount that they originally borrowed due to interest would have up to \$20,000 in interest wiped out. People who make less than \$120,000 per year could have all of their interest canceled.

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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.

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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, David McCall, 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, Jen Sorensen, Rosie Sorensen, Jamie Stiehm, Tom Tomorrow, Sam Uretsky, Katrina vanden Heuvel, John Young, Dave Zirin and others you won't find in the "mainstream" press.

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