



The EPA Has Done Nearly Everything It Can to Clean Up This Small Town. **It Hasn't Worked.**

Despite years of air monitoring, inspections and millions in penalties for petrochemical plants, the air in Calvert City, Kentucky, remains polluted. The EPA's inability to fix it is an indictment of the laws governing clean air, experts say.

By LISA SONG, ProPublica

This story was originally published by ProPublica.

Nearly 100 people crowded into the library in Calvert City, Kentucky, in February when the Environmental Protection Agency hosted a public meeting on air pollution. Many had discovered flyers in their mailboxes explaining how the agency had found “elevated levels” of chemicals that “can pose an increased risk of cancer.”

The EPA aimed to deliver a simple message that evening: Local petrochemical plants were leaking toxic air pollutants and regulators were working to fix them. And what played out next was predictable to anyone who has been to one of these meetings. There were concerned questions (Would you hesitate to live here? What are you going to do today?), unsatisfying answers (We're working with the plants on voluntary measures) and pleas for action that regulators said couldn't happen “overnight.”

What made this meeting remarkable, however, was a sobering truth that bubbled up amid the exasperated grumbles and earnest assurances.

Once a community becomes a hot spot for these pollutants, it's nearly impossible to clean it up for good. In fact, ProPublica found, such a success story is virtually unheard of.

In 2021, we published a cutting-edge national map of more than 1,000 communities that had become what are known as “sacrifice zones” — areas caught in clouds of cancerous pollution that seep from the refineries, chemical plants and plastic producers that power America. We highlighted all of the ways state and federal regulators had failed to protect those places, by not installing air monitors, or alerting residents, or penalizing polluters.

In Calvert City, a town of 2,514 in western Kentucky, all of that had already happened.

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AN EDITORIAL

Ukraine Survives GOP Chaos

House Speaker Mike Johnson (R-La.) defied the chaos agents in his own party as he allowed the House to approve \$95 billion in US aid for Ukraine, Israel and Taiwan in a special Saturday session April 20 that was a rare victory for bipartisanship.

The most controversial portion was \$61 billion earmarked for embattled Ukraine. The MAGA Chaos Caucus, which protects the interests of Donald Trump and his mentor, Russian President Vladimir Putin, had stopped Johnson from allowing the House to approve the aid to rearm Ukraine, which has held Russian invaders at bay for more than two years, but had been running low on ammunition and interceptor missiles for Ukraine's air-defense systems since the last major infusion from the US in December 2022.

President Joe Biden requested funding for Ukraine in October 2023, but the Chaos Caucus blocked the bill, demanding that any assistance for Ukraine be tied to policy changes at the US-Mexico border. Then MAGA rejected a bipartisan Senate deal on immigration reforms, on Trump's instructions, reportedly because Trump wanted to keep stirring the "border crisis" through the election.

The Pentagon warned that, without an infusion of aid from the United States, Ukraine would continue losing territory to Russian military, which is preparing to start a spring offensive. The aid to Ukraine finally was approved on a 311-112 vote, with opposition from the right-wing members of the Chaos Caucus, who did not want to give President Biden a "win." Trump has said he would settle the war by letting Russia keep the land it has seized.

Rep. Marjorie Taylor Greene (R-Ga.) filed a "motion to vacate" March 22, which could remove Johnson from his post, after Johnson allowed the House to pass a spending package to avert a partial government shutdown just hours before the deadline. The funding had support from both sides of the aisle, but the Chaos Caucus really wanted to force a government shutdown.

Then, after Johnson agreed to allow the aid for Ukraine, Reps. Paul Gosar (R-Ariz.) and Thomas Massie (R-Ky.) joined Greene in the motion to vacate and urged Johnson to voluntarily step aside. Democrats might need to vote with moderate Republicans to keep Johnson in office, unless they can find three moderate Republicans to switch parties to elect Democratic leader Hakeem Jeffries. If Dems can't find three R's who'll switch, they should vote to keep Johnson in office, because Trump and the Chaos Caucus aren't going to allow any more reasonable Republican to take his place.

MAGA Congress members who complain that money is being spent on defending Ukraine when there are needs in the US that go unmet are displaying the usual hypocrisy. The Center for American Progress in 2022 reported that the tax cuts enacted during the George W. Bush and Trump administrations slashed taxes disproportionately for the wealthy and profitable corporations, severely reducing federal revenues. Instead of paying for themselves by spurring economic growth, the tax cuts added \$10 trillion to the nation's debt.

And if Republicans extend the Trump tax cuts, which were enacted on a party-line vote in 2017 and expire in 2015, the nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office reported, the extended tax cuts would add \$3.5 trillion to the deficit through 2033.

"MAGA Republicans don't give a damn about the deficit, and today's estimate of the cost of kickbacks for their friends and

donors is further proof," said Senate Budget Committee Chairman Sheldon Whitehouse (D-R.I.). "Republicans racked up the national debt by giving tax breaks to their billionaire buddies, and now they want everyone else to pay for them. It is one of life's great enigmas that Republicans can keep a straight face while they simultaneously cite the deficit to extort massive spending cuts to critical programs and support a bill that would blow up deficits to extend trillions in tax cuts for the people who need them the least."

The Kremlin reacted angrily to news that Congress was on track to approve an aid package for Ukraine, warning that it will lead to the "deaths of even more Ukrainians."

The decision "will make the United States of America richer, further ruin Ukraine and result in the deaths of even more Ukrainians, the fault of the Kyiv regime," Kremlin spokesperson, Dmitry Peskov, said, in remarks reported by Russia's state news agencies.

Activists on the far right and the far left in the US joined the MAGAs in urging the US to force Ukraine to settle a fight they cannot hope to win. War critics have been saying that ever since Putin sent in the invaders in February 2022, expecting Kyiv to fall in 72 hours. Then they said the "special military action" might take two months.

Two years later, Russia's military death toll in Ukraine has passed 50,000, the BBC reported, relying on research by BBC's Russian language service, independent media group Mediazona and volunteers who have been counting deaths since the invasion, monitoring new graves in cemeteries, open-source information from official reports, newspapers and social media.

More than 27,300 Russian soldiers died in the second year of combat — nearly 25% higher than the first year, the BBC reported — a reflection of how territorial gains have come at a huge human cost as Russian officers have used the "meat grinder" strategy to send waves of soldiers forward in frontal assaults to try to wear down Ukrainian forces and expose their locations to Russian artillery.

The overall Russian death toll of more than 50,000 is eight times higher than the only official public acknowledgement of fatality numbers ever given by Moscow in September 2022. Russia considers casualty figures a state secret.

Ukraine rarely comments on the scale of its battlefield fatalities. In February, President Volodymyr Zelensky said 31,000 Ukrainian soldiers had been killed — but US intelligence estimates suggest greater losses, the BBC reported.

Russia has made advances in Ukraine as the aid from the West has waned, and the Ukrainian defenders have had to count their remaining bullets. But the Pentagon says a massive military aid package is "ready to go" as soon as Congress acts and Biden signs off.

Russia, which has a population of 144 million, has around 1.1 million active troops across all branches. Ukraine, with a population of 37.9 million, claims one million in the military and has proposed mobilizing another 500,000 to step up the war with Russia.

Ukraine has shown they are up to the challenge of pushing the Russians back as long as the Ukraine defense forces have access the advanced weapons the US and other NATO members can furnish.

Ukraine doesn't need American soldiers to join the fight, but if Ukraine defeats the Russians, that might end Putin's further imperial ambitions. If Russia moves against NATO member states, such as Poland or the Baltic States, that could put American troops on the firing line. It's still better to arm Ukrainian troops now. — JMC

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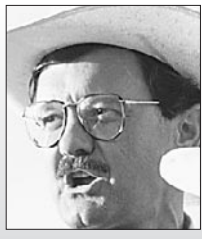
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JIM HIGHTOWER



Texas Republicans would abolish labor unions, eliminate the minimum wage, privatize Social Security, legalize machine guns ... you get the drift.

Where's George Orwell Today? Texas!

If you think the GOP's Congress of Clowns represents the fringiest, freakiest pack of politicians that MAGA-world can hurl at us — you haven't been to Texas.

It's widely known, of course, that Sen. Ted Cruz, Gov. Greg Abbott and most other top Republican officials here are obsequious Trump acolytes. Thus, Texas is infamously racing against Florida to be declared the stupidest, meanest, most repressive state government in America, constantly making demonic attacks on women's freedom, immigrants, voting rights, public schools, poor people and so on. But I'm confident Texas will win this race to the bottom for one big reason: GOP crazy runs extraordinarily deep here.

We have a county-level layer of ultra-MAGA cultists constantly pressing the state's far-right officials to march all the way to the furthest edge of extremism — then leap into absurdity. Therefore, the party officially supports abolishment of labor unions, elimination of the minimum wage, privatization of Social Security, legalization of machine guns and ... well, you get the drift. Now, though, local mad-dog Trumpistas are pushing their party straight into the abyss of autocracy by declaring war on H-E-B.

What's that? H-E-B is a Texas chain of supermarkets beloved in communities throughout the state. "Beloved" because the stores fully embrace the rich diversity of all people in our state, has affordable prices, values employees and supports community needs.

Nonetheless, county Republican zealots screech that H-E-B violates their party ideology by accepting food stamps, opposing privatization of schools, and (horrors!) sponsoring some LBGTQ pride events. So, they're demanding official condemnation of the grocery chain for — get this — "advocating for policies contrary to the Republican Party of Texas platform."

Yes, violating the party platform is to be criminalized. It's the reincarnation of Orwell's "Nineteen Eighty-Four": Be MAGA ... or else.

Can't Oil Barons Ever Be Honest? (Hint: No)

Former New Mexico Gov. Bruce King once opposed a bill because, he said, he feared it would "open a whole box of Pandoras."

An odd rhetorical twist, but it would be helpful if today's ego-bloated, high-tech billionaires and corporate profiteers had a bit of self-restraint, rather than thinking their money equals genius. For example, such doofuses are presently pushing convoluted schemes to "solve" our globe's technology-caused climate crisis with — what else? — technology.

Their latest box of Pandoras includes a grandiose plan to "geoengineer" carbon dioxide, the destructive gas spewed into our air by the production and use of fossil fuels. The geniuses say they have the technology to suck-up that bad gas and pump it a mile deep into the Earth. See, problem gone! All they need, they say, is for taxpayers to put up trillions of dollars.

Who's behind this hustle? Oil giants. Yes, the same prevaricating snake oil salesmen who cause most of the suffocating CO2 pollution that's rapidly cooking our planet! Such petro-peddlers as Occidental Petroleum are now trying to rebrand themselves as "carbon management" experts,

asking us to trust them to reengineer our atmosphere. But they're frauds; their magical "Vacuum Cleaner in the Sky" won't remove even 1% of the new carbon emissions released every year.

Worse, Occidental says it intends to keep much of the CO2 it vacuums up, using the gas to force more oil out of the ground — thus creating more global warming! As Occidental's CEO gleefully puts it, geoengineering "gives our industry a license to continue to operate for ... 60, 70, 80 years."

Razzle-dazzle technology is not a climate solution. It's a business-as-usual lie told by profiteers desperate to keep burning fossil fuels — and our globe.

What Nation Besides Israel Is Killing Gaza's Innocent Palestinians?

"Somebody better investigate soon." That's a lyric in Bob Dylan's "Oxford Town," a 1962 song exploring the relentless murdering of Black people and civil rights activists in the Deep South. The line mocks the refusal of racist officials to punish the White murderers, instead cynically covering up atrocities by promising do-nothing "investigations."

Six decades later, the depraved ethic of "Oxford Town" is allowing Israel's indiscriminate carpet-bombing of Gaza, wreaking horror at a genocidal pace on the Palestinian people. So far, some 33,000 Palestinians have been slaughtered, with another 75,000 horribly injured — and two-thirds of these victims are children and women. Hundreds of thousands more face imminent starvation because their homes, cities and entire economy have been blown to smithereens. Adding to the depravity, Israel's fanatical ruler, Benjamin Netanyahu, restricts humanitarian aid from reaching the Palestinian people.

Yet our government is Netanyahu's biggest international apologist and enabler! Oh, for sure our officials condemn each of his atrocities, loudly demanding "a full investigation." But even when investigations happen, they produce no punishment ... and no change in our shameful open-ended policy of annually supplying the billions of US dollars and mega-weapons he's now using to exterminate the innocent men, women and children of Gaza. Thus, the horrendous 2,000-pound bombs he's dropping on Palestinians bear our US flag.

President Joe Biden said he's heartbroken by the relentless killing of innocent Palestinians, calling it "unacceptable." Then he accepted it! Even as he expressed anguish, Biden authorized a shipment of another \$18 billion-worth of US bombs and jets to Netanyahu.

Washington keeps sending killer weapons — then, when they're fired at innocents, we piously demand useless investigations and request (pretty please) that Netanyahu "bomb responsibly." Gosh, why isn't that working?

Why Are We Letting Greedheads and Ideologues Kill Our Post Office?

Before there was a USA — before our Constitution was adopted, and even before our 1776 Declaration of Independence — one of America's best democratic institutions was already delivering for the people: The Post Office.

But it's important to realize that, for 250 years, this invaluable public service has delivered more than mail. It was — and is — a core element of our national unity. Its network of local employees goes door-to-door, coast-to-coast, six days a week in every ZIP code, physically linking America's widely dispersed, wildly diverse people into one country. It is a universally popular and essential government service that works!

Yet — as we've seen with such other valued public assets as our schools and parks — no flower is so beneficial to the common good that selfish corporate opportunists won't try to pluck it for their private gain. So for years, corporate profiteers and laissez-faire ideologues have been

plucking apart the budget, staff, branches and historic mission of the post office.

Their scheme is to shrivel service, foment public dissatisfaction with the agency, demand evermore cuts in staff and branches — then push for a corporate takeover and downsizing of this universal, nationwide delivery network. It's not just a piece of government they're trying to eliminate; it's the core idea of America itself, namely our people's can-do democratic spirit and commitment to the common good.

Rather than meekly accepting this corporate retreat from our egalitarian ideals, let's reassert our rebellious spirit. For

starters, we can help the feisty American Postal Workers Union push a "People's Postal Agenda." It outlines ways to reinvent and expand the public services that this grassroots network of employees and local branches is uniquely able to provide. For info and action go to apwu.org.

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

Earth Day Update: Optimism and Pessimism

By FRANK LINGO

This year marks the 55th Earth Day. At the first one in April 1970, I found the lawn of my college with a bunch of booths informing us of ecological issues.

Fast-forward to 2024 and we've made some important improvements in our treatment of the planet, and at the same time many of our actions are abysmally inadequate.

A perspective on the past could foretell our future. Bipartisan bills in the early 1970s included the Clean Air Act, the Clean Water Act and the Endangered Species Act — all excellent laws. The Environmental Protection Agency was created as one means to enforce them.

Catalytic converters for cars were required, and they reduced carbon monoxide emissions by 97%, making our air much cleaner. The news video of a river in Ohio burning from petrochemical pollution shocked the country's conscience and inspired crackdowns, so factories and power plants had to stop dumping their toxic refuse into waterways.

That was a great start, which proved that we can find solutions, but then the progress stalled. The environment became a partisan issue with the Republican Party choosing to serve the interests of fossil fuel firms, who contributed millions of dollars to their campaigns. The Democrats weren't much better, many also accepting big payouts from polluters.

By the 1990s, climate scientists told us of the perils of global warming but many Americans scoffed at the science. Anti-scientific sentiment took hold, encouraged by disinformation ads financed by the fossil fools. (Secret documents have since revealed that Exxon knew in the 1960s that burning their gas would cause global warming.)

Some other countries, especially in Europe, have committed more seriously to sustainability, and over there environment is usually not a partisan issue. But the USA, the world's biggest polluter per-capita, shows scant leadership in world treaties because of our partisan divide.

Now decades of disregarding the dangers have come back to bite us. A March 2024 Associated Press article was headlined "UN weather agency issues 'red alert' on climate change after record heat, ice-melt increases in 2023."

Climate scientists say that, worldwide, we are close to going over a rise of 1.5 Centigrade (over 2.6 degrees Fahrenheit) above pre-industrial levels. Consider if your child's temperature went from 98.6 up to 101 and stayed there. That's not when reasonable people would dismiss thermometer science. Like in humans, the Earth's temperature is sensitive and a spike is a serious situation.

The net effect is climate chaos. It's already happening in the form of stronger

and more frequent hurricanes, longer droughts, and horrific forest fires. Coastal cities are in danger of drowning. Miami will be home to the dolphins and not the football team. Except the dolphins will head north to cool off. Ocean temps in August 2023 exceeded 100 degrees off Florida's coast. Heat like that kills many fish and sea mammals.

Such disasters have persuaded people of the problem. In an Oct. 2023 survey, CNN found that 71% of Americans believe the climate crisis is causing some harm to their fellow citizens. That's a big jump from other polls in the past where it was under 50%.

Still, the deniers double down on disinformation. Even a mainstream newspaper like the *Kansas City Star* published in January an anti-environmental opinion piece claiming that electric cars are garbage. The *Wall Street Journal* is extremely conservative, but even their car expert, Dan Neil, wrote a well-informed article that same week defending electric cars against such distortions.

On the bright side, prices of solar panels and wind turbines have plummeted while their efficiency has soared. So it's economical to be ecological for home and business owners. Batteries are getting better, even for storage of sustainably sourced power. Biodegradable plant-based plastics are available, if only packagers would provide them. There are even microbes which eat plastic if we'd use them.

"Earth's issuing a distress call," U.N. Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said in March. "Fossil fuel pollution is sending climate chaos off the charts."

It's up to all of us. If choose our food, our fuel, our leaders as if our lives depend on it, maybe we can save the Earth from ourselves.

Frank Lingo, based in Lawrence, Kansas, is a former columnist for the *Kansas City Star* and author of the novel "Earth Vote." Email: lingofrank@gmail.com. See his website: Greenbeat.world



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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Trump Excelled at Dishonesty

The 2024 presidential election is starting to resemble a horror story that the combined talents of H.P. Lovecraft and Stephen King working together could never have conjured during their darkest and most creative hours. Donald Trump is back, despite an unmatched history of epic criminality rarely seen in the annals of Western man. However, there is one issue and subject that we can collectively as a nation thank Trump for. Donald Trump has, with a crushing finality, destroyed and eradicated the toxic and destructive notion of “American Exceptionalism.” Trump and his dual political/criminal ascension have thankfully-laid to ruin and rubble the noxious and deadly belief of “American Exceptionalism” which for generations has permeated the American political and spiritual landscape.

Americans will never again be able to boast and swagger and showcase their perceived natural superiority over other nations and other people. We can no longer boast to the world that Americans cherish and uphold the truth. We can no longer proclaim or boast about our love of democracy and the letter of the law. Trump and his epic criminality, which inexplicably has been embraced and nurtured and, yes, admired by millions of Americans has sent the world a clear and, yes, harrowing message. The message is this-truth – science – the fragile bundle of ideas that create authentic and long-term democracy-none of these matters.

What matters today are the big lies that feed and empower the “Ugly American.” Indeed, Trump has opened doors that have polarized the nation-and there is no end in sight. Thus, we can collectively as a nation be grateful for Trump’s one true and beneficial contribution to the world.

Donald Trump has effectively by showcasing epic dishonesty, lies, malice, and malignant hatred laid to waste-again with finality-the toxic and damning belief of American exceptionalism. In that regard the American people and indeed the world can thank Trump for a job well done.

JIM SAWYER, *West Edmonds, Wash.*

High-Speed Internet to Rural America

This is in reference to your lead article regarding Biden’s \$90 billion to rural America for high speed internet in the 4/1/24 issue [“President Biden and Democrats in Congress funneled \$90 billion into high-speed internet for rural areas, with the goal of bringing universal broadband to all Americans by 2030. But Republican lawmakers condemned these projects as ‘socialism’ and resist their implementation” by Dana Milbank].

I live in Geneva, N.Y., population approximately 14,000, located between Rochester and Syracuse. We have had high-speed fiber internet for some time. The fiber optic companies and utilities are busy putting up new and taller poles here as well, leaving two unsightly poles where once there was one. I once got my fiber internet, TV, and phone service this way from Verizon. I now get this service from a small local company, “Community Broad Band”, which broadcasts their signals from antenna located on top of the local Methodist church’s tower. Subscribers have a very small dish receiver on their roofs.

The fiber service gave me a handful of TV channels and some streaming entertainment. Broad Band Community gives me hundreds of TV channels, all of the stream-

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Ohio was Wrong Last Time: Let’s Do it Again!

By DON ROLLINS

For 60 years (1960-2020) pollsters looked to Ohio as the ultimate bell-weather for presidential elections. It was a streak in keeping with the state’s political flexing, earning Ohio status as the quintessential swing state.

That luck-of-the-draw ended on Nov. 3, 2020, as the Buckeye State went for Donald Trump by more than eight percentage points. Thankfully, Ohio’s run as failsafe presidential oddsmaker was over. So too, the Trump presidency.

But while restoring my home state to its “predictive glory” is a common GOP hook line these days, statehouse MAGA Re-

publicans really mean Ohio would get its groove back, and Trump would once again be off-script in the Rose Garden.

Given all major polls currently have Trump ahead by double digits in Ohio, many of those same Republican officials and luminaries appear oddly calm when interviewed. Ohio is now a presidential lock, and they know it. The resulting strategy out of Columbus seems focused: Turn out an already stoked base, and divert campaign resources elsewhere.

That elsewhere is the US Senate, where Ohio’s venerable Sherrod Brown is locked in a high-stakes matchup with Republican challenger (and Trump endorsee) Bernie Maren. Brown has held steady with a 5-7- point lead, and benefits from a massive funding advantage created by Maren’s bitter three-way primary race; but nothing can be taken for granted given the seat is essential if Democrats are to maintain control of the upper house.

Maren, 57 and a Colombian-Ameri-

can from northeast Ohio, is proving to be a worthy adversary despite his earlier distancing from Trump. As with scores of other GOP candidates once disgusted with, but eventually kowtowing before the ex-president (including Ohio’s junior US senator, J.D. Vance) Maren’s 2106 characterizations of Trump as a “lunatic” and “maniac” driving the country into a ditch are on the record.

Maren has since reversed course, and political amnesia has set in. During his remarks celebrating his primary victory, he stated he now wears his Trump endorsement as “... a badge of honor.”

For Brown’s part, his liberal bona fides over three terms are stellar. Yet after years of outperforming in a state in which every other state office is now filled by a Republican, this time Brown is running down-ticket from a Democratic president with a 34% approval rating. Its a daunting task made more difficult by an equally vulnerable executive.

Brown and Democrats across the country are hoping Maren’s MAGA extremism on the issues will be to their advantage. Maren has already signaled he’d have no problem bypassing the pro-choice referendum adopted by Ohioans last fall, and give full-throated support to a near-total national ban. Likewise some of the most draconic, inhumane southern border measures his party is yet to concoct; and further cuts to the social safety nets Brown and his Democratic colleagues have worked to preserve.

Clearly Ohio can’t deliver for Joe Biden in such an atmosphere. The state’s 17 electoral votes will be posted to the Trump column not long after the polls close. Still there is reason to trust enough level-headed Ohioans will realize the gravity of the moment, and spare their state and nation from yet another of Trump’s sycophants.

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

ing service I wish to subscribe to, and all at a lower price. It is a small local company, with technicians who, when problems arise, give prompt advice over the phone, or show up at the house promptly when that is not sufficient.

My point is, there are cheaper, better, and less obtrusive ways of getting broadband to rural communities than by optic fiber.

LARRY CAMPBELL, *Geneva, N.Y.*

Conason’s Attack on RFK Jr.

On reading Joe Conason’s article [“Robert F. Kennedy Jr.’s Farce – And Our Tragedy, 4/15/24 *TPP*], after four paragraphs of ad hominem attacks on RFK Jr. as farcical Presidential candidate, he mentions he wrote a favorable article about him in the past. “Fair and balanced” I guess.

I just finished “The Wuhan Cover Up” by RFK Jr., published recently, and I was impressed with the tight scholarship, persistent argumentation and voluminous footnotes. There was nothing farcical about it I that I could see.

I would recommend, w/o ad hominem, Joe read even one chapter to see what he thinks.

BUSHROD LAKE, *Santa Fe, NM*

Focus on Real Issues

We are in a world of trouble, literally as well as figuratively. Yet, it seems necessary to review a short list of the threats to our existence as a species, as well as to our status as a civilized nation.

Let us begin with the sky above and the seas at our feet, all becoming so charged with carbon dioxide that they have run out of the capacity to forgive us our overbearing use of fossil fuels. We seriously need to move on that, if only we could withdraw ourselves from our frazzled attempts to maintain business as usual.

Then we must urgently address the spectacular ability of global capitalism to turn valuable resources into worthless garbage and toxic waste with ever-increasing celerity. Rather than a straight line from nature’s bounty to a landfill or brown field, the supply chain should take the form of a circle—reduce, reuse, and recycle, or do without. Can we work on that?

And let’s take on the massive maldistribution of wealth from the places and persons that produced it to the ownership class that appropriated the lion’s share of it. From this one aspect of how imperial capitalism works proceeds nearly every social and political problem the world weeps over, from homelessness and hunger to mass migration and war.

So where else does the ruling class direct our outrage, and their media lackeys our focus, but to the “woke agenda,” i.e., the questioning of cultural assumptions by which the ruling class has always ruled. Surely enough, the misdirection works, and too many of us end up fighting each other over the racial composition and sexual disposition of our population – instead of fighting for our collective human existence.

Just two words should suffice: Focus, people!

JEFFREY HOBBS, *Springfield, Ill.*

Whose Laws of War?

New York Times columnist David French wrote an April 8 column titled “Netanyahu is making the same mistake America made in Iraq,” and it is beyond me how he can get away with it.

It is not possible that Israel could make the same mistake as the US did in Iraq, since the US in Iraq happened from America being the aggressor, just as Hamas was upon Israel. Israel is defending (sort of) and the US and its attack upon Iraq had nothing to do with defending – the Iraqis were defending.

French’s approach is racist, because all he has as a common denominator to claim Tel Aviv’s fight is the same as

Washington’s fight with Iraq – as both governments are fighting Muslims – which he conveniently calls “terrorists.”

French says both the US in Iraq and Israel in Gaza are “fighting terrorists,” and that when “in a fight against terrorists, providing humanitarian aid isn’t just a moral imperative, it’s a military necessity.”

French makes reference to the “laws of war” a lot in his column. He must then be aware of some of the basic workings of the “laws of war.” For instance, when people are attacked by “war aggression” and they defend themselves (as Iraqis did), they are not “terrorists,” they are fighting within international law, they have a right to defend themselves. The “war” aggressor is doing the terrorism.

As with the US in Iraq, French gives Israel the right to use violence in Gaza if done within the “laws of war.” But could an “occupying power” that had invaded the US mainland access “the technical legal status of an invading army once it took control of an invaded region” ... of America? Never in a million years would French accept it, accept that a foreign military could access the “laws of war” to kill Americans and occupy US soil.

The “laws of war” are such criminal nonsense – for instance, could Belize access the “laws of war” to invade America, kill Americans and occupy US soil?

The “laws of war” are nothing more than your ability to do “war.”

FRANK ERICKSON, *Minneapolis, Minn.*

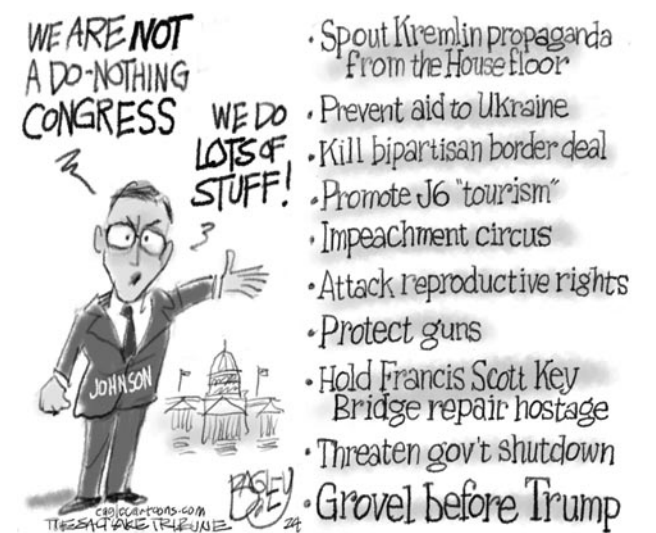
Living in the 21st Century with 16th Century Cults

Our horrific and shameful insurrection (Jan. 6, 2021) of the conned, duped, B.S.’d and lied-to segment of our population via the “cultisized” spelling of common dating back to civilization’s origin, and notably from all the “Gods” created by the emperors of the Roman Empire to the feudalistic scourges, “flat Earthers” B.S. to instill the fear and ability to manipulate and pillage for centuries.

Religion has been one of the primary facilitators from its creation forward, that has produced the likes of the Jim Jones, David Koresh and Warren Jeffs of the world, and their “cultisized” B.S. and duping of the aforementioned and today’s pet rock, Q-Anon and the multitude of today’s schemes and scams that are growing detrimental to lives’ existence if these perpetrators of all kinds of wrongdoing are not identified at one’s earliest age in life and throughout.

We have failed in numerable ways to deal with “technologies,” abilities and its facilitation of our “societal reprobrates” as listed prior. We are unfortunately guilty of being duped by the “moneyed interests” for far too long and excessively costly both financial and threatening to lives in multiple ways unabated. We continue to substantiate “We” are a nation, while living in the “realities” of the 21st century and governing like it was the 16th century.

FRANK ROHRIG, *Milford, Conn.*



Diversions from Political Mainstream

Too much or too little? In times like these, tumultuous and difficult but somehow denying answers, column writers have a dilemma. We can choose a subject that overwhelms—like the 2024 wars—and drown in questions, data, opinions, conclusions that may never be proven but are of the utmost consequence. Or we can choose a subject with too little material, like rural health care or the survival of pollinators, also of the utmost consequence, but with few threads to follow.

So we choose something less consequential and hope to make deadlines. Thus, this columnist today writes about third-party candidacies.

Let's start with 73-year-old Jill Stein, the Green Party's perennial. She is a tireless campaigner going back to her first attempts at office in 2002 when she ran for governor of Massachusetts. Working her way up the political ladder, she ran for President in 2012 and every campaign since, although her 2020 campaign was a quiet one. Still, she's built a little more power every year. Her main talking points are predictable: Both parties have failed to help Americans



Favor for a third party has risen among independent voters and is at an all-time high, says Gallup, even if third-party voters throw the election to the bad guy.

achieve goals in income, environmental improvement, education and global stability. Hackneyed as they sound, these arguments always find traction.

According to her webpage, her principles include: A Just Economy; A Real New Green Deal; Freedom, Equality and Justice for All; Peace and Global Human Rights; Real Democracy to Power the People. OK, but how about policy to fuel those principles? Can you extricate us from Joe Biden's Israel love affair, impose peace and human rights, without losing the Jewish vote? Can you take agriculture back to local markets without losing the farmers?

Stein's top donors in the 2016 run were the usual Wall Street darlings. According to Open Secrets, top donations came from Alphabet, Amazon, Lockheed Martin, Microsoft, Apple and IBM. Donating thousands to her, they also donated millions to Donald Trump and Biden. Note the cyberspace lean of the list. Under a button on Stein's website that says, "Stop the Tik Tok Ban" is a sentence reading, "Trying to

ban TikTok is a transparent attempt to shut down this channel for us to communicate instead of solving the real problems we face." But again, no proposed solutions for those real problems.

Looking on comments on Stein's webpage, you'd think she was running against Robert F. Kennedy Jr., rather than against Biden and Trump. One commenter says, "I mean I also could just vote rfk and he has at least a chance to win lol." A personal note: I love anyone that can write "LOL" with a political comment.

Like Stein, Kennedy is poised to take votes from Biden rather than Trump. And as founder of the national Waterkeepers Alliance he has the credibility to attract enviro types. His campaign, however seems Trumpian. Other than the lack of personalized gold sneakers, Bibles or victory perfume, Kennedy has adopted a lot of orange-man strategies: You can buy a "Bark for Bobby" hoodie for your dog or a "Cats for Kennedy" feeding mat for Tabby's food bowls. A t-shirt declares "No Shirt, No Shoes, No Secret Service: Kennedy 24" and reminds us that Kennedy feels that he should get Secret Service protection.

Under policies, we find "People who work hard should be able to afford a good life." And RFK comes through with proposals: Raise the minimum wage; prosecute union-busting corporations so that labor can organize; expand free childcare; drop housing costs by \$1,000 per family and make home ownership affordable by backing 3% home mortgages with tax-free bonds; support small businesses; secure the border and bring illegal immigration to a halt so

that undocumented migrants won't undercut wages; negotiate trade deals that prevent low-wage countries from competing with American workers; rein in military spending; clean out the corruption in Washington, D.C.; make student debt dischargeable in bankruptcy and cut interest rates on student loans to zero; cut drug costs by half to bring them in line with other nations. And, says RFK the anti-vaxxer, "reverse the chronic disease epidemic that is a \$3.7 trillion drag on families and the American economy."

Favor for a third party has risen among independents and is now at an all-time high, says Gallup news, claiming in 2022: "Sixty-three percent of US adults currently agree with the statement that the Republican and Democratic parties do 'such a poor job' of representing the American people that 'a third major party is needed.' This represents a seven-percentage-point increase from a year ago and is the highest since Gallup first asked the question in 2003."

Understood. But most voters follow up the question with what-if? What if I vote third party and help throw the election to the bad guy? Stein answers that parties abandoned their bases many elections ago and that Independents are simply giving them back a choice.

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DISPATCHES

TRUMP EYES SOCIAL SECURITY CUTS BY SLASHING PAYROLL TAX. Amid reports that former US President Donald Trump's economic advisers are urging him to cut the federal payroll tax, a key revenue source for Social Security and Medicare, advocates urged voters to remember that the presumptive Republican presidential nominee has long threatened to do just that. Julia Conley noted at CommonDreams.org (4/18).

"Don't be fooled," said Nancy Altman, president of Social Security Works, which lobbies to strengthen the social safety net for retired Americans. "At the end of his term in office, Trump delayed Social Security's dedicated revenue paid from workers and their employers. He was quite explicit that, if re-elected, he would convert that delay into a permanent cut."

Altman was referring to an executive order Trump signed in August 2020, allowing companies to delay payroll tax payments—an option most companies declined to take as the Treasury Department made clear they would have to pay all of the deferred taxes the following year and that employees would see smaller paychecks as a result of the program.

Trump promised to make the payroll tax cut permanent, and, as Reuters reported April 17, the former president is discussing the proposal with economic advisers including Fox News host and former National Economic Council Director Larry Kudlow and right-wing commentator Stephen Moore.

The former president is weighing cuts to Social Security's revenue stream even as Republicans complain that the popular program is unaffordable and push to raise the retirement age to delay Americans' use of the funds.

The GOP has long claimed Social Security is headed toward insolvency and pushed to privatize the program or cut benefits, but last year's Social Security trustees report found that the program's trust fund currently has a \$2.85 trillion surplus and could pay 80% of benefits for the next 75 years even if Congress takes no action to expand it—as long as it continues to be funded through taxes.

"Social Security can only pay benefits if it has sufficient dedicated revenue to pay its costs. That is why it doesn't contribute even a penny to the deficit," said Altman. "If Trump succeeds in slashing that dedicated revenue so that it is no longer sufficient to fully cover the cost, it will result in an automatic benefit reduction. This would happen without any Republicans having to vote for the cuts, or Trump having to sign them into law."

"He is dusting off the old Republican playbook and bringing back the strategy known informally as 'Starve the Beast,'" said Altman of Trump. "In this case, Social Security is the beast."

Along with cutting payroll taxes, which are paid by workers and employees and amount to 7.65% of each employee's gross pay in order to fund senior citizens' post-retirement income, Trump has proposed extending the 2017 Tax Cuts and Jobs Act, the vast majority of which benefited the wealthiest Americans, according to the Economic Policy Institute and the Center for Popular Democracy.

Altman noted the contrast between Trump's tax proposals and those of President Joe Biden, who has proposed strengthening Social Security and extending its solvency by requiring people with wealth over \$100 million to pay at least 25% in income taxes, raising the corporate tax rate to 28%, and quadrupling the stock buyback tax to disincentive com-

panies lavishing their shareholders with their profits instead of investing in their workforce.

"The choice this election is clear: Trump and the Republicans will cut Social Security and give tax breaks to millionaires and billionaires," said Altman. "The Democrats will expand Social Security, paid for by requiring millionaires and billionaires to pay their fair share."

TENNESSEE VW WORKERS VOTE TO JOIN UAW IN LANDSLIDE. Workers at a Volkswagen plant in Chattanooga, Tenn., became the first Southern autoworkers not employed by one of the Big Three car manufacturers to win a union when they voted to join the United Auto Workers by a "landslide" majority, Olivia Rosane noted at CommonDreams.org (4/20).

This is the first major victory for the UAW after it launched the biggest organizing drive in modern US history on the heels of its "stand up strike" that secured historic contracts with the Big Three in fall 2023.

"Many of the talking heads and the pundits have said to me repeatedly before we announced this campaign, 'You can't win in the South,'" UAW president Shawn Fain told the victorious workers in a video shared by UAW. "They said Southern workers aren't ready for it. They said non-union autoworkers didn't have it in them. But you all said, 'Watch this!' And you all moved a mountain."

According to the UAW's results, the vote tally stands at 2,628—or 73%—yes to 985—or 27%—no. Voting at the 4,300-worker plant ran three days, April 17-19.

The Chattanooga workers announced their current union drive in December 2023. The victory follows two failed unionization attempts at the plant, in 2014 and 2019.

"We saw the big contract that UAW workers won at the

Big Three and that got everybody talking," Zachary Costello, a trainer in VW's proficiency room, said in a statement. "You see the pay, the benefits, the rights UAW members have on the job, and you see how that would change your life. That's why we voted overwhelmingly for the union. Once people see the difference a union makes, there's no way to stop them."

The union's win comes despite the opposition of Republican Tennessee Gov. Bill Lee.

"Today, I joined fellow governors in opposing the UAW's unionization campaign," Lee said on social media April 16, before voting started. "We want to keep good-paying jobs and continue to grow the American auto manufacturing sector: A successful unionization drive will stop this growth in its tracks, to the detriment of American workers."

Republican governors of Alabama, Georgia, Mississippi, South Carolina, Tennessee and Texas signed onto Lee's anti-union statement.

However, Tennessee State Rep. Justin Jones (D-Nashville) celebrated the win.

"Watching history tonight in Chattanooga, as Volkswagen workers voted in a landslide to join the UAW," he wrote on social media April 19. "Despite pressure from Gov. Lee, this is the first auto plant in the South to unionize since the 1940s. This incredible victory for labor will transform Tennessee and the South!"

The next union test is at the Mercedes-Benz plant in Vance, Ala., where more than 5,000 workers filed a petition with the NLRB to call an election, which is scheduled May 13-17.

For the Chattanooga workers, meanwhile, their next big fight will be to secure their first union-negotiated contract.

"The real fight begins now," Fain told cheering workers. "The real fight is getting your fair share. The real fight is the

Continued on page 22

FROMA HARROP



Abortion was legalized in 1973, reducing the number of unwanted children, which might explain the sharp drop in the crime rate in the early 1990s.

Did Legalized Abortion Lead to Lower Crime Rates?

Growing restrictions on the right to an abortion have revived talk of what many still regard as a highly controversial theory. It holds that the legalization of abortion in 1973 reduced the number of unwanted children, who might have been at higher risk of committing serious crimes. And that explained the sharp

drop in the crime rate that started in the early 1990s.

This theory, which rubbed many nerves raw as racist, occupied a chapter in “Freakonomics,” a 2005 bestseller. “There is a long lag between abortions being performed and the affected cohort reaching the age at which crime is committed,” one of the authors, University of Chicago economist Steven Levitt, recently wrote in the *Economist*. “It is rare — almost unprecedented — in academic economics to be able to make a testable prediction and then to go back and actually test it decades later.”

Because young people who commit the crimes were disproportionately Black, arguing that abortion would lead to a reduced criminal population might have sounded intended to reduce the Black population. The counterargument, however, could be that the victims of murder were also disproportionately Black.

The former MSNBC host Mehdi Hasan jumped on the racial implications in crime statistics. “White people kill other white people at almost the same rate black people kill other black people,” he tweeted, “& yet you never hear anyone complaining about ‘white on white crime.’”

Hasan seemed to confuse numbers with rates. Although the number of White-

on-White homicides about equaled Black-on-Black homicides in 2019, Whites made up about 60% of the total population, while Blacks represented only about 12%. Thus, the per capita murder rate was much higher among the Black-on-Black contingent.

“Pro-life” groups have long made the case that abortion is itself racist. They cite eugenicists from early last century who pushed all forms of birth control as a means to target “inferior races.” White women currently account for about 39% of abortions in this country, while Black women account for about 28%, according to the Guttmacher Institute, which collects such data. Perhaps the more relevant statistic is this one: 75% of women who obtain abortions are low-income.

The Economist didn’t and still does not like the “Freakonomics” theory. It noted other explanations for the drop in homicides. “No-fault divorce, rather than legalized abortion, may have played a bigger role,” it said unconvincingly.

A more plausible counterargument might be that increased incarceration and improved policing, as well as more police, accounted for much of the falling crime rates. Levitt questioned whether that conclusion was being pushed by “those whose livelihoods came from fighting crime.”

A personal observation: Back in the very bad-old-days of urban crime, I lived in a mostly poor neighborhood mostly occupied by “people of color.” I recall a 7-year-old girl playing in a park behind my building getting killed in the crossfire of gang warfare. It was at dusk when White grown-ups like me avoided the park, but where were little kids supposed to play before going home for dinner?

We are urged to remember the names of young Black people killed by police, and that is fine. But what about that 7-year-old? Try as I might, I couldn’t find reference to her name. She rightfully could have had a family of her own by now. The remaining members of her family must be traumatized to this day.

Because of the racial implications, the *Freakonomics* abortion theory must be treated with care. But look at the life stories of the most vicious criminals, Whites included, and you see major dysfunction made worse by poverty. The abortion discussion should rightfully go beyond a woman’s right to control her body.

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

A Rushed Farm Bill is a Bad One

This Congress already has failed. Let the next Congress take it up.

By ART CULLEN

A five-year farm bill was supposed to have been approved last year, but was held up in the House over disagreements on food stamps, conservation, crop insurance and funding. House Agriculture Committee Chair Glenn Thompson, R-Pa., announced that he will find a way to push a farm bill out before Memorial Day in order to get President Biden to sign a new farm bill by the end of the year.

Don’t bet the farm on it.

Sen. Chuck Grassley said he is pessimistic, and so is Sen. Joni Ernst, both Republican Ag Committee members from Iowa.

Rep. Randy Feenstra, R-Hull, is optimistic. “So there’s going to be a lot of talk, especially when it comes to SNAP and stuff like that. But I fully believe that we will get it out of the House, and then it’s just a matter of what Schumer and Stabenow is going to do in the Senate when it comes their way,” Feenstra told *Brownfield News*.

If a new farm bill can’t pass this year, it is expected that another one-year extension will be passed. Grassley said farmers would receive protection but not adequate protection. Getting beyond an extension of the same-old would be up to a new Congress, and as of now it is anybody’s guess who will

be in charge.

It’s not as if the existing hang-ups are going anywhere. Fights over food stamps in the House stalled the last farm bill by two years. House Speaker Mike Johnson walks on eggshells in his caucus room as he is accused of caving in to Democrats on spending. The same sticking points will be as sticky in 2025.

It’s a huge piece of legislation with terribly complicated politics. You have regional interests from the South and Midwest battling over commodity payments. You have disagreements between commodity and livestock interests. Then you throw in cultural wedge issues like food stamps (SNAP benefits), and it all becomes a mishmash.

What used to be a fairly bipartisan process in the past decade has devolved into a food fight like everything else in Washington. Because so few know or care about the work of the agriculture committees, their work is controlled by the interest groups that fund our politics.

If food is important, the farm bill should be.

Our food security and agricultural resiliency are imperiled by a warming climate. A farm bill with conservation at its core could serve farmers and the environment better.

The farm bill as it is and has been over the past 40 years has resulted in more consolidation, accelerated rural depopulation, more surface water pollution in Iowa, and fewer farmers.

It also has stunted funding for research into livestock disease as pandemics build and bird flu jumps to humans.

Putting a new label on a defective product does not make it better.

But it might make some politicians look better if they can say they actually got some lipstick applied to the pig.

Crop insurance remains intact, as does a safety net for

commodity markets. Food stamps too. As Grassley said, the protections are in place. So instead of jamming through an even worse farm bill than we already have, which is likely in this election year, we may all be better off if we take our time and do it right.

Ernst should be the No. 3 Republican in the Senate following the election, and the top woman in the caucus. She could establish herself as a national leader by stating unequivocally that nutrition programs are the most efficient way to fight poverty, which makes all of America stronger. Democrats and Republicans used to join hands over it — Hubert Humphrey and Bob Dole, Tom Harkin and Chuck Grassley.

Someone needs to be a voice of reason. The ethanol industry, for example, is openly acknowledging that the future for corn growers depends on capturing tax credits for carbon dioxide pipeline. That’s not a great position for Iowa farmers to be in. But that is where the current farm bill puts us.

We could write a new piece of legislation that enhances soil and water health while directly paying farmers for stewardship. We can make conservation programs a lot more flexible. We can help farmers diversify their revenue streams while cleaning up the Raccoon River, which did not have a nitrate problem before farm programs encouraged planting fencerow to fencerow. And it could cost less if we cut corporations off the teat, which would have a lot of appeal in Iowa. That is not likely to happen by Memorial Day. More of the same is.

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.

How to Win the SAF Game: Part 1

By ALAN GUEBERT

The easiest way to win any game is to rig the rules.

That’s what Big Ag and its loyal boosters at the Department of Agriculture (USDA) appear to be doing to make sure their new project, Sustainable Aviation Fuel, or SAF, a hoped-for 3-billion-gallons-a-year jet biofuel market by 2030 and 35 billion gallons annually by 2050, flies despite market gravity and basic science.

To clear the way for corn-based ethanol to become the dominant SAF feedstock, “qualifying producers can earn a minimum \$1.25 tax credit per gallon” that can “increase to as much as \$1.75 gallon” explains Andrew Swanson, a University of California (Davis) resource economist in a recent *farmland* post.

Those market-making tax credits, included in 2022’s Inflation Reduction Act (IRA), “are in addition to any fuel credits earned under the RFS,” today’s ethanol-enabling federal Renewable Fuel Standard, and state sweeteners like California’s carbon credits.

The “stacked” credits are not just “lucrative” to potential SAF producers interested in the “jet fuel conversion processes;” they’re the

whole ballgame. Without them, SAF has little chance of ever taking off.

“However,” explains Swanson in his lengthy, balanced report, “there is a catch.” For any future SAF producer to “receive these tax credits, a fuel must have 50% less emissions than petroleum jet fuel.”

That’s Everest-tall for ethanol and more than double RFS’s comparatively meager “20% less emissions than petroleum gas” standard for automotive fuel.

There’s more. According to Swanson, SAF emissions must comply with “standards set by the International Civil Aviation Organization” that show “SAF from corn-starch ethanol has higher emissions than petroleum jet fuel.” That means “ethanol producers do not currently qualify for the IRA tax credits.”

But wait, this is ethanol, the federally-mandated biofuel that over the last 40 years has had more lives than the hardiest barn cat. It’s survived decades of sketchy economics, questionable carbon emissions data, and most recently, the fast rise of electric vehicles.

To win the SAF fight, Swanson notes, the Biden Administration—under intense pressure from Big Ag’s ethanol lobby and USDA’s advocacy—needed to rejigger the SAF emissions rules just to get ethanol into the game.

So “The Biden Administration formally stated in December that the Treasury Department will adopt a different model to calculate ethanol’s emissions for SAF. This model is called GREET,” or, in bureaucrat-speak, Greenhouse Gases, Regulated Emis-

sions, and Energy use in Technologies.

Better yet, this new, customized model yielded a new, customized emission number. “According to GREET, corn ethanol represents a 43% reduction in emissions from petroleum gasoline.”

I know, a miracle, right?

While that number still doesn’t clear SAF’s steeper hurdle to unlock IRA’s tax-credit gold mine, says Swanson, “... using GREET will certainly reduce the emission gap between ethanol SAF and the 50% threshold—if not eliminate it completely.”

“Moreover,” adds Swanson, “exploring how GREET determines the emissions of ethanol will reveal how ethanol producers could surpass the 50% threshold.” The most obvious places to start are “the three largest sources of emissions for corn ethanol... corn production, biorefining, and land use change.”

Of the three, biorefining offers an extraordinary example of how this novel, Department of Treasury math magically makes ethanol “green” enough to enter SAF’s tax-credit heaven.

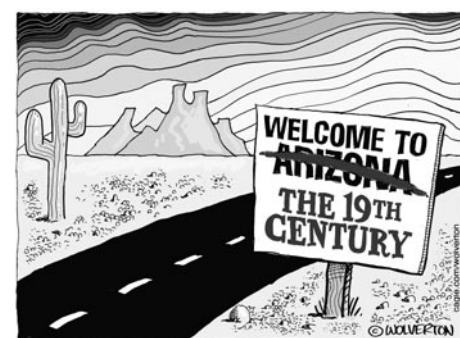
For example, under GREET, just “switching from natural gas to renewable natural gas” during ethanol’s refining process, then employing “carbon capture and sequestration... would reduce the carbon intensity of ethanol SAF” to meet the necessary IRA threshold.

In other words, potential SAF refiners can grab the biofuel’s tax credit billions by

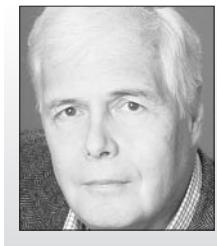
first grabbing carbon credits generated by other heavily-subsidized, deeply controversial federal “green” programs like methane-making manure digesters and carbon-capture pipelines.

Why all the bald-faced rule rigging—and a spectacular tax credit triple jump—to make SAF fly? More on that to come.

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 farmland-foodfile.com



GENE LYONS



COVID got into my heart and produced an irregular heartbeat that left me weak. A cardiac specialist stimulated my heart back into rhythm. I was back!

Speaking of Old Age

Old men have been much in the news of late. Specifically, the health and intellectual fitness of two aging politicians, President Joe Biden and former President Donald Trump.

As a member of the same demographic — I'm roughly halfway between the two candidates in age — I can't say I'm enthusiastic about the choice. The odds of either man being physically and intellectually fit four years from now, when the nation will presumably be electing his successor, would seem long.

My own odds have turned rather for the worse since last we met here. Indeed,

having recently experienced what felt like a near-death experience — the doctors seemed somewhat less alarmed than I was — I feel more qualified to speak to the issue.

Regular readers may have noticed an editorial note to the effect that I've been recovering from an illness. Four illnesses would be more like it — a succession of maladies that hit me out of nowhere. In retrospect, it seems almost comical. But it didn't feel funny then.

I'm writing this because so many readers sent me messages of support that I've been truly touched. Who knew that my meandering contributions meant enough to people that they'd take time to write?

So, thank you, each and every one.

I'd always been one of the lucky ones, rarely sick a day since recovering from chickenpox at age 12. Probably a bit smug about it, honestly. None of the chronic complaints common to people my age had touched me: no back or joint pain, no arthritis, no cancer apart from a couple of skin lesions left over from my lifeguarding days.

Back when the COVID epidemic began, I joked with my brother that our family's history of living in dirt-floored Irish hovels with farm animals had rendered us immune to disease. Never mind that our maternal grandfather had died in the 1918 influenza epidemic. Other people get sick, not us. All the same, I showed up early and often for COVID vaccines.

Then came year 80. I woke up one morning in February too weak to get out of bed. No chest pain, so it wasn't a heart attack; I could see, hear and move my extremities, so it wasn't a stroke. But I truly felt as if the life was draining out of me.

I told my wife that I was dying. Oddly, I wasn't so much frightened as resigned. The rest of you would have to go on without me. I'd be gone. Off duty. I remember thinking that our two sons could care for Diane. If the idiots wanted Trump, they could have him. I'd no longer be available to bitch about it.

Even so, I told her not to call an ambulance, which she interpreted to mean that I wasn't fixing to die at all. She waited. Eventually, I managed to get out of bed. The rest of the day is a blur, but on the second morning I drove myself to the emergency room at the University of Arkansas Medical Sciences campus about 10 blocks away.

COVID. My second infection of the winter. The first had been like a mild cold. This time it had gotten into my heart. I was diagnosed with atrial fibrillation, an irregular heartbeat that can cause strokes. They started me on blood thinners, beta blockers to slow my racing pulse and anti-virals for the COVID. They kept me overnight in the hospital, a lifetime first.

I felt weak and vulnerable. Diane complained that my bitching and moaning had become intolerable. Then my plumbing

stopped up. Back to the emergency room for the longest day of my life. "Acute urinary retention" was the diagnosis. Catheterization provided a temporary but awkward solution.

Convinced that I was in denial, my wife insisted upon accompanying me to the urologist. After listening to her, he said, "I agree with Diane" — a big W for her. He thought I showed symptoms of pneumonia, which yet another emergency room visit confirmed. More pills — antibiotics this time.

I was still weak as the proverbial kitten, and probably clinically depressed if the truth were known. Definitely done writing columns. I'd drive down to the dog park, sit on a bench and watch while Diane walked her daily laps. I could barely finish one.

Then "Dr. D" did his magic trick. A specialist in cardiac electrophysiology with a long name nobody in Arkansas can pronounce — brilliant and compassionate like all of the many doctors and nurses I encountered at UAMS — he stimulated my heart back into its normal rhythm.

And presto! I was back at 100% almost overnight. The A-fib could come back, but so far so good. A humbling, but instructive, experience. Old age is a bitch.

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

Lawmakers Should Spend a Night in a Homeless Shelter

Maybe then they'd drop their opposition to even modest tax credits for low-income people like the ones I work with.

By TIFFANY TAGBO

If there's one thing I could tell lawmakers, it would be to bring back the expanded, monthly, fully refundable Child Tax Credit.

Those monthly payments of up to \$300 per child cut child poverty nearly in half in just a few months. And when the credit expired in late 2021, child poverty immediately shot back up. So we know it works.

Lawmakers are now considering a more modest expansion. It doesn't go far enough, but it could lift another 400,000 kids out of poverty — children like the ones I worked

with.

I grew up walking the fine line of having something and nothing all at the same time. I've experienced tumultuous times as an adult, and I've worked with people experiencing poverty and homelessness. I can tell lawmakers firsthand no matter which side of the coin families end up on, legislation and programs such as the Child Tax Credit, SNAP, WIC, and other safety net programs make a difference.

When I was growing up, my mother worked several minimum-wage jobs and relied on social programs to fill the gaps left by low wages. As a result, my siblings and I never had to sleep on the streets, go to school hungry, or wear tattered clothing like many children do.

With that help, I went on to graduate from the University of Central Oklahoma with a bachelor's degree. Eventually, I became a Child Welfare Investigator at the Oklahoma Department of Human Services following up on claims of neglect and abuse.

While I saw some of both, many of these cases were simply the conditions of poverty. Many caseworkers had never experienced poverty and couldn't make the distinction, but I could. Unfortunately, poverty landed many children in the child welfare

system.

With decent pay and benefits, I was able to buy a house. But the work was soul-crushing and I eventually burned out.

You do everything right, and still — boom! You're knocked right down. One day you are employed with a good salary and benefits, the next you are unemployed without the means to afford the basics, even with a college degree. Married, pregnant, and unable to find decent work, I relied on SNAP and Medicaid to get by — barely.

My job changed, but the clients I work with haven't.

Poverty puts them in impossible situations. They must choose between food or shelter, medical care or poor health, running water or electricity. It's a vicious cycle of suffering.

Without a fixed address or help navigating the system, families can't always access assistance programs that would help them.

If my clients had the expanded monthly Child Tax Credit, many could have afforded housing, clothing, and food — and escaped the cruel cycle of poverty. In his recent budget proposal, President Biden called on Congress to restore the expanded, pandemic-era Child Tax Credit and Earned Income Tax

Credit that lifted tens of millions out of poverty in 2021.

A newer bipartisan tax proposal before the Senate would help. It would modestly expand the Child Tax Credit, lifting 400,000 kids out of poverty and helping 16 million overall.

The bill passed the House with an overwhelming bipartisan majority but has stalled in the Senate, where some senators are blocking it for political gain. Families deserve better. The time for delay is over. The Senate needs to vote.

I challenge lawmakers to live on the \$6 a day that SNAP recipients do, or to come and spend just one night in a shelter. Once they experience these hardships, they'll restore the expanded Child Tax Credit faster than they can say "expand it." Perhaps this should be a requirement of the job.

We must make our voices heard and speak for those who are silenced and often left out of policy discussion. We must restore the Child Tax Credit expansion and ensure the thriving of all children.

Tiffany Tagbo is a mother of two from Oklahoma City, Oklahoma and an Expert on Poverty with RESULTS. This op-ed was distributed by OtherWords.org.

For Its Stakes, Trial Eclipses the Solar Eclipse

By JOHN YOUNG

"Highly anticipated," said the TV anchor. Highly anticipated? Come on, dude. For millions of Americans, the first criminal trial of Donald Trump is Christmas, Hanukkah, Kwanzaa and Ramadan, all in one. Throw in Toyotathon.

It's the first criminal trial ever of a former president — he who swore to uphold our laws and now pleads "King's X" to the highest court.

As a citizen who cares about this republic and judicial fairness, I feel like a 6-year-old in footie PJs. "'Twas the night before voir dire ..."

For more than a year — arraignment: April 4, 2023 — we have counted down the days on a mental advent calendar.

Elf on the Shelf? No. Con Man on the Ottoman.

There he would sit, just beyond my stocking feet, his lying Caramelo face aflame on the TV screen as commentators explained how he forestalled reckoning. He said it was all Joe Biden's doing. No. It was grand juries' doing.

Now it is time — time to be tried for the

same things for which, as his fixer, Michael Cohen went to prison — repeat: went to prison — for doing the bidding of "Individual 1."

I understand you still might be coming down from the solar eclipse, but gather the family again.

Come, children; observe how a lesser astral body, a New York judge, would be positioned under our system of laws to shut off the big ball of gas who is self-perceived as the brightest star in the firmament.

And the "most persecuted."

Pay attention and learn, young 'uns. This is America, where anyone can grow up to be president, then be indignant to find the criminal code applies to him.

A solar eclipse is a stunning event. But so are certain acts by this figure.

Like cheating on multiple wives, preying on women, cheating the government at tax time, engineering a fraudulent bid to throw out a lawful election and still being held up as a man of "Christian values."

You know those trashy magazines in the check-out line? Listen and learn how this powerful man finagled a "catch and kill" deal with one of them to cover up some of his many dalliances.

This is no garden-variety sex scandal. This involves multiple trysts, hush-money checks signed in the Oval Office and a shell company meant to leave no footprints.

More importantly, on the cusp of a presidential election, with fraudulent busi-

ness records, this was a scheme to make sure voters didn't know about any of this when they went to the polls.

The better to wave the baton of accusation at Hillary Clinton to chants of, "Lock her up."

I have a question for anyone who considers it all a "witch hunt," particularly since grand juries of average citizens authorized the 88 indictments.

Why would Trump stall proceedings with all his might?

Why not demonstrate in court and under oath how the charges in the Manhattan criminal case and the other three pending against him are baseless?

Speedy trial, speedy acquittal. He should demand that. The sooner the better, right? He could get on with his life and not have to spend hundreds of thousands of dollars a day with specious filings and dodges.

This reminds of what Robert Mueller had to say about Trump in his report about claims of collusion with the Russians. Mueller couldn't say for sure that Trump did that. Mueller did imply strongly that Trump engaged in criminal obstruction of the probe.

Americans should have asked of Trump, "Why? What to hide?"

So, today: Why delay? Without a doubt, it's in the hope of reclaiming the presidency and wiping all legal troubles clean.

Ah, but at long last in a Manhattan courtroom, one of many abominable cons is to be laid out for all to see. Gather the family. Invite the neighbors. No need for special glasses.

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



Cover Story...

Continued from page one

Since the early 2000s, monitors near three facilities owned by Westlake Corp. have captured alarming levels of ethylene dichloride, which is linked to stomach cancer, pancreatic cancer and leukemia. One was found emitting more of it than any other industrial facility in America.

ProPublica has written stories about the city's problem, and the local news has followed up.

The US Department of Justice has even gotten involved, forcing the company to pay a \$1 million fine and spend another \$110 million to fix equipment at its facilities in Calvert City and Louisiana.

None of it had stopped the poison.

Westlake didn't respond to requests for comment. The company previously told the nonprofit newsroom Kentucky Lantern that it would work with environmental regulators and had "engaged a consultant" to study the EPA's air-monitoring report. In response to the \$1 million fine from 2022, Westlake told Law360 that it was "pleased to have reached an agreement with the United States Environmental Protection Agency and is making investments to reduce environmental emissions in concert with the company's sustainability strategy."

In an interview, EPA officials said they have inspected Westlake's facilities, have updated a federal rule on industrial pollution and are working with Westlake on voluntary measures to reduce emissions in Calvert City.

"EPA is concerned about the concentrations here, and we are committed to protecting public health in this community," said Daniel Garver, an environmental scientist in the EPA office that oversees Kentucky.

During the meeting, an older man on oxygen said he wished he'd been warned before he moved to town years ago. A woman who had never worked in a chemical plant, but had developed a rare cancer linked with industrial workers, asked the EPA to offer community cancer screenings.

And Steve Miracle, the school district superintendent, was worried about his youngest students. An air monitor near the elementary school playground had captured toxic concentrations that were many times the level that triggers EPA concern for cancer risk.

Thus far, the best fix regulators had offered were indoor air filters at the school, which would do nothing to protect the kids the moment they stepped outside.

Talking to ProPublica earlier that day, Miracle asked, "Is it going to take another two years before we get a solution in place?"

Through interviews with air pollution experts, former EPA employees and public health professionals, ProPublica found it will likely take much longer — if real change happens at all.

We asked environmental experts if they knew of communities where excess toxic air pollutants had been tamed after regulators and residents interceded.

"I don't know of one," said Jim Pew, an attorney at the environmental law nonprofit Earthjustice. "I think the answer is really depressing."

The inability to stop Westlake from polluting is really an indictment of the rules that govern toxic air pollution, experts told

ProPublica. Scott Throwe, a former senior EPA enforcement official, put it this way: If Westlake followed every regulation, the emissions "would still be significant."

The EPA regulates only a handful of pollutants with enforceable standards for outdoor air quality. Air monitors track those compounds, like particulate matter and lead, and when concentrations hit a certain limit, regulators must intervene to bring them down. That might involve limiting the construction of new industrial plants or requiring emissions testing on residents' cars.

The law governing ethylene dichloride doesn't work like that. The EPA regulates it and 187 similar air toxics in a less direct way, by enforcing standards for the technology that polluters must install to lower emissions.

A facility like Westlake has dozens of smokestacks, tanks and other points where air toxics are supposed to be released. The company has to install pollution-control equipment on these devices to reduce emissions.

Many of them have specific emissions limits, like 2 pounds of ethylene dichloride per hour. But there's little to no direct air monitoring to ensure the limit is met, and generally no cap on the total emissions that are allowed to come from a plant. If one of the Westlake facilities expands production and adds three smokestacks permitted at 10 pounds of ethylene dichloride per hour, it's not required to cut back on 10 pounds in another part of the facility.

And not all air toxics come out where they're supposed to. So-called "fugitive" emissions can escape from pumps, valves and thousands of other places. Westlake is supposed to conduct routine maintenance to identify and repair leaks. But at the end of the day, no one knows exactly how many tons of air toxics are streaming out of a particular plant.

The law has a backstop to alleviate these weaknesses: Every eight years, the EPA is supposed to review its chemical plant regulations and update them as needed. That might involve requiring newer and better pollution-control technology. Additionally, the EPA might conduct risk studies by estimating the total amount of air toxics coming from these plants and modeling how they disperse into communities. If the results show a lot of residents at high risk, that adds urgency to tightening controls.

But the agency is so understaffed that these reviews can take decades. Westlake Vinyls, one of the plants in Calvert City, got a stricter rule in April for many of its processes — the first revision since 2006.

EPA rarely conducts these reviews for industrial polluters until they're "practically under pain of death to do it," often due to lawsuits from environmental groups, Throwe said.

There's ample evidence that Westlake's emissions have gotten out of hand. The Calvert City facilities have been repeatedly fined for leaking air toxics since at least 2010. When the EPA inspected the plants in September 2022 — several months after ProPublica wrote about alarming air-monitoring results — inspectors found multiple leaks, including one estimated at 170,000 parts per million. Throwe called it a "huge" deal, considering the EPA typically counts anything above 500 parts per million as a leak. In April 2023, EPA inspectors showed

up with experts from the agency's National Enforcement Investigations Center, an elite unit whose involvement shows the case's escalating importance. They documented additional problems in an inspection report, including a pipe with "a visible gap or hole allowing emissions to be released."

But EPA staff are spread thin. The National Enforcement Investigations Center has five inspectors handling air-pollution violations. They're supported by additional inspectors from other EPA offices; the one in charge of Kentucky refused to say how many air-pollution inspectors they have. (The vast majority of inspections are conducted by state and local regulators. The EPA has more of an oversight role.)

To wrap up its most recent investigation, the EPA can't just lean on the dozen or so leaks its inspectors witnessed. If the agency wants real improvements from Westlake, it needs proof of systemic problems. It needs to examine Westlake's records for patterns of poor maintenance and prior leaks, a labor-intensive process that could take many months.

"It is totally unacceptable" for the EPA not to act more quickly to protect the public, said Wilma Subra, an environmental health expert who advises communities on air pollution. She said the agency should know which parts of the facilities are prone to leaks based on its history and target enforcement to immediately fix those weak spots.

Once the EPA is ready to penalize Westlake, any kind of significant fine requires input from the Department of Justice, Throwe said. If the agency accepts an EPA referral, he said, negotiating a settlement with Westlake could take three to five years.

Then, whatever penalty comes out of this process would be added to the other fines the company has faced in the past.

The recent \$1 million fine, for example, took eight years to levy.

The company's net worth is \$19 billion.

Residents are tired of waiting for the pollution to stop. "It's time for EPA to really take some action," Jim Borders, a retired credit union manager, said at the meeting, calling the government's recent fine "chump change."

When an EPA scientist mentioned how the agency was continuing to take air samples, a resident interrupted, "You've been monitoring for years!"

The updated EPA regulations for Westlake Vinyls could make a real difference, said Michael Koerber, former deputy director of EPA's Office of Air Quality Planning and Standards. The new rule, released this month, is giving chemical plants like Westlake a two-year deadline to install ethylene dichloride air monitors along their perimeters. If concentrations exceed a certain limit, Westlake would need to investigate the cause and fix the leaks responsible for high emissions.

Koerber said the monitors could provide an early warning system and force faster repairs.

The state's regulatory agency is working with Westlake to adopt the new regulations sooner than required, said John Mura, a spokesperson for the Kentucky Energy and Environment Cabinet. Kentucky will also apply state guidelines for cancer risk "to protect the health of Calvert City residents," he added.

The samples merit urgent action, par-

ticularly the ones captured around the elementary school, said Koerber. The federal agency calculated that the air toxics raised chronic cancer risk to 60 in a million — meaning that if 1 million people were continuously exposed to those levels for 70 years, 60 people would likely develop cancer. That far exceeds the level that triggers EPA concern but is still below the maximum level the EPA considers acceptable.

"If I'm a parent sending my kid to this school? I'd be concerned," Koerber said.

Children are particularly vulnerable to this kind of pollution, said Carol Ziegler, a family nurse practitioner and co-founder of the Climate, Health and Energy Equity Lab at Vanderbilt University. "Those numbers are just appalling," she said, adding that they raise a key question: "How many sick kids are OK with you?"

Rhonda Fratzke, the woman who asked the EPA for cancer screenings, fears the pollution has caused illnesses that are difficult to diagnose. Several years ago, Fratzke learned she had angiosarcoma of the liver — a rare cancer linked to workers who handle vinyl chloride, a colorless gas used to make plastic. Fratzke lived near one of the Westlake facilities for nine years while it released vast plumes of the compound. Now, the 62-year-old just wants to see her teenage granddaughter graduate from high school. "With what time I got, I want people to know that it is your right to stand up and say, 'Hey, just fix it.'"

Pew, the Earthjustice attorney, said regulators aren't doing nearly enough to help communities like Calvert City. If residents want to see the best results they can get, they should look to Louisville, Kentucky, the closest experts could come to finding a partial success story. Air toxics from Rubbertown, a part of the city with a cluster of industrial plants, had affected nearby neighborhoods — largely populated by communities of color — for decades.

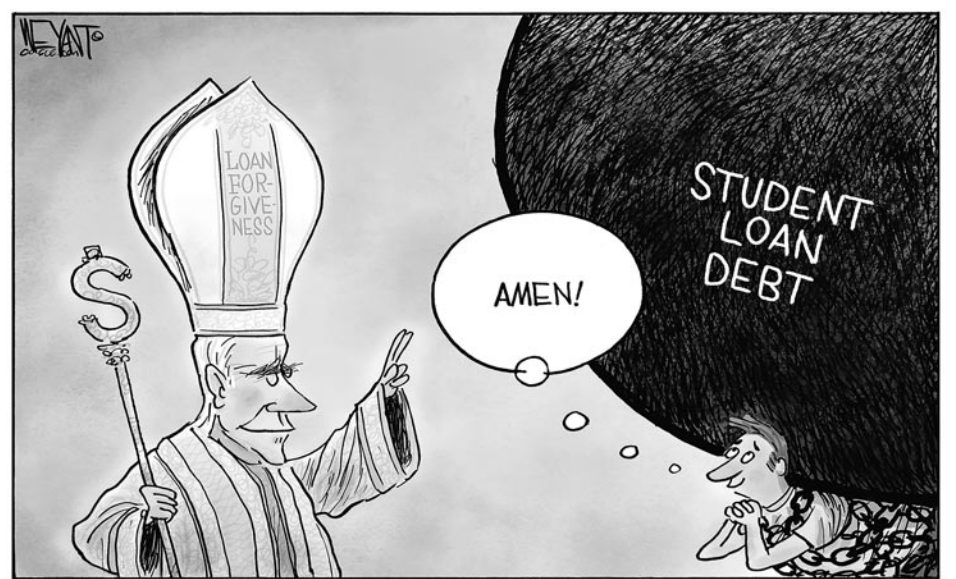
In 2005, local officials adopted an air toxics reduction program that was stricter than the EPA's. Eboni Cochran, a homeschool mom and co-director of the grassroots group Rubbertown Emergency ACTION, said her organization was largely responsible for getting community support. Volunteers packed government hearings, held protests and canvassed neighborhoods to collect thousands of signed postcards urging officials to act. The group was following in the footsteps of years of activism led by the Rev. Louis Coleman Jr., who died in 2008.

Cochran said the program led to initial improvements. Even before it was fully in place, one major polluter drastically reduced its emissions, she said.

But no victory is final, Cochran added. There were years without air monitoring due to inadequate funding, and residents still complain about ineffective investigations, she said. Cochran has repeatedly sacrificed time with her husband and son to continue her advocacy.

With this kind of community work, she said, "99.9% of the time there's no clear win."

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Criminal Court, Day One: The Grifting Grievances of Don Snoreleone

By DICK POLMAN

On April 15, the first morning of his first criminal trial, the Nodfather caught some zzzzzz's at the defense table – perhaps to protest the proceedings, perhaps to inadvertently demonstrate that he's a cognitively impaired 77-year-old – but that wasn't the highlight of the day.

The best stuff happened in late afternoon, when Donald Trump trudged to the waiting cameras and did what he does best: Whine like an entitled little brat.

Having failed to kill off the trial or postpone it until forever – he's credibly charged with buying the silence of a trysting porn star, paying her off as part of an illegal campaign finance scheme to hide the evidence from voters on the eve of the '16 election – his only recourse is to mewl that the judge is being mean to him.

He's mad, for instance, that the judge won't let him skip the trial the following Thursday so that he could attend the U.S. Supreme Court's oral arguments on whether presidents deserve total immunity. In his words, "He (Judge Juan Merchan) won't allow me to leave here for half a day, go to DC, go before the United States Supreme Court – because he thinks he's superior, I guess, to the Supreme Court. We got a lot of problems with this judge..."

I got a lot of problems with that drivel.

(1) All criminal defendants are required to attend their own trials. That rule applies equally to everyone, from the pettiest larcenous thief to an adjudicated rapist allied with Russia. By contrast, there's no requirement whatsoever that someone named in a Supreme Court case must attend oral argument in that chamber.

(2) Ponder this one: An ex-president charged with multiple election-interference crimes (the '16 election) demanded April 15 that he be excused from his criminal trial so that he could sit in a hearing that's about whether he can kill off a different criminal trial in which he's charged with fomenting violence in order to overthrow democracy (the '20 election). Lewis Carroll and Joseph Heller must be spinning in their graves.

Trump was also mad April 15 – or merely purported to be mad – that Judge Merchan didn't immediately give him permission to skip the trial and attend son Barron's school graduation slated for May 17. In his words, "We had some amazing things happen today. As you know, my son is graduating from high school. It looks like the judge will not let me go to the graduation of my son who's worked very, very hard and he is a great student ... I've been looking forward for years to have this graduation, with his mother and father there. It looks like the judge won't allow me to escape this scam, this scam trial ..."

Three points:

(1) Trump lied (big surprise, that's his brand). Merchan did not rule that Trump can't go to Barron's graduation; the judge merely said he's not yet prepared to rule on that – and, indeed, he said that if the trial proceeds in a timely fashion, he may be willing to say yes. But Trump's lie was recycled online by top-tier MAGA sycophants and grassroots MAGA dolts, which, of course, was his intention all along.

(2) Trump purporting to care about Barron's grad ceremony ("I've been looking forward for years to have this graduation") was truly the howler of the day. According

to multiple reports, he didn't go to the high school ceremonies for any of his kids. None of them, nor his wife, came to court to show support.

3) This is the same son who was home with Melania while the criminal defendant was canoodling in secret with Stormy. He seems not to grasp the irony.

Trump will be whining about stuff like this for weeks to come. This election-interference trial will be a long slog, but – finally! – there's a decent chance that the weight of evidentiary facts will trump his propaganda. His signature is on the hush money checks, for starters. I feel sorry for his lawyers. When they address the jurors, they should simply echo Groucho Marx, who, in the film *Duck Soup*, defended Chico this way:

"Gentlemen, he may talk like an idiot and look like an idiot. But don't let that fool you. He really is an idiot."

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.

Bully Bobby Jr. Is No Friend of Free Speech

By JOE CONASON

With every day that Robert F. Kennedy Jr. runs his peculiar presidential campaign, he offers a display of delusional narcissism and feckless duplicity. Aside from drawing attention to himself, Kennedy seems to be trying to ensure the reelection of Donald Trump, provoking the suspicion that he shares Trump's toxic politics despite his own liberal heritage.

Whatever murky and destructive ideology Kennedy may espouse, however, everyone should understand by now that this aging nepo baby is definitely not what he has lately pretended to be: an implacable defender of free speech.

On April 1, he told CNN anchor Erin Burnett that Joe Biden is arguably "a much worse threat to democracy" than Trump, supposedly because the president has "used federal agencies to censor political speech." This muddled accusation stems from Kennedy's nefarious role during the pandemic, when social media platforms tried to mute his relentless promotion of anti-vaccination propaganda.

While Kennedy blames the Biden administration for "censoring" him, the private efforts of companies like Google and Facebook to block the deadly anti-vax disinformation – which earned heavy profits for Kennedy – didn't violate his First Amendment rights. At this point it's darkly comical to hear a candidate who appears nightly on

television, while raking in huge subsidies from Trump's billionaire backers, whine about suppression of his message.

But there was a real attack on free speech that grew out of the pandemic. It was initiated by Kennedy himself and revealed deep flaws in his judgment and character.

In August 2020, a Daily Kos blogger writing under the name "Downeast Dem" posted an item about Kennedy's appearance at a rally in Berlin against the German government's COVID-19 restrictions. Both the article and the highly unflattering headline – "Anti-vaxxer RFK Jr. joins neo-Nazis in massive Berlin 'Anti-Corona' Protest" – accurately described the event, which was sponsored by an antisemitic and Nazi-adjacent organization called Querdenken.

The Berlin protest, its dubious sponsors and supporters, and Kennedy's role as a speaker were all reported in large media outlets, including CBS News, the *New York Times*, and the big German daily *Der Tagesspiegel*, whose story was linked by Downeast Dem.

Kennedy angrily threatened Daily Kos and the anonymous blogger, seeking to force them to pull down the post. He demanded a million-dollar payoff to go away. He filed a defamation lawsuit against the blogger and another action aiming to force Daily Kos to disclose the blogger's identity.

Major civil liberties and news organizations pushed back, aiming to protect a fundamental First Amendment principle that defends anonymous commentary – unless and until that anonymity is found to cloak a violation of law or an actual defamation.

"Kennedy went after someone he thought couldn't defend himself," says Markos Moulitsas, the Daily Kos founder and proprietor. In response, Moulitsas tried to bait Kennedy into suing him, posting a headline mocking the anti-vax at-

torney for "cavorting with Nazis," and daring him to pick on someone his own size. But Kennedy didn't bite, and his lawsuit, filed in the wrong jurisdiction and bereft of merit, ultimately failed. His latest move is an attempt to escape paying the court costs borne by victims of his harassing litigation.

Much like Trump, whom he pretends to oppose, Bobby is a bully. He demands absolute free speech for himself, even when he is defaming his betters and endangering public health. But he tried mightily to curtail the free speech of a private citizen who dared to criticize him – and might be small enough to push around.

The irony of Kennedy's costly intimidation campaign was that many more people learned about his obnoxious alliance with the German far right. The Daily Kos community rallied to support its embattled member and the principle he embodied. Nobody, including Moulitsas, believes the law should protect lawbreakers or defamers. (His staff takes down defamatory and illegal posts all the time.) Yet he still sees anonymous speech as a fundamental liberty and spent a lot of money defending it.

As for Kennedy, he is certainly no friend of freedom. He has become an ally of far-right authoritarians here and abroad, from Mar-a-Lago to the Kremlin, who will be thrilled if his spoiler campaign helps return Trump to the White House.

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.

Biden Rent Increase Cap Shows the Tenant Union Movement Can Win Nationally

The new rent cap heralds a shift in tenant organizing in the U.S. from building power in local struggles to influencing federal policy.

By FRAN QUIGLEY

For the past several years, tenant unions from disparate locations, like Kansas City, Missouri; Bozeman, Montana; and Louisville, Kentucky, have been canvassing door-to-door, lobbying at the White House and Congress, and convening loud, passionate demonstrations in their home communities and at the national headquarters of corporate landlords. They have earned admiring profiles in the *New York Times* and *Time* magazine and have been featured on National Public Radio. What they have not done is win a tangible federal victory for renters.

After tenants demanded cancellation of rent and mortgage obligations in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the government instead issued \$46 billion in Emergency Rental Assistance to landlords with no

strings attached, filling the coffers of serial evictors and institutional slumlords with notorious health and safety records. After tenants called for renter rights to be enshrined in federal law, the Biden administration's early 2023 Blueprint for a Renters Bill of Rights was so lacking in actual policy to accompany its lofty language that the nation's landlord lobbyists gleefully claimed victory.

"Over the past several decades, the federal government has not only abdicated its responsibility tenants, it has actually become the financial enabler of some of the worst landlord business practices," says Tara Raghuvver of the National Tenant Union Federation.

But, as of March, that may be changing.

That is when the Biden administration announced it would impose a cap on rent increases on Low-Income Housing Tax Credit (LIHTC) housing. The 10% annual increase limit is far higher than the 3% cap that tenant unions have been pushing for, and the limitation to the LIHTC program leaves out a great deal of other federally financed and subsidized housing. But the new rule could apply to over a million households. And perhaps more importantly, it shows for the first time that the tenant union movement can make its power felt on the national stage.

"It's a huge win, and it wouldn't have happened if not for tenant unions beating the drum for the past several years demanding that every dollar of federal financing and subsidies be conditioned on tenant

protections," Raghuvver says. "The federal government is finally recognizing its responsibility to protect tenants from price-gouging."

It seems the landlord lobby agrees. The same organizations that cheered the words-only Biden Blueprint a year ago have joined together to bitterly criticize the new rent cap.

"You're discouraging the creation of supply," the CEO of the National Housing Conference complained to the *Washington Post*.

Landlords were particularly disturbed by the Biden administration explicitly dismissing their increasingly discredited argument that rent limits decrease the supply of affordable housing.

"We've seen no evidence that this limitation—even those much lower than 10%—have limited the supply of new affordable housing nationally," said Department of Housing and Urban Development spokesman Zachary Nosanchuk.

The new rent cap also heralds a shift in tenant organizing in the U.S. Although tenant unions have traditionally built their power through local struggles, laws passed by state legislatures in places like Missouri and Kentucky put ceilings on local housing reforms. At the same time, federal financing plays an enormous role in the housing industry. In 2022, the Federal Housing Finance Agency, or FHFA, which manages both Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac, purchased \$142 billion in mortgages issued by banks to multifamily landlords, thus assuming the risk of nonpayment. So tenant unions

argue that this federal government largesse should come with conditions, specifically limits on rent hikes, obligations to keep the housing clean and safe, and promises not to evict tenants or not renew leases except for good cause. These types of tenant protections on federally backed housing could apply to over 12 million rental units, nearly one in three renting households in the country.

Winning these conditions and ensuring that the new rent cap is fully enforced are the next steps for the tenant union movement looking to build on the momentum of this win.

"For many of these landlords, rent-gouging, evictions, and poor conditions are part of the business model, and what makes their business model work is the favorable terms they receive from our federal government," Raghuvver says.

"The rent is too damn high, and the government is in business with our landlords."

Fran Quigley directs the Health and Human Rights Clinic at Indiana University McKinney School of Law. This appeared at Common-Dreams.

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A New Manufacturing Frontier

By DAVID MCCALL

Tom Bixler and several hundred of his co-workers produced top-quality glassware at the Libbey Glass plant in Toledo, Ohio, over the years while keeping the aging equipment there operating through sheer grit.

They even set efficiency standards despite the steep odds and carried the company through Chapter 11 bankruptcy, all to ensure the sprawling manufacturing complex remained viable and a centerpiece of the local economy.

But while they're rightly proud of all they've done to sustain the facility, Bixler and fellow members of the United Steelworkers (USW) know they need to continue innovating to build a more secure, sustainable future. They're now embarking on a critical transformation of their plant that will not only safeguard Northwest Ohio's glassmaking jobs for decades to come but help forge a new frontier in American manufacturing.

Bixler, president of USW Local 65T, joined US Deputy Energy Secretary David Turk and US Rep. Marcy Kaptur March 25 as they highlighted a federal grant award of up to \$45.1 million that will enable the plant to install a pair of larger hybrid electric furnaces intended to boost efficiency, reduce pollution and expand employment.

The cutting-edge furnace technology—combining the advantages of oxygen fuel and electric melting to process the raw materials for glassmaking, reducing carbon dioxide emissions by up to 60%—has the potential to set a new standard for the industry and revolutionize glass production nationwide.

And this commitment to the glass industry represents just one part of President Joe Biden's initiative to grow the manufacturing economy with clean energy and union jobs. In all, his administration in April announced \$6 billion for 33 decarbonization and modernization projects, deploying a range of new technology, in iron, steel, chemicals, refining,

cement, pulp and paper, and other industries.

Historic union-backed legislation—the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act and the Inflation Reduction Act—will fund the grants.

“This is something that's going to blaze a whole new trail,” said Bixler, a mold maker at Libbey for 41 years, who considers the federal grant, to be matched by the company, as Biden's investment in workers who have worked so hard to preserve the plant and keep the community strong.

“The technology in the furnaces has not changed for eons,” explained Bixler, noting the 12 mold-makers in Local 65T work with members of USW Locals 59M and 700T, as well as co-workers in the International Association of Machinists and Aerospace Workers, to produce drinking glasses, stemware and mugs.

“We all work together to keep the plant operating and the glass flowing off the line with very antiquated equipment.”

He and other workers made sacrifices to bring Libbey through bankruptcy a few years ago. While the financial crisis temporarily jeopardized the century-old plant, Bixler said, the new grant and furnace innovation will help to ensure the facility's survival “for our grandchildren and great-grandchildren and on down the line.”

The USW wrote a letter of support for Libbey's grant application and now intends to help the company expand apprenticeship opportunities, ensuring good jobs for community members and dedicated union workers for the plant.

“One of the best things our country can do is to get back to having a union workforce in every aspect of the economy,” said Bixler, noting Biden awarded many of the grants to union-represented employers and start-ups pledging to respect workers' labor rights. “The biggest thing is safety. We also get better paid for everything we do, compared to anybody non-union doing the same job.”

Among other grants to USW-represented employers, Biden's Department of Energy (DOE) awarded up to \$500 million to National Cement Co. in Lebec, Calif., for pioneering the use of agricultural byproducts and other new technology to produce carbon-neutral cement.

It's slated to provide Century Aluminum up to \$500 mil-

lion for the nation's first new aluminum smelter in 45 years, a facility in the Ohio/Mississippi River basins that will greatly increase US production capacity and create more than 1,000 USW-represented jobs.

And it awarded US Pipe in Bessemer, Ala., up to \$75.5 million to install electric induction melting furnaces that will not only reduce pollution but cut costs, add jobs and increase manufacturing capacity.

The investment in increased efficiency comes as the IJIA, the national infrastructure program, ramps up demand across the country for the kinds of water and sewer pipe that USW members produce at US Pipe.

Together, the DOE and IJIA investments provide a foundation for the more-than-100-year-old company to remain a vital linchpin of numerous manufacturing supply chains as well as a driving economic force in Bessemer.

“Normally, if you get a job at US Pipe, you retire from it,” said USW Local 2140 President Ron Woods, noting union contracts provide family-sustaining wages and other essentials that enable workers to live middle-class lives.

Woods anticipates that the new furnace will not only lead the company to hire more workers but give dozens of existing union members the opportunity to learn new skills and take on additional responsibilities.

“Naturally, they will get paid more. When you make more, you spend more. We have some new people here, and this will help them buy houses and cars,” Woods said, adding that new jobs and higher wages not only benefit local businesses but pay the taxes needed for strong schools and other amenities.

During his visit to Toledo, Turk observed that the grants will better position US companies to compete in the global economy. That remark struck a chord with Bixler, who noted glassmakers continually face overseas threats.

“We're looking forward to getting this grant and implementing this new technology, so we can preserve the future,” he said.

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

To Trim Our Richest Down to Democratic Size, We Need to Think Big

... but maybe start small

By SAM PIZZIGATI

How rich have America's super rich become? The annual compensation of Steve Schwarzman, the chief exec of the private-equity colossus Blackstone Inc., offers up one telling yardstick.

In 2023, we learned earlier this year, Schwarzman's take-home actually fell some 30% off what he collected the year before. But Schwarzman's overall payday for that year, even after that tanking, still amounted to a jaw-dropping \$896.7 million.

The current personal net worth of Blackstone's CEO? The Bloomberg Billionaires Index puts that figure at a sweet \$42.3 billion.

Schwarzman's current political net worth? That remains to be seen. In the 2020 presidential election cycle, this Wall Street titan spent over \$27 million on donations to his favorite office-seekers, over five times what he spent in the 2016 election cycle. Since 2020, Schwarzman's personal fortune — what he has available to shower down on his election-day favorites — has more than doubled.

The total wealth of billionaires worldwide, over that same span, has more than tripled, from \$76 to \$233 billion, according to just-published Forbes data. Four years ago, Forbes counted more billionaires in the United States — 614 — than in any other nation. Today, the latest Forbes tally tells us, some 813 billionaires call the USA home.

These billionaires — and the mere centi-millionaires so yearning for billionaire status — aren't just prospering. They're exerting an unmatched influence on our politics and our future.

Americans of modest means, back in the early 1900s, confronted an eerily similar political situation. They would come to understand, as the great US Supreme Justice Louis Brandeis once put it, that “we can have democracy in this country or we can have great wealth concentrated in the

hands of a few, but we can't have both.” They did their best to de-concentrate the nation's wealth — and made some serious progress.

By the middle of the 20th century, thanks to that progress, America's richest were facing a 91% federal tax on their income over \$400,000, the equivalent of about \$4.6 million today. Until 1980, those same rich also faced tax rates as high as 70% on the fortunes they willed at their deaths to their dearly beloveds.

Tax rates that stiff have all evaporated over the past half-century. America's 400 richest today, analysts at the Biden White House have calculated, have of late been paying a minuscule 8.2% of their annual actual incomes in federal taxes.

How can we turn that 8.2% into something more like 82%? How can we start taxing the kingpins of the profiteering private sector at the same sort of high rates that helped the mid-20th-century United States give birth to history's first mass middle class?

Maybe we need to start by focusing on the kingpins of the nonprofit sector.

No one in this nonprofit sector is, to be sure, currently pulling down anything close to the annual tens of millions now filling the pockets of our nation's top corporate and financial execs. But many of our nonprofit sector's chiefs — the top execs at major hospitals, universities, and foundations, for instance — are today taking home handsome rewards that dwarf the paychecks of their employees.

This past March, the *Chronicle of Philanthropy* took a look at annual chief executive compensation at 16 of America's largest foundations. CEOs at these 16 nonprofit giants averaged \$1.1 million.

On US campuses, the *Chronicle of Higher Education* added earlier this year, top executive pay can run considerably higher than the compensation we see in foundation land. In 2021, the most recent year with data, some 21 presidents of private colleges and universities pocketed over \$2 million.

That same year, the US Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions reports, the top executives at 16 of America's largest health care nonprofits “averaged more than \$8 million in compensation” and took home over a combined \$140 million.

The nonprofits that are shelling out all these hefty rewards, let's keep in mind, are simultaneously enjoying assorted exemptions from federal, state, and local taxes. In

other words, average American taxpayers are subsidizing the hefty compensation of America's top nonprofit execs.

And that doesn't sit too well with growing numbers of Americans working both inside and outside of our nation's nonprofits. In Los Angeles, trade union activists in the hospital industry have been pushing for a local ordinance that would cap hospital executive pay at \$450,000, the current take-home with expenses of the president of the United States.

“The primary concern of our major health providers,” the SEIU-United Healthcare Workers West union notes, “should be serving the community, not enriching individuals.”

But plenty of that enriching is going on, and not just in big cities like Los Angeles. In 2022, the CEO of Indiana's largest nonprofit hospital-chain collected just over \$4 million in compensation. That same nonprofit's chief operating officer came up less than \$1,000 shy of \$2 million, and its chief financial officer made just over \$1.5 million.

Nationally, observes the Lown Institute health-care think tank, nonprofit hospital CEOs are regularly making “as much as 60 times” more than workers at the nonprofits they manage.

How wide should that gap run? The world-renowned founder of modern management science, Peter Drucker, once told the federal Securities and Exchange Commission that no top execs should be making more than 20 times what they pay their workers.

“I have often advised managers that a 20-to-one salary ratio,” Drucker noted, “is the limit beyond which they cannot go if they don't want resentment and falling morale to hit their companies.”

Earlier this year, US Senator Bernie Sanders from Vermont joined a group of other lawmakers that included Maryland's Chris Van Hollen and California's Barbara Lee to introduce the latest federal legislative effort to translate Drucker's wisdom into public policy. Their proposed “Tax Excessive CEO Pay Act” would raise tax rates on corporations with CEO-to-median worker pay ratios above 50 to 1.

“The American people are sick and tired of CEOs making nearly 350 times more than their average employees,” Senator Sanders opined at the bill's unveiling, “while over 60% of Americans live paycheck to paycheck.”

This Sanders legislation has no chance of passage, of course, at our current historical moment. Our corporate big guns simply

wield too much power on our contemporary political stage.

Our nonprofit world's big guns, meanwhile, do have political clout as well, but not nearly as much as their corporate counterparts. So why not start focusing much more of our CEO-worker pay ratio fire on the nonprofit sector? Why not press for legislation that denies nonprofit status — and the tax breaks that come with it — to nonprofits that pay their top execs at any rate over Peter Drucker's 20-times ratio?

Successful moves in that direction would send a powerful message: that our tax system should in no way reward enterprises that pay their execs unconscionably more than what they pay their workers.

That message, in turn, could lead to legislation that denies government contracts and subsidies to profit-making enterprises that lavish rewards on their chiefs at the expense of decent compensation for their mere employees.

Where could all this lead? Maybe to a tax code that subjects all income over a modest multiple of the minimum wage to at least the 91% tax on top-bracket income dollars in effect throughout the Eisenhower years. Taxing away income above that multiple would, in turn, help lock into place a much more equal America.

Could winning limits on nonprofit executive compensation actually set us on a path to reach that much more equal future? Any journey of a thousand miles, let's never forget, always begins with a single simple step.

Sam Pizzigati, an Institute for Policy Studies associate fellow, co-edits *Inequality.org*. His latest books include *The Case for a Maximum Wage* and *The Rich Don't Always Win: The Forgotten Triumph over Plutocracy that Created the American Middle Class, 1900-1970*.



MARY SANCHEZ



Sports have long been an important component, an accelerator, to society's hesitations. Still, most women aren't measured for skill in such arenas.

Let Women's Sports Be a Tailwind to a Better Society

Now that Caitlin Clark has changed the future of women's basketball, the challenge is on.

Can the tidal wave of support for women's sports that she set off continue off the court? Can this feel-good momentum be harnessed in favor of change for how all women fare?

There are plenty of reasons to be dubious of the prospects.

Clark's well-deserved accolades won't necessarily mean that women everywhere are suddenly going to see their value in society recognized, rewarded, or cheered.

That much is obvious, but let's insert a hopeful asterisk.

Sports have long been an important component, an accelerator, to society's hesitations. Think Jesse Owens and Wilma Rudolph in track striking at anti-Blackness sentiment and the stark segregation and racism that was so prevalent during their eras of Olympic performance.

We think of Jackie Robinson for breaking the color barrier in Major League Baseball, leading to denunciations of hate and bias.

Billie Jean King's impact on women's sports only accelerated after she trounced Bobby Riggs on the tennis court in 1973. She was a huge force in arguing for equal payouts between male and female winners of major tennis tournaments.

Still, most women aren't being measured for their skill in such high spectator arenas. They're showing up at work daily for far less celebrated schedules. They're playing by far more nebulous rules and are being judged with more wide-ranging conclusions.

As the "Barbie" movie made painfully clear in that much-repeated dialogue delivered by America Ferrera, women are often labeled as "too" as in too aggressive, too meek, too persnickety. Or, they're simply challenged and assumed to be lacking in skills, especially if they're women of color.

This type of scoring is tabulated in office politics, around the proverbial water cooler, in performance reviews and within office gossip.

This harsh summary of the work experiences of too many women is no shade on Clark, as well as the phenomenal attention that she, the Iowa Hawkeyes, and the

triumphant NCAA winners, the South Carolina Gamecocks, helped bring to women's collegiate basketball.

The championship game between South Carolina and Iowa drew an average of 18.7 million views (as people tuned in and out), topping out at 24 million people watching, according to reports of early data by Nielsen. That's more eyes on a game than on any NBA game in recent years, going back to 2019.

Clark was the top pick in the April 15 WNBA draft, by Indiana Fever. ESPN is reporting that the team is already seeing an uptick in people wanting to purchase tickets. Presumably, they want to watch Clark play and hit some of those long-distance three-point shots.

To cash in, the Fever front office is pre-selling individual tickets to some games. That's money for the owners, but is not necessarily an indicator that the massive gap between men and women's professional basketball salaries is closing.

The highest paid WNBA woman is Jackie Young of the Las Vegas Aces. She earns \$252,450 per year. The lowest paid NBA player is Mouhamed Gyueye of the Atlanta Hawks. He just signed a four-year contract worth \$7.64 million.

And yet, the cheers for Clark, for so many women in sports, is a moment to build upon.

My own city just built the first soccer stadium for a professional women's team, the Kansas City Current. Every game has been sold out for the season. It's just as common to see men and boys wearing the team's teal colors and emblem as it is for

women and girls wearing the apparel.

Yes, there are plenty of statistics to douse the enthusiasm. Virtually everyone can nod at the often-cited numbers that women earn about 84 cents on every dollar that men earn.

We can also point to the fact that the US has never elected a female president as well as the statistics about who controls the c-suites of corporate America or sits on the most powerful boards.

But the present moment, coming off the enthusiasm generated by Clark and other female athletes, combined with the excitement about the Summer Olympics, does matter.

This opportunity hasn't been this widespread, this teed up, for several decades. At the upcoming Olympics in Paris, more women athletes will certainly be highlighted.

Allowing the goodwill, the applause and support to spread to women outside of sports can happen. We either squander the opportunity or leverage it.

Because there is another factor: Younger generations of girls saw Clark and other female athletes rightfully glorified.

Clark's amazing talents fed their souls, aspirations, and expectations of fair and equitable treatment. Let's meet them with the respect that all women and girls deserve.

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

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The US-Japan Summit and the Nippon Steel Deal

Will the Japanese get Biden to let Nippon Steel acquire US Steel?

By ROBERT KUTTNER

President Biden hosted a summit with Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida in early April. The ceremonial dinner was April 9 and the working sessions begin April 10. The summit is primarily about defense issues, but Nippon Steel tried to crash the party.

Nippon made a deal to acquire US Steel, which was approved on April 12 by USS shareholders. President Biden has already said that he considers this purchase against the national interest, and he has the power to block it after a review by the interagency Committee on Foreign Investment in the US (CFIUS). The steelworkers union (USW) is also adamantly opposed.

At the working sessions of the summit, Nippon hoped to enlist Japan's Minister of Economy, Trade and Industry, Ken Saito, to press his American counterparts to support the deal. Saito met with several top officials, including Commerce Secretary Gina Raimondo, Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen, and National Economic Council Director Lael Brainard.

Talking points obtained by *The American Prospect* suggest that Saito told these officials that challenging the Nippon deal would give a "chilling signal" to Japanese investors that they will "face unfair treatment" in the US, and that Nippon's acquisition would "strengthen US economic and national security by bolstering domestic steel production, and reinforce both countries' shared values and deepen the mutual reliance that benefits our national interests."

Nippon has also gone on a charm offensive to try to enlist the Steelworkers as an improbable ally. According to a draft letter agreement also seen by the *Prospect*, Nippon has offered to invest \$1.4 billion in US Steel's older facilities that USS has been closing, and to refrain from layoffs through the end of the Steelworkers' current contract in 2026. Nippon also offers to comply with regular pension contributions.

On April 5, US Steel CEO David Burritt released a letter to employees and shareholders endorsing Nippon's commit-

ments.

But I had a long talk with Steelworkers president Dave McCall, who was Biden's guest at the summit, and McCall points out that every single offer is full of loopholes. McCall told me that the parent company, Nippon Steel of Japan, is not offering to sign anything. Rather, it is proposing that its US subsidiary and US Steel, if its acquisition goes forward, be the signatories, which has no legal force if anything happens to either of them.

"This sets up years of litigation," McCall said. "They say, once the US Steel deal is complete, that there will be no reduction in force through the end of our contract in 2026, unless it's a planned layoff or idling, or closure, or change in their business plan. That's worth nothing. They say they'll share tech with USS, unless they find it to be economically adverse to their investment in their own strategy."

"We hope that the CFIUS process takes place sooner rather than later," McCall added, "so that the president can make a decision on national-security issues. It's important that we maintain blast furnaces in this country. [US Steel has] already shut down three blast furnaces in the past three years."

In response to President McCall's comments, a Nippon spokesperson, Monika Driscoll, emailed me a prepared statement: "On March 27, Nippon Steel Corporation delivered a set of written commitments to the leadership of the USW that are not only above and beyond the obligations contained in [US Steel's] Basic Labor Agreement (BLA), but that will also be legally binding and enforceable."

McCall obviously disagrees.

So if Nippon thinks they can co-opt the Steelworkers Union as an ally, with loophole-ridden promises, they are underestimating their opposition. "We recognize that Japan is a military ally," McCall said. "That doesn't make them an economic ally. We already have 12 cases against Nippon for dumping and other instances of unfair trade."

Nippon also has a long record of investing in China and helping the Chinese develop their own steel industry, which dumps subsidized steel worldwide. A recent investigative report by Horizon Advisory documented Nippon's extensive operations in China. Sen. Sherrod Brown (D-OH) flagged the report in a letter to President Biden opposing the Nippon USS takeover. "Nippon's connection to the Chinese steel ecosystem and industrial policy agenda has concerning implications regarding ties to

China's military-civil fusion strategy and quest for global economic power," said Brown.

Despite Nippon's efforts to enlist the Japanese government to treat Nippon as a national champion and a prime topic for the summit, my sources say that the Japanese prime minister may well treat the Nippon issue as a distraction from more important bilateral issues, especially defense in the context of China's increasing military aggressiveness.

How the Fed Keeps Getting Inflation Wrong

More than 400 economists work for the Federal Reserve Board. Far too many are intimidated by the echo chamber of bad economics created by Chair Jay Powell.

By ROBERT KUTTNER

President Biden made two catastrophically bad appointments. One was Attorney General Merrick Garland. The other was Fed Chair Jerome Powell. Either could literally cost Biden his presidency and the country its democracy—Garland by having slow-walked Trump's prosecution and Powell by needlessly slowing the economy.

The latest inflation report by the Bureau of Labor Statistics, released April 10, showed the Consumer Price Index ticking up by 0.4% in March, the same as in February, but slightly higher than expected. This, in turn, set off signals from the Fed that expected rate reductions would have to be postponed, and near-hysterical media commentary. The Dow duly dropped more than a thousand points.

According to one press report after another, the economy was stuck with high inflation; high interest rates would persist; and Biden's election-year good-news economy would be stuck with a bad-news story. But if you bother to take a close look at the details of the actual price increases by sector, they have nothing to do with the kind of inflation that justifies high interest rates. Some of the Fed's own research confirms that.

Nearly all of the price hikes came from a few sectors, none of which have anything to do with overheated demand. Take homeowner insurance, where costs have soared, rising 20% between 2021 and 2023. That has everything to do with climate-related losses that insurance companies try to make up by hiking rates on other homeowners, and nothing to do with demand. High interest rates don't touch that.

Biden has already made clear that he is opposed to this takeover. It would be very surprising if he reversed himself now; and the Japanese government has to know that pressure on him to do so would be a waste of diplomatic leverage.

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

Here's Why You Can't Afford an Electric Car

By SONALI KOLHATKAR

It seems that there has never been a better time than now to buy an electric vehicle in the United States, especially if you read news headlines and White House press releases. You might be forgiven for thinking that you can actually afford to upgrade your old gas-guzzling sedan with a sleek, new zero-emissions EV. And if you can't afford one, the various local, state, and federal rebate programs will surely knock thousands off the price tag, right?

Wrong. In order to be able to qualify for the ever-changing and complicated federal \$7,500 rebate on EVs, one has to be rich enough to be able to afford to buy a new EV (some used ones qualify but good luck figuring out which one, and then even better luck finding such a car available for purchase). But, in order to qualify for the rebate, one can't be too rich. If you're middle-income, like me, you can lease an EV, but then you don't qualify for the rebate—your leasing company does—and you're left paying a hefty monthly lease.

News headlines about Tesla slashing its EV prices might still convince you that a new EV is within reach—that is if you don't mind enriching one of the worst humans on the planet. But Teslas are still among the more expensive cars on the market.

Meanwhile, there are sensationalist headlines about EV sales falling over the past year, so much so that one might be forgiven for thinking that maybe most people wanting an EV already purchased one and demand is simply weakening. Dig past the headlines however, and the news reports all come to the same conclusion: EVs are still unaffordable for the majority of Americans, especially those who simply want to reduce their carbon footprint and their financial expenses at the same time. "Pricing is still very much the biggest barrier to electric vehicles," according to one research analyst.

A *Los Angeles Times* report agreed: "Although the cost of building EVs continues to drop, it has yet to reach price parity with conventional gasoline-powered vehicles." But the paper then bizarrely blamed Americans for the high price

tags, saying, "Americans' preference for larger vehicles necessitates larger, heavier and costlier battery packs, contributing to the high prices." There was no mention of auto manufacturers spending years aggressively marketing SUVs and other giant gas guzzlers to Americans. Indeed, there is a whole range of EV trucks on the market right now—still out of the grasp of ordinary middle-income Americans looking for an efficient commuter family car.

Too bad these consumers don't have access to China's new EV, the BYD Seagull, a car that test drivers in the US are gushing over, and whose price tag begins at a mere \$9,698. "That undercuts the average price of an American EV by more than \$50,000," explained Bloomberg. In fact, more than 70% of all EVs sold globally are Chinese manufactured. You don't have to live in China to buy a Chinese EV. You just have to live outside the US.

What most headlines aren't saying overtly and what the Biden administration is also keeping relatively quiet about is that the US is engaging in a fiercely protectionist trade war with China in order to shield American automakers. Forget the TikTok war—it's Chinese-made EVs that keep US auto CEOs up at night.

To protect them, the Biden administration is fanning the flames of anti-China sentiment and claiming it is worried about "National Security Concerns" over the computer systems of Chinese-made EVs. "China is determined to dominate the future of the auto market, including by using unfair practices," said Biden in late February. "China's policies could flood our market with its vehicles, posing risks to our national security." The president has even ordered an investigation into China's so-called smart cars, which most EVs are these days.

But the Biden administration's climate goals for auto emissions rely on a mass transition to EVs across the nation. Already, it's behind in ramping up toward its goal of wanting half of all vehicles sold in 2030 to be EVs, likely because most Americans can't afford them, or can't access the far-cheaper Chinese-made cars. On top of that, the GOP has now made attacking EVs part of its new culture war. It's no wonder EVs remain out of reach for most Americans.

Why are Chinese cars so much cheaper, more varied, and just better than American ones? It doesn't all boil down to the cost of labor as one might imagine. Chinese labor costs are not as low as they used to be. China's government has simply made EVs a massive priority. An analysis in MIT

Technology Review explained, "the government has long played an important role—propping up both the supply of EVs and the demand for them," and that there have been "generous government subsidies, tax breaks, procurement contracts, and other policy incentives."

Instead of adopting a similarly aggressive approach to making EVs a priority, the Biden Administration's Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) has created a complex series of tax credits that require all EV materials and labor to be sourced in the US—a goal whose math just doesn't add up. And, the IRA doesn't even protect US workers enough. The United Auto Workers (UAW) denounced the IRA on its first anniversary for failing to require fair labor standards in the transition to an EV economy.

Still, UAW did the job itself. Fresh from a major union victory in late 2023 the union won job protections from the three biggest US automakers for workers transitioning into the EV industry.

Our economy relies far too much on cars and most American cities are planned around car-centric living. It's no wonder that petroleum-powered vehicles are the single largest US source of climate-changing emissions. There are many ways to reduce this source, including redesigning cities to be more walkable, improving the quality and cost of public transportation and train systems, and encouraging bicycle transportation when possible—all of which will take concerted effort, time, and resources.

But the climate clock is ticking fast. After decades of scientists and climate activists sounding the alarm and being ignored, we are only now starting to take baby steps to mitigate climate change and it's simply not enough. Even when accounting for the mineral extraction needed to make EV batteries, EVs have a far lower carbon footprint than petroleum-based cars and are perhaps the best, most accessible tool we have to quickly reduce our carbon impact.

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

Fatal Recklessness at Boeing Traces Back to Long-Standing C-Suite Greed

Why Jack Welch's philosophy of maximizing short-term shareholder value at all costs is to blame.

By KATRINA VANDEN HEUVEL

Frazzled, exhausted employees. Major components being installed out of order. Well-orchestrated assembly lines breaking down. No, this isn't a burger joint at rush hour; it's how a Boeing whistleblower described the 737 Max manufacturing plant where he used to work. As he put it: "We were rushing planes out the door." And that's how you get doors rushing out of planes.

It's no wonder that, for six years now, passengers have experienced harrowing and sometimes fatal malfunctions on Boeing planes: A panel tearing off and leaving a gaping hole in the side of an ascending aircraft. A wheel falling off during takeoff. A cockpit window cracking. Planes crashing because of faulty, secret software that was never mentioned in pilot training. New examples seem to be coming to light constantly: In April, a Houston-bound Boeing plane lost its engine cover 35 minutes into its journey.

But despite the flood of well-deserved media attention that this company's woes have received, Boeing is not unique. Across companies and industries, fatal recklessness has been justified time and again in the name of the profit motive. Too often, we discover too late that executives knew about dangers with their products and services, and forged on anyway. Preventable consumer death will continue to be treated as simply part of the cost of doing business—until the people running America's biggest companies are compelled to understand that they will suffer real consequences.

This is about more than faulty manufacturing. As aviation expert Jeff Wise wrote

recently, it reflects a broader negligence at Boeing that traces back to long-standing C-suite greed.

In 1997, Boeing acquired McDonnell Douglas, one of their largest competitors, in a \$13.3 billion merger, which at the time was the 10th biggest in US history. In so doing, it also adopted the company's CEO, Harry Stonecipher, into executive leadership—a man who, as Wise points out, subscribed to the Jack Welch philosophy of maximizing short-term shareholder value at all costs.

That view quickly took hold at the new Boeing. One CEO after another drove up Boeing's stock value by skimping on its greatest assets: its world-leading engineering and the experts who made it possible. In the last decade alone, the company spent over half a billion dollars on executive pay and \$40 billion on stock buybacks instead of reinvesting those profits in operations. Cracks in this approach started showing in 2018 and 2019, when two faulty 737 Max planes crashed, leaving 346 people dead.

Boeing has faced some repercussions from its string of disasters since then. Its stock is down 29% this year, its CEO is stepping down, and the FAA has ordered it to shore up its manufacturing practices by June. But unlike a Boeing plane, Boeing's reputation isn't exactly in shambles; a number of analysts seem to believe the company will bounce back.

The truth is, the underlying incentives that nurtured Boeing's negligence are the foundation of American capitalism: skirting safety in favor of greed is a long-standing American tradition.

In the 1970s, Ford made a car called the Pinto, now known for its exploding gas tank and jamming doors that turned it into a fiery prison. There's evidence that Ford engineers knew these risks after repeated crash tests. But executives, gunning to compete with the Volkswagen Beetle, held off on recalling the car for seven years.

This callousness extends beyond the transportation industry. In a leaked 2016 memo, a Facebook VP wrote: "Maybe someone dies in a terrorist attack coordinated on our tools. And still we connect people." He has since been promoted to CTO. Juul executives knew early on that they were hooking teens with their nicotine-based e-vape, but chose not to install a fea-

ture to limit nicotine dosage. From OceanGate to SpaceX, the list goes on. For all the talk of ESG and corporate values, companies will always be motivated most by one thing: financial gain.

To a certain extent, consumers can help hold companies accountable. Travelers' trust in Boeing has taken a hit, and more fliers are trying to avoid booking travel on a 737 Max. But absent a mass movement of disgruntled airline passengers demanding better travel conditions—which, admittedly, sounds totally plausible—federal regulators need a drastically better strategy to effect change in the airline industry and beyond.

After January's door panel fiasco, the FAA has grounded some 737 Max planes to conduct safety inspections, pressed pause on Boeing's plan to expand production of that model, and scaled up inspection and maintenance requirements for the aircraft. But the FAA has struggled to enforce safety regulations for years now. It also grounded the entire 737 Max fleet in 2019, after the two fatal crashes. The ban lasted only two years, and it appears the lesson didn't stick.

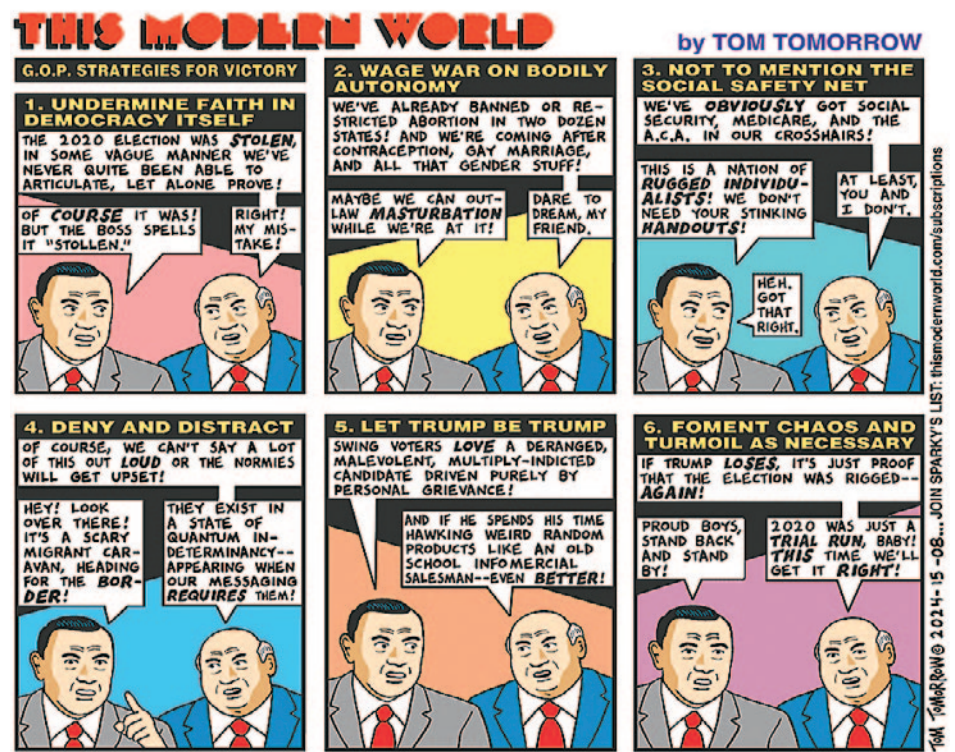
If the FAA doesn't have the capacity to enforce existing rules better, it's time to im-

pose bigger penalties and actual consequences—like directly fining top executives for preventable safety failures.

Even then, the fact remains that, through disaster after disaster, Boeing has proven that a company can indeed be "too big to fail." Legislators might consider consequences that are just as big. Is it time to nationalize Boeing? The company may not be in the kind of financial distress that has prompted such a takeover before, but it's certainly causing enough distress, even as it essentially functions as a government entity, relying on government contracts for nearly 40% of its revenue.

Let's not pretend that patching up some planes in the short term can remedy a foundational rot that's been festering for nearly three decades. It's time to make the poster child for the worst of American capitalism into the poster child for consumer safety regulations. Boeing's first-class ride is over. They can fly economy.

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



We Need a Democratic Revolution to Overcome the Rightwing Media Machine!

Autocrats and fascists know the importance of media ownership (Hitler and Mussolini also took over radio and newspapers during their time). Why this simple lesson is lost on progressives is confounding.

By THOM HARTMANN

Vladimir Putin understands better than Democrats and Democratic donors how to seize control of a nation. And Democrats damn well better learn the lesson, and fast. Forget about the economy and even abortion: it's the media, stupid!

When Putin wanted the Central African Republic (CAR) to give him multiple gold and mineral mines in that resource-rich country, the first thing his agent, Yevgeny Prigozhin, did was to buy a radio station and start running propaganda about the benefits of the CAR creating closer ties to Russia.

Similarly, when Putin wanted to put Donald Trump into the White House, he had Prigozhin's Internet Research Agency — a massive, well-funded troll farm based in St. Petersburg — use swing-state polling and other internal RNC confidential information to send more than 100 million targeted Facebook impressions to swing state Americans.

Paul Manafort, Trump's campaign manager in 2016 and a former employee who took over \$10 million from one of Putin's favorite oligarchs, handed that data off to Russian intelligence, leading in part to his going to prison (Trump pardoned him and is now talking about bringing him back into the 2024 campaign). Twenty-six of Putin's IRA people were similarly indicted by the Mueller investigation, although American law has not been able to reach them in Russia.

Another example is Russia's Putin and Hungary's Viktor Orbán: in both cases, they used — just as Trump is promising to do here if he is reelected — libel laws to drive “normal” and progressive radio, newspapers, and TV out of business and replaced them with the equivalent of Fox “News” owned by friendly oligarchs, proclaiming the won-

ders of Putin and Orbán all day, every day.

Autocrats and fascists, it seems, know the importance of media ownership (Adolf Hitler and Benito Mussolini also took over radio and newspapers during their time). Why this simple lesson is lost on wealthy progressives is confounding.

The main reason the GOP has so much power in Congress is that in low-population rural states the only voices on the radio are promoting Republicans. There are over 1,500 rightwing commercial radio stations, and around 900 religious nonprofit stations, all blasting out a pro-Republican message 24/7. They quite literally reach into every nook and cranny — no matter how rural or obscure — of America.

On the progressive/Democratic side, there are only a handful of large commercial stations across the nation, almost entirely located in big cities like Chicago and Minneapolis. SiriusXM, which also carries my program weekdays from noon-3 PM ET, is the only national alternative for progressive talk radio, but requires a satellite receiver and a paid subscription. **[Editor's Note: Progressive news and talk can also be heard online on Progressive Voices and TuneIn apps and Free Speech TV at Freespeech.org.]**

Similarly, the giant corporations that control the majority of search and social media have a pronounced rightward tilt. When Google stopped spidering Alternet.org about a decade ago, for example, it so wiped out that site that they had to sell themselves to an entrepreneur.

Facebook's Mark Zuckerberg had private dinners in the White House with Trump, and Elon Musk is openly implying that Democrats represent a threat to America. Progressives don't see the algorithmic amplification of their messages that conservatives do on either of those platforms, even though the country is politically roughly 50/50.

(Apologists for the platforms will argue that's because the algorithms are designed to promote “hot/emotional” content and rightwingers are more likely to create inflammatory content, but because these companies continue to keep their algorithms secret there's no way to confirm any claims made, by me or them.)

Every four years, Democratic donors — particularly large Democratic donors — put literally billions of dollars into campaigns for Democratic candidates. If they'd simply purchased a few hundred strategically located radio stations (particularly in rural areas) they'd have gotten a much better return on their investment. In rural areas where people regularly drive long distances just for routine things like shopping, radio is still incredibly important: Red states would begin to flip purple and then Blue just in time for

referred to as Trump's “coverup of a sex scandal,” this way of describing it minimizes its importance.

This case is really an election interference case — as are the criminal cases charging him with seeking to overturn the results of the 2020 election. Together, they establish an ongoing pattern: Trump will do anything to gain and keep power, even if his actions violate the nation's laws.

This case alleges that in 2016 Trump arranged to pay off an adult entertainer in order to hide his affair with her from the public. The important thing to keep in mind is that the money was given to protect Trump's campaign for the presidency — not to protect his marriage or protect him from personal embarrassment.

The entire purpose of the payoff was to help Trump become president.

Had its sole purpose been to hide a personal sexual affair, it would not have been criminal.

It was criminal because Trump interfered in an election. He violated campaign finance laws. He deprived voters of information that might have affected their votes. Trump then sought to cover it up with false entries in business records.

The mainstream media keeps referring to Trump's upcoming trial as based on “charges that he covered up a sex scandal.” That's exactly how Trump wants it characterized. So it looks like the district attorney is tarring Trump with having had an extramarital affair with a porn star — a form of character assassination, not a crime.

But that's not what the trial is about,

elections.

For example, in the past few years Republican-aligned businessmen have bought over 300 Spanish-language radio stations across the country and put on them rightwing Spanish-language hosts. The result is clear today: the Hispanic vote is bending toward Trump.

In 2004, when Air America was rolled out (I wrote the original business plan), it was successful, for as long as it was, in large part because our programs were carried by leased stations owned by what was then Clear Channel and is now iHeartMedia: we were on more than 50 Clear Channel stations in almost all of the nation's major markets.

Following a string of Democratic victories in cities and states where Clear Channel was carrying Air America shows, and the election of Barack Obama in 2008, the company was purchased in a leveraged buyout by Mitt Romney's Bain Capital and Thomas Lee.

When Mitt Romney decided to run for president in 2012, Clear Channel began pulling Air America's progressive programming off the air, dramatically cutting Air America's audience and their advertising revenue. My “home station,” Portland's KPOJ, was flipped by Romney's company to sports just a few months before the 2012 election.

Lacking that critical mass of audience to support advertising revenue, the progressive network was soon bankrupt, and two years later so was Clear Channel (because of the debt load dumped on it by Romney's business model), then reincarnated as iHeartMedia.

Meanwhile, the right-wing social and traditional media machine continues to elect Republicans with big funding from rightwing corporations and the billionaires who own them and fund right-wing think tanks.

As Ken Vogel et al pointed out in a 2011 article for *Politico*:

“The Heritage Foundation pays about \$2 million [a year] to sponsor Rush Limbaugh's show and about \$1.3 million to do the same with Sean Hannity's—and considers it money well spent.”

To the best of my knowledge, none of the talkers on the left have ever been funded in such a fashion. Small wonder that Hannity now owns a real estate empire worth tens of millions, and Limbaugh, before he died, could brag of an eight-figure net worth or more.

But more important, the influence of these well-financed talkers has altered America's political landscape in less than three decades. What this shows is that the movers and shakers on the far right, the

and it's not what's at stake. Trump tried to keep relevant information from voters on the eve of the 2016 election.

This trial is about the integrity of our elections system.

As Manhattan District Attorney Alvin Bragg explained, Trump was out to “bury negative information about him and boost his electoral prospects. Trump then went to great lengths to hide this conduct, causing dozens of false entries in business records to conceal criminal activity.”

In calling this the “hush money” or “sex scandal” case and implying that Trump was merely trying to hide his tryst with a porn star, the mainstream media is minimizing

rightwing billionaires, understand the power of media (and took Lewis Powell's advice to get control of America's media).

When George W. Bush was president, twice a year he invited talk radio hosts to broadcast live from the lawn of the White House and made administration officials available for interviews. Barack Obama stopped the practice, probably because there are so few stations programming progressive content: it was during his presidency that Romney's Bain Capital took down Air America.

I've written about this for years, including major pieces in *The Nation* and on Salon.com, but Democratic donors — being pushed by Democratic consultants who make their money from commissions on placing commercials — have largely ignored this gaping hole in the Democratic media world.

As a result, Red states are redder than ever and Republicans are following the inclinations of rightwing radio hosts who offer them a built-in national echo chamber, putting democracy itself at risk. Hannity had a huge influence over Trump and Republicans across the country appear on shows with these hosts daily.

Oklahoma Republican Senator James Lankford, for example, recently revealed that if his bipartisan legislation to secure the southern border passed the Senate, a talk radio host:

“[T]old me flat out, ‘If you try to move a bill that solves the border crisis during this presidential year, I will do whatever I can to destroy you because I do not want you to solve this before the presidential election.’”

Nationally syndicated rightwing host Jesse Kelly later claimed credit for the threat. Good for the GOP, bad for America.

I pushed this idea of Democratic donors buying radio stations hard during the Obama administration, even bringing the topic up in a meeting at the White House. Bernie Sanders helped organize a group of legislators to listen to a presentation suggesting this by me and a handful of other Air America talk hosts. Our goal was to encourage them to reach out to big Democratic donors to invest in progressive media.

The legislators listened respectfully, but when their chance to respond to our proposal came, Senator Hillary Clinton suggested that such things were best left to the “free market.” A congressman then suggested that NPR was doing a fine job of educating people, so why should they create a progressive network?

The meeting went downhill from there. Which brings us to the current moment.

There are some indications that at least

Continued on page 19

its significance and misleading the public.

The way Trump's actions are characterized — the words used to describe what Trump has done to America — are critically important. Please make sure you describe what's at stake in the trial accurately, correct others when they misdescribe it, and write or email any media that misstate what it's about.

Thanks.

Robert Reich, former U.S. Secretary of Labor, is professor of public policy at the University of California at Berkeley and the author of “The System: Who Rigged It, How We Fix It.” Read more from Robert Reich at <https://robertreich.substack.com/>

ROBERT REICH



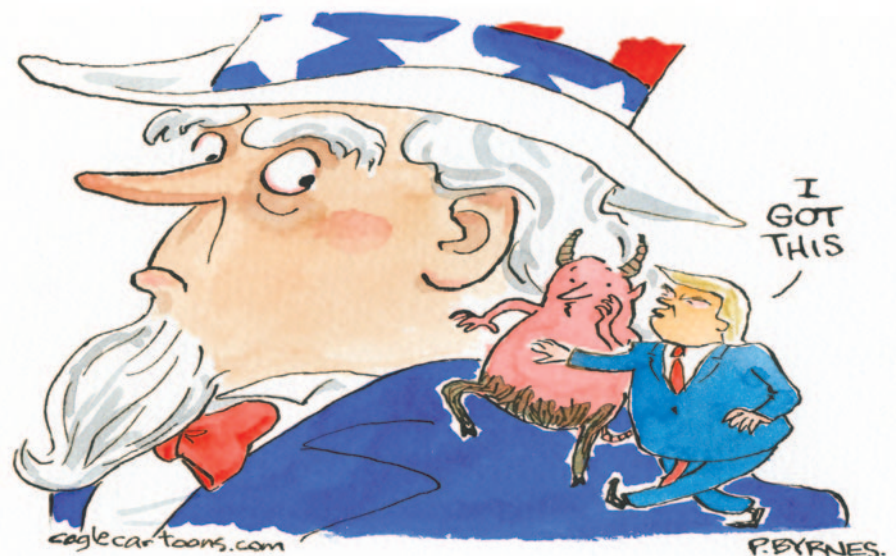
Trump's New York trial is really an election interference case — as are the cases charging him with seeking to overturn the 2020 election.

How to Understand Trump's Criminal Felony Trial

Trump's first criminal trial — the first criminal trial of a former president, ever — began Monday, April 15, with jury selection. The 34-count business falsification case may be the only case against Trump to reach a verdict before the November election.

Many people I speak with are worried that this is the weakest of Trump's four pending criminal trials because it has to do with an illicit affair.

Wrong. Although this case is commonly called the “hush money” case and



JESSE JACKSON



Robinson grew up a stunning athlete, lettering in 4 sports at UCLA. Baseball, ironically, was his worst sport. His triumphs took more than athletic gifts.

Remember Jackie Robinson's Triumphs

On April 15, Major League Baseball celebrated Jackie Robinson Day, honoring the day, now 77 years ago, when Jackie Robinson broke the baseball color line by taking the field with the Brooklyn Dodgers. On the 15th, every player in baseball wore number 42, Robinson's number, the only one ever retired by the entire league.

Robinson was the youngest of five children, born in Cairo, Georgia, into a family of sharecroppers. When his father abandoned the family, his strong mother found a way to get them to Pasadena, California, and working as a domestic, into their own

home.

Robinson grew up to be a stunning athlete, lettering in four sports at UCLA. Baseball, ironically, was his worst sport.

His triumph on the field and off took much more than athletic gifts.

As the first African American in major league baseball, he faced constant abuse. Opposing players threatened to strike, pitchers hurled bean balls at his head, runners slide into him spikes up. He and his family received regular death threats in the mail. Opposing dugouts and fans hurled racist invectives at him.

In Florida spring training, Robinson had to stay apart from the team because local hotels would not accommodate him. Two ballparks locked the team out rather than let him on the field. In Sanford, Florida, fans ran the team out of the ballpark. When Brooklyn Dodger General Manager Branch Rickey praised a play Robinson made in the field, his minor league manager asked Rickey if he truly thought "a n—r is really a human being." Three prospective teammates petitioned the club to keep him off the team.

Robinson was a proud, fiercely competitive Black man. From a young age, he would challenge racial abuse. When he was in the military, years before Rosa Parks, he faced court martial when he refused to move to the back of a military bus. (He was tried and acquitted). Yet he promised Branch Rickey, who had the courage to sign him, that he would not retaliate or respond to the racial bile heaped upon him. With discipline and courage, he kept that

promise.

The racial abuse was expected. In many ways a far bigger burden was that Robinson carried the hopes, the dreams, the possibilities of an entire race on his shoulders.

In 1947, baseball was the center of American culture. African Americans had had a few transcendent heroes that broke into national consciousness: Jesse Owens in the 1936 Olympics, Joe Louis knocking out German hero Max Schmeling in the first round in 1937, the transcendent Marian Anderson singing from the Lincoln Memorial after the Daughters of the American Revolution refused to allow her to perform in Constitution Hall.

When Robinson broke into the major leagues, he became the torchbearer for an entire people. As Roger Wilkins wrote, his success made "almost every black person in America better and bigger. ... And he began to give millions of us a sense that things no longer needed to be as they had always been."

It is incredibly hard to break into the major leagues — particularly in 1947 when there were far fewer teams. Many players break under the pressure of proving they have the skill to make it. It is unimaginably grueling to be not only a rookie but to face daily racial hostility on the field and off. Imagine then the added pressure Robinson felt from carrying an entire race on his shoulders day after day, month after month, and amazingly, ending as Rookie of the Year.

With his remarkable wife Rachel at his side, Jackie Robinson was a courageous leader off the field as well as on. He was a

loving and loved father. He marched with and supported Dr. Martin Luther King. He was an active force in the NAACP. After he retired from baseball, he became the first Black vice president of a major American corporation, and later helped found the Black-owned Freedom National Bank in Harlem, designed to spur economic development in that community. After he passed away in 1972, Rachel helped build the Jackie Robinson Foundation that has provided thousands of college scholarships for minority youth with strong capabilities but limited resources.

Dignity, courage, service, resilience — Jackie Robinson is honored today not simply because he was a Hall of Fame player, not simply because he broke baseball's color line, but because he helped make America better. He was, I offered at his funeral, "a rock in the water, hitting ... ripples of new possibility. He didn't integrate baseball for himself. He infiltrated baseball for all of us. ... He helped to ascend from misery to hope, on the muscles of his arms and the meaning of his life."

In this time, when many tire of the struggle, we do well to remember the example set by Jackie Robinson. He triumphed over daunting obstacles and opened doors for all of us.

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

Email jjackson@rainbowpush.org. Follow him on Twitter @RevJJackson.

A Bittersweet Arab American Heritage Month

Our culture is worth celebrating. But amid the immense suffering in Gaza, it's hard to feel celebratory.

By FARRAH HASSEN

I've always known my Arab culture is worth celebrating.

I heard it in Syrian tenor Sabah Fakhri's powerful voice reverberating in my mom's car on the way to piano lessons and soccer practice during my youth. I smelled it in the za'atar, Aleppo pepper, allspice, and cumin permeating the air in the family kitchen.

I saw it in the intricate embroidery on my grandma's silk robe. And in the determination etched in the faces of my immigrant parents, who raised seven children in Southern California without relinquishing our rich Syrian traditions.

April was National Arab American Her-

itage Month. It should be a time to celebrate the contributions of the over 3.5 million Arab Americans who strengthen our proud nation.

We have Ralph Nader to thank for consumer protections, like automobile safety. We have the late Senator James Abourezk (D-SD) — the first Arab American elected to the US Senate — to credit for landmark legislation championing Indigenous rights. Dr. Mona Hanna-Attisha, a pediatrician, first exposed the Flint, Michigan, water crisis.

There are countless others. But right now, it's impossible to feel celebratory. My community is reeling from the immense pain and horror of an unfolding genocide against the 2.3 million Palestinians of Gaza.

Palestinian Americans have lost family members in Gaza from Israel's unrelenting bombardment and mass starvation of civilians. Adding insult to injury, Israel is using US-supplied weapons to commit these atrocities.

Palestinian Americans — along with other Arabs — have also been on the receiving end of increased hate crimes, harassment, racist rhetoric, and discrimination, belying the message that they, too, are an integral part of this nation. The American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee received 2,500 reports of anti-Arab hate from October to

March.

During this period, Wade Al-Fayoume, a 6-year-old Palestinian American boy from Illinois, was fatally stabbed. Three Palestinian college students were shot in Vermont.

In his proclamation marking this year's heritage month, President Biden was forced to reckon with Gaza. Instead of announcing a long overdue, permanent ceasefire and an end to US military support for Israel, he offered empty words.

How can Arab American life and culture be celebrated when fellow Arabs are facing erasure in Gaza? Nearly 35,000 Palestinians have been killed in Gaza so far, including nearly 14,000 children. Thousands more remain missing. And at least 576,000 Palestinians are on the brink of famine.

Homes filled with family heirlooms and memories have been systematically destroyed. The ancient olive trees that symbolize Palestinians' deep-rooted connection to their land haven't been spared.

It's easy to feel despair. But what brings me hope is the new generation of Arab Americans organizing, marching, and working with other communities to demand a permanent ceasefire. We are reminded that dissent is the highest form of "patriotism."

Despite attempts to smear and silence them for supporting Palestinian human

rights, their efforts are having an impact. A March 27 Gallup poll showed a significant drop in American public support for Israel's conduct of the war, from 50% in November 2023 to 36% now.

Meanwhile, Arab Americans have emerged as a new and powerful voting bloc. Spearheaded by Arab Americans in Michigan, hundreds of thousands of Americans voted "uncommitted" in recent primary elections in Michigan, Minnesota, North Carolina, Massachusetts, and elsewhere to protest US policy in Gaza.

This represents a real shift from the days after 9/11, when Arab Americans faced blanket demonization without any pushback. This is progress, although much more must be done.

We know we belong in America even if we're not always treated that way. We need enduring collaboration between Arab Americans and policymakers, educators, and community members to defend our rights, create a more equal America, and promote more just US policies abroad — starting with a ceasefire in Gaza.

Farah Hassen, J.D., is a writer, policy analyst, and adjunct professor in the Department of Political Science at Cal Poly Pomona. This op-ed was distributed by OtherWords.org.

Why Do My Groceries Cost So Much?

Giant corporations want to keep their taxes low and the prices we pay high. We can't let them win.

By SULMA ARIAS

In 2004, I was a single mom raising three daughters on my own. I worked three jobs, including an overnight shift as a translator at our local hospital, to make ends meet. Every time I stood in line at the supermarket, I worried about what I would have to put back on the shelf to stay within our weekly \$100 food budget.

My daughters are all grown now. But whenever I'm buying groceries, I still get that horrible feeling in the pit of my stomach as I remember not knowing if we would have enough to eat, and how much — or how little — I could provide for my family with \$100.

Prices for all of us have gone way up since COVID, and \$100 now buys about \$65 worth of groceries compared to five years ago. This puts a huge bite on working families, because we spend most of our income every month — as much as 90% — on food and other necessities. So when prices rise, we hurt the most.

Big corporations tell us that policies and supply chains are to blame for rising costs, but there's a big part of the story they don't want you to know: These giant corporations are themselves largely responsible for higher prices.

According to a new report by the Federal Trade Commission, the largest grocery retailers — which include Walmart, Kroger, and Amazon, which owns Whole Foods — used the pandemic as an excuse to raise prices across the board. The same is true for big agribusinesses like Tyson Foods and DuPont, which sell the lion's share of meat products and seeds.

These giant companies wrote themselves a blank check during COVID, which they now expect us to pay for.

What all of these corporations have in common is they always want to get bigger. Why? Because when consumers have fewer choices, corporations can force us to

pay higher prices. This is especially true with food, which none of us can live without. And according to the FTC, a big reason for these higher prices is corporate greed.

Time and again, big companies tell us that if they could only get bigger, they would pass savings on to consumers. This is almost never true. Instead, they give money back to their investors and reward executives — like Walmart's Doug McMillon, who takes home over \$25 million a year, and Kroger's Rodney McMullen, who makes more than \$19 million. That's 671 times more than the amount an average Kroger's worker makes.

Corporate consolidation can have deadly consequences. In health care, which my organization tracks closely, we see that the domination of private insurance by a handful of companies — Aetna, United Healthcare, and Cigna — leads to bigger bills, worse health outcomes, and lost lives.

The profits of retailers and agribusinesses have now risen to record levels, as much as five times the rate of inflation. How do companies like Tyson Foods, Kroger, and Walmart boost profits? The way they always do: by raising prices, while 65% of Americans live paycheck to paycheck.

No American should ever have to work three or more jobs just to survive: not in 2004, 2024, or 2044. We want a world in which every one of us has what we need not only to live, but also to dream. Identifying who is behind the rising cost of everyday essentials is a necessary first step.

Sulma Arias is executive director of People's Action, the nation's largest network of grassroots power-building groups, with more than a million members in 30 states. This op-ed was adapted from OurFuture.org and distributed for syndication by OtherWords.org.



Conscience: When Mine Conflicts with Yours

Thomas Aquinas said that conscience comes from God — a noble thought when all in a community embrace the same divinity, the same ethics. But a pluralist society allows for different interpretations of conscience. Mine versus yours versus theirs.

Our society has honored divergent consciences. In World War II, when most Americans accepted the need to take up arms, we allowed for conscientious objectors. Those who supported the war, yet could not enter into combat, filled non-combat roles. Others, who could not countenance participating in this war at all, regardless of the rationale, went to jail. The war in Vietnam similarly drew objectors: some did not fight, but participated in the effort; some went abroad, renouncing their citizenship; some went to jail. All accepted the consequences.

Now we have pharmacists and physicians citing “conscience” when confronted with abortions, abortifacients, even contraception. Physicians assert that their conscience keeps them from participating in abortions, even if the woman, as well as her own physician, as well as the state legislature, has accepted the legitimacy of the abortion. Indeed, the physicians arguing in the Supreme Court to block the abortion pill, contended that if a woman who took the pill ended up in their hospital, they could not in conscience treat her (an unlikely occurrence since abortion is almost illegal in those states where

the physicians practice). Some physicians refuse to prescribe birth control. Their consciences preclude them from that sinful pill.

Pharmacists, for their part, cite “conscience” when they refuse to fill a prescription for contraception. Presumably if a woman needed medication post-abortion, a pharmacist might also refuse to fill that prescription. Arkansas, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, Michigan, Mississippi, Pennsylvania and South Dakota have enacted conscience clauses to protect those professionals whose consciences forbid them from doing what they — not necessarily the state or their professional societies or patients — deem sinful.

To date, it is easy to yell “conscience.” Physicians do face the risk of lawsuits, if an “unnecessary delay in care” causes harm. A patient can file a malpractice suit against a specific physician, as well as the hospital. Already lawyers are advertising their services on-line.

But that is a risk most conscience-troubled physicians may willingly take. The road from harm to malpractice to settlement is long.

As for pharmacists, they are obligated to question, and refuse to fill, a prescription they suspect is harmful or illegitimate. (In court, states are arguing that pharmacists filled prescriptions for opiates too willingly.) But contraceptives are legal. The large retail establishments are supposed to excuse a conscience-laden employee and find one willing to fill a prescription. Again, if a patient suffers harm — for instance, must travel miles to a pharmacy to fill a prescription, that chain risks litigation.

So we have an anomaly: conscientious objectors who face no consequences for their stance. They can cite “conscience” with impunity,

How about adding some consequences?

Community service remains an option. An obstetrician who refuses to perform abortions, even in cases of ectopic pregnancy, rape, incest and fatal fetal anomalies, now can walk away. Why not require 10 hours a month pro bono in a rape crisis center? Or in a center for the children languishing in the foster care system? Those conscientious objectors value life: let them give some non-billable hours to treat the women and children in this country who live mired in poverty. Add money into the payback, asking those physicians, in the upper echelons of earners, to contribute financially to the care of the patients they do not see.

For pharmacists, the current solution is hardly workable. Employers must excuse employees who cannot fill prescriptions for contraceptives, and find alternative employees — a challenge in small establishments. As for making a patient drive to a pharmacy that can fill a prescription . . . that risks harming patients, especially those in rural counties. The solution to the conscientious objector problem demands common sense. Let those pharmacists find other professions. Just as we do not expect pacifists to enroll at West Point, we should not admit people who cannot fill specific prescriptions, legal and prescribed, into pharmacy training programs. We have many professions that allow people to serve others without violating their consciences.

A pluralist society allows for conscientious objectors, but those objectors should not simply refuse to participate, or force the larger society to bend to their beliefs. Instead, they should contribute to the wellbeing of our nation. In short, we should insist on consequences.

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

Health Care Should Be More Than Bitter Pills

By SAM URETSKY

*...The doctor's talk was of coughs and chills
And the doctor's satchel bulged with pills.
The doctor said unto Isabel,
Swallow this, it will make you well.
Isabel, Isabel, didn't worry,
Isabel didn't scream or scurry.
She took those pills from the pill concocter,
And Isabel calmly cured the doctor.
Ogden Nash (The Adventures of Isabel)*

Nobody seems to be happy with the state of healthcare in the United States. The professionals, the patients, and the politicians. Maybe the executives of the health insurers like the system, but that supposes that they understand it, which is giving them a lot of credit that they only questionably deserve.

Alan Reisinger, M.D., Associate Medical Director of MDVIP, an organization that offers one of the alternatives to conventional medical practice, reported on the benefits of organizations like his own. The patient pays a fee, perhaps as much as \$2,000 a year, but gets priority service from their primary care physician — an appointment within 48 hours, and the MD's cell phone number. While many primary care physicians report having a practice of 2,500 to 3,000 patients, the

physicians who are affiliated with MDvip or its competitors — SignatureMD, Privia Health and others — can reduce their patient load to 600 while providing more personal care and maintaining their standard of living. That leaves 2,000 wannabe patients who have to have to go find a primary care physician, but whose place on the waiting line has been preempted by the 5-600 people who had \$2,000 extra. What's wrong with this picture?

Dr. Reisinger cited an IPSOS survey of patients reported patient dissatisfaction with getting primary care:

- 61% of consumers say healthcare system is a hassle
- 63% say navigating the system is stressful
- 53% say the healthcare system treats patients more like a number than a person
- 40% of adults have spent much more time in the waiting room than with the physician.

At the same time, MDs are complaining of burnout. Burnout is defined as “a state of mental, physical, and emotional exhaustion that can be caused by chronic stress in the workplace.” Medscape's 2024 “Physician Burnout and Depression Report,” published Jan. 24, reported that emergency medicine physicians are the most burnt-out medical specialists for the second year in a row, with 63% experiencing burnout. A few of the specialties that are reporting high levels of burnout are:

- Emergency medicine: 63%
- OB-GYN: 53%
- Oncology: 53%

- Pediatrics: 51%
 - Family medicine: 51%
 - Radiology: 51%
- The best areas of practice medical are:
- Pathology: 41%
 - Psychiatry: 39%
 - Ophthalmology: 39%
 - Plastic surgery: 37%

The numbers are significantly higher for female MDs than for males, 63% for women, compared to 46% for men. Other healthcare occupations scored around the same burnout rates. Results from a 2020 survey indicate that almost two-thirds of nurses (62%) experience burnout. It's especially common among younger nurses, with 69% of nurses under 25 reporting burnout.

Among hospital pharmacists, the burnout rate has been reported at 53.2%, potentially a serious problem in an occupation with a steady decline in college applications and a Bureau of Labor Statistics anticipated annual growth in openings of 3%.

Also. In 2023, a record number healthcare workers, nurses, nursing assistants, technicians, pharmacists, and other specialties went on strike. The strikers were aware of their moral responsibilities and the risks to patients, but felt that working conditions already risked the welfare of their patients.

Here's a quote from a study published in the *International Journal of Research in Public Health* “Healthcare workers are particularly susceptible to burnout, especially given the fact that clinical practice is an important burnout trigger due to the ongoing contact with patients and suffering. Burnout among healthcare workers adversely affects not only

the department they work in but also their performance and the functioning of the entire healthcare system. It increases the risk of medical errors and adversely affects patients' safety.”

Of course there's one group that's not covered by these statistics — the have nots. The Commonwealth Fund reported “Almost 3.8 Million People Have Lost Their Medicaid Coverage Since the End of the COVID-19 Public Health Emergency.” Medicaid eligibility was frozen for the COVID-19 emergency, but now that the emergency is over, the states are reconsidering eligibility. An estimated 15 million people will lose Medicaid coverage. An educated guess, from a 2022 Census Bureau report claimed 26 million people — or 7.9% of the US population — were uninsured. That was a low number because of the people who were covered by Medicaid but will lose it now the crisis is past. The United States is the only modern nation that doesn't have universal healthcare. Neither providers or patients are satisfied with the system, but Republicans like their tax breaks for corporation and wealthy people — and that is why the United States spends about 18% of its GDP on healthcare while most modern nations get by on 11%. As it is, the US spends about \$1 billion a month on drug advertising alone — not on the drugs themselves, but on TV ads that say “ask your doctor if (Dammit!) Is right for you.”

It's worth discussing — soon.

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

Our Budget Priorities Should Reflect the People's Agenda, Not Hasten Nuclear Oblivion

This fiscal year 2024, the United States will spend \$94.485 billion on all nuclear weapons programs, an increase of over \$4 billion from last year.

By ROBERT DODGE

April 15 is the day we fund our nation's priorities as determined by our elected leaders.

In March, the United Way released its 2023 211 Impact Survey of roughly 16 million requests, offering insights into the trends and challenges faced by households and communities across the country. Topping the list were housing, utilities, and food assistance as the top needs of people seeking support na-

tionwide. Similarly, a Gallup poll released in March listed the economy, inflation, hunger and homelessness, and healthcare costs in the top five priorities.

Where do nuclear weapons fit in? They're not even on the radar of most people, and particularly not mainstream news outlets. Yet this fiscal year 2024, the United States will spend \$94.485 billion on all nuclear weapons programs. This is an increase of over \$4 billion from last year. This expenditure is for weapons that can never be used without posing a threat to all of humanity. Yet these expenditures continue to grow out of control, year over year. It is fueled by the mythology of nuclear deterrence, the major driver of the arms race. Not to be outdone, every country feels driven to exceed the nuclear forces and capabilities of their adversaries. We spiral out of control toward nuclear oblivion, ever increasing the potential for nuclear war either by intent, miscalculation, or accident.

Nuclear weapons threaten us every moment of every day. There are 12,119 weapons in the global nuclear arsenals. We know that the use of even a tiny fraction, less than one-half of 1% of these weapons over a single populated region, could cause catastrophic cli-

mate change lasting years and potentially putting 2 billion people at risk.

With this nuclear famine knowledge, the new arms race shifts from the paradigm of (MAD) Mutually Assured Destruction to (SAD) Self Assured Destruction. These weapons rob our communities of precious resources that could be redirected to the many needs that our communities cry out for. The very existence of nuclear weapons and programs is an economic, environmental, social, and racial justice issue. Yet this is a situation that does not have to be.

Back From the Brink is a growing movement across this nation. It calls for a no-first-use policy, ending sole presidential authority to launch nuclear weapons, ending “hair trigger alert,” canceling the plans to replace the entire arsenal with new weapons, and most importantly, resumption of negotiations for a multilateral, verifiable treaty for the elimination of nuclear weapons. This campaign is supported by US House Resolution 77, which embraces the goals and provisions of the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons and each of the precautionary measures in the Back From the Brink campaign. The resolution

currently has 44 cosponsors in the US House of Representatives.

This past year has seen heightened awareness of the threat of nuclear weapons moving into the mainstream with the release of the Academy Award-winning film “Oppenheimer”; the *New York Times* series “At the Brink,” with an in-depth overview of the risk and potential impacts of nuclear war; an April 9 *Boston Globe* editorial “We Need to Start Worrying About the Bomb;” and the recently published books *Nuclear War: A Scenario* by Annie Jacobsen and *Countdown: The Blinding Future of Nuclear Weapons* by Sarah Scoles.

The nuclear abolition movement is here and growing. It is time for our budget priorities to reflect the people's agenda and to abolish nuclear weapons before they abolish us.

Robert Dodge, a frequent Common Dreams contributor, writes as a family physician practicing in Ventura, California. He is the Co-Chair of the Security Committee of National Physicians for Social Responsibility, serves as the President of Physicians for Social Responsibility Los Angeles, and is a steering committee member of Back from the Brink.

WAYNE O'LEARY

The Absurdity of American Immigration Policy

Global capitalism, which presently controls our economic lives, requires certain conditions to be in place, in order to operate at peak profitability. One is expanded free trade, the unfettered exchange of goods and services. We've recently witnessed one of its downsides in the form of the Baltimore bridge collapse, caused by the operation of a dangerously oversized container supership of the sort globalized transport deems essential for it to derive maximum benefit from economies of scale.

Another precondition desired by global capital consists of unchecked worldwide population flows that provide it with the cheapest possible labor supply wherever it operates. The international upsurge in cross-border migration is the current manifestation of labor moving to where global capital demands its availability at the right cost. Immigrants surging across national borders, mostly in search of work in the developed economies, are literally following the dollar as the currently arranged global capitalist system requires them to do. Whether this is in the best interest of society at large is another question.

Regardless of the upshot of such economic upheaval, there's no doubt that in the Western Hemisphere its impact is greatest in the US. Immigration to these shores has been increasing for several decades, but the immediate catalysts for its recent explosive rise were probably the dislocations of the

worldwide financial crash of 2008 and the extended recession that followed, combined with the side effects of climate change and the new means of mass communication that have technologically interconnected and shrunken the world.

At any rate, more and more people are coming here, and the numbers are astounding. Legal immigration has stabilized at around one million a year, but illegal or unauthorized entries are at least that or greater. One estimate places total immigrant arrivals in America during 2023 at three million, still a mere fraction of the 160 million worldwide *The Economist* reports would like to emigrate to the US if they could.

Most problematic, of course, are the undocumented, who either apply for asylum, claiming persecution at home (a vague, hard-to-confirm category), or simply avoid official channels altogether by easily penetrating the sieve-like southern border illegally. The former apply for humanitarian admission and are released into the country after promising to eventually appear before immigration courts, a multi-year process euphemistically called "catch and release"; the latter, the so-called gotaways (1.4 million of them in 2021-22), just disappear onto US soil and melt into American society.

Pro-immigration has historically been the default position of both major American political parties, but not always. Organized labor, a Democratic constituency, has often opposed immigration because of its downward pressure on wages, influencing Democrats against it; likewise, the nativist Republican right, fearful of foreign contamination, has occasionally overcome its party's business wing, which in its search for cheap labor traditionally favors more immigration.

Since 2020, however, party positions have changed somewhat. The Democrats have increasingly become an open-borders party in response to Donald Trump's provocations, such as his family-separations policy, and to curry favor with its minority voters.

The Trumpian GOP, meanwhile, has adopted an absolutist closed-door approach.

At the moment, the immigration ball is in Joe Biden's court, and he's not handling it well. Dexter Filkins, writing in *The New Yorker* ("Borderline Chaos," 6/19/23), has ably detailed the president's ideological pro-immigration stance — his open invitation to asylum seekers during his 2020 campaign and since, his removal of Title 42 health restrictions on immigration, his stocking of his administration with immigrants'-rights advocates, his expansion of "backdoor" admissions through extended work visas.

The president wants more immigration, and he's getting it. Since his inauguration three years ago, 3.1 million border-crossers from 150 countries have been legally admitted into the US (about one million seeking asylum), while another 1.7 million have entered illegally or have overstayed temporary visas — 4.8 million in all. This includes hundreds of thousands of special admissions granted to selected Central American refugees for political reasons and to beneficiaries of the much-abused family-reunification process. This past November and December alone, over 500,000 migrants crossed from Mexico into the US.

Joe Biden, whose blind spot on immigration matches his blind spot on Israel, is paying a stiff price for his indulgent borders policy. According to a *New York Times* survey (November 2023), voters favor Trump over the president on immigration by 53% to 41%. Nevertheless, there's one politically influential group, the business community, that's with him all the way.

Shortly after the 2020 election, corporate America announced its desire to partner with the incoming Biden administration to achieve mutually beneficial solutions on immigration, that is, expanded H-1B and H-2B work visas and increased backdoor worker admissions through refugee and protected-status programs, each by means of executive action. The goal for business: reducing labor costs and boosting profits by replacing relatively expensive domestic

workers with cheaper comparable talent from overseas. The presumed quid pro quo: corporate political donations.

New arrivals, legal and illegal, drove US net migration in 2023 to its highest level in six years and brought the foreign-born component of our national workforce to 18.6% — the corporate sector's dream come true. But for stressed American cities, forced to accommodate the surging influx, it's brought unimaginable problems — not a dream but a social and economic nightmare.

Unless they break the law, the undocumented, including asylum seekers, can't technically accept jobs until they first obtain legal residency, a process taking several years. In the meantime, it's up to the cities where they reside to feed, clothe, educate and shelter them, and provide healthcare as well.

Large urban centers, where the thousands of migrants tend to congregate, are experiencing fiscal crises of massive proportion. According to the latest figures, Chicago has spent \$255 million caring for its migrant population, Denver \$222 million, and New York City (which must observe a "right-to-shelter" law) \$1.2 billion to house 110,000 newcomers. New York State itself budgeted \$2.1 billion for migrant aid in 2021 and plans an additional \$2.4 billion in expenditures through 2025.

Democrats should recognize where the evolving international migrant crisis is heading. Beginning with Angela Merkel's integrationist Germany in 2015, moderate and progressive European parties have been in political free fall due to their tolerant acceptance of mass migration. The American center-left could be next. Instead of using executive actions to stimulate immigration, Joe Biden might consider executive actions, such as nationalizing the National Guard, to enforce border security.

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.

Raging Against 'White Rural Rage'

In their new book, Tom Schaller and Paul Waldman write as if economic class no longer exists or matters.

By LES LEOPOLD

I don't like to slam books, especially those ahead of mine on the best seller list. It might seem like petty jealousy. But one recent release, "White Rural Rage" by Tom Schaller and Paul Waldman, is seriously flawed.

For starters, the authors write as if economic class no longer exists or matters. According to this book, all rural White people, or at least most of them, share similar racist attitudes. Class distinctions between bosses and workers, rich and poor, are meaningless.

Because Schaller and Waldman view the world through their anti-class, whiteness lens, they don't consider the possibility that working-class voters share common attitudes across geographies. Contrary to their thesis, the research for my book found no discernable differences in attitudes on hot-button social issues between urban, suburban and rural White working-class voters.

As Democratic Party pollster Mike Lux reports, "These voters wouldn't care all that much about the cultural difference and the woke thing if the Democrats gave more of a damn about the economic challenges they face deeply and daily."

Where's the Beef?

Schaller put his cards on the table during an interview on MSNBC, during which he called rural Americans "the most racist, xenophobic, anti-immigrant, anti-gay demographic group in the country."

The authors also claim it is getting worse. In defending themselves in *The New Republic*, they write that "as the rest of the

country moved away from Donald Trump [in 2020] rural whites lurched toward him by nine points, from 62% to 71%."

But voting for Trump is not the same as being a bigot. In fact, the data in my book shows that white working-class voters, rural and otherwise, are growing more liberal, not illiberal on key social issues.

Anti-Immigrant?

"Are you in favor of granting 'legal status to all illegal immigrants who have held jobs and paid taxes for at least three years and not been convicted of any felony crimes?'" (Cooperative Election Study)

White working-class in favor:
2010: 32.1%
2020: 61.8%

Anti-Gay?

"Should gay or lesbian couples be legally permitted to adopt children?" (American National Elections Study)

White working-class in favor:
2000: 38.2%
2020: 76.7%

Increasing Racism?

"Agree that most Blacks just don't have the motivation or willpower to pull themselves out of poverty." (General Social Survey)

1996: 56.8%
2021: 32.8%

Furthermore, our data, which is derived from three large multi-year voter surveys, shows that from 20-50% of White working-class non-Democrats are liberal on social issues.

What About Sherrod Brown?

If White rural racism is the key to all politics, then why do significant numbers of rural voters in Ohio support Sen. Sherrod Brown, who in 2018 ran about 12% ahead of President Joe Biden in 2020? In fact, Brown, who votes liberal on social issues up and down the line, ran significantly ahead of Biden in every rural county.

Brown's connection to working-class voters might have something to do with his willingness to take on Wall Street for ripping

off workers again and again. It works politically because enough of those supposedly bigoted White workers care a lot more about never-ending job instability than they do about wokeness.

In his excellent review (and evisceration) of "White Rural Wage," Nicholas Jacobs, a political scientist, points out that:

"Democrats who give in to the simplistic rage thesis are essentially letting themselves off the hook on the politics, suggesting that rural Americans are irrational and beyond any effort to engage them."

It's not White rural rage. It's not irrational rage either. Rather it's very clear-eyed working-class anger as insatiable corporate

Billionaires are Bad for Democracy. Taxing Them is Good for It.

Extreme wealth inequality leads to extreme political inequality. Progressive taxation would be better for our economy and democracy alike.

By OMAR OCAMPO

A new, disturbing milestone has been confirmed in the latest *Forbes* World Billionaires List. The US billionaire class is now larger and richer than ever, with 813 ten-figure oligarchs together holding \$5.7 trillion.

This is a \$1.2 trillion increase from the year before — and a gargantuan \$2.7 trillion increase since March 2020.

The staggering upsurge shows how our economy primarily benefits the wealthy, rather than the ordinary working people who produce their wealth. Even worse, those extremely wealthy individuals often use these assets to undermine our democracy.

Billionaires have enormous power to in-

flame the political process. They spent \$1.2 billion in the 2020 general election and more than \$880 million in the 2022 midterms. Even when their preferred candidates aren't in office, our institutions are still more likely to respond to their policy preferences than the average voter's, especially when it comes to taxes.

The vast majority of Americans, including 63% of Republicans, support higher taxes on the wealthy. Yet our representatives consistently fail to deliver. A quintessential example was Donald Trump's 2017 tax cuts for corporations and the rich — the most unpopular legislation signed into law in the past 25 years.

Though backers promised the tax cuts would benefit all Americans, a recent report by the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities revealed that the primary beneficiaries were the top 1%.

The good news? Those cuts are set to expire after next year. So we'll have an opportunity for a new tax reform — one that raises more money for the services we rely on while protecting our democracy from extreme wealth concentration.

President Joe Biden's Billionaire Minimum Income Tax (BMIT) is one promising proposal. By raising the top tax rate and taxing unrealized capital gains, the BMIT seeks to repair a system where billionaires pay a lower average tax rate than working people.

Continued on next page

Netanyahu, Empowered by Biden's Grant of Impunity, Baits Iran into His Genocidal Gaza War

By JUAN COLE

ANN ARBOR – Despite all the hype about Iran's largely symbolic barrage of over 200 drones and cruise and ballistic missiles, unleashed on the thinly populated Negev Desert (where it was mainly Palestinian Bedouins who were put in danger), the military significance of this action was minimal. An Israeli base was hit at Dimona, which houses the country's nuclear warheads, but the government said that the damage was minimal. Almost all of the projectiles were shot down, by the Jordanian and Israeli and American Air Forces, or by anti-missile missiles. The only casualty appears to be a 7-year-old Palestinian Bedouin girl, who was seriously injured by a falling missile.

Iran struck because Israeli Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu on April 1 had the consular annex of the Iranian embassy in Damascus bombed, killing high-ranking Iranian officials, including Brigadier General Mohammad Reza Zahedi and seven other officers of the Iranian Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC). Those officials were there at the invitation of the Syrian government, and embassies are protected from military attack by the Vienna Convention.

Iran cited Article 51 of the United Nations Charter for its counter-strike on Israel, which guarantees states the right of self-defense. Embassies are considered national soil.

Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, Iran's clerical Leader, had said April 10 at his Eid al-Fitr sermon: "The consulate and embassy institutions in any country are the soil of that country. The evil regime made a mistake

and must be punished and will be punished." He added, "The events in Gaza showed the evil nature of Western civilization to the world. They killed thirty-odd thousand defenseless people; aren't these human? Do they not have rights?" He also said, "They showed what kind of civilization this is. A child is killed, in the mother's arms. The patient dies in the hospital. Their power cannot touch ... the men of the resistance; so they target the lives of family members, the lives of children and the oppressed, the lives of old men."

Iran's permanent mission to the United Nations in New York wrote on X,

"Conducted on the strength of Article 51 of the UN Charter pertaining to legitimate defense, Iran's military action was in response to the Zionist regime's aggression against our diplomatic premises in Damascus. The matter can be deemed concluded. However, should the Israeli regime make another mistake, Iran's response will be considerably more severe. It is a conflict between Iran and the rogue Israeli regime, from which the U.S. MUST STAY AWAY!"

Tehran is saying that, with this exchange, "the matter can be deemed concluded." Ayatollah Ali Khamenei is not looking for an all-out war.

It was not only the strike on the Iranian embassy that set the stage for Iran's barrage, but also the six months of intensive Israeli bombing of the Palestinians of Gaza, in which the vast majority of those killed were innocent noncombatants, with 70% being women and children and many others non-combatant men. The death toll now stands at 33,686 Palestinians. Only a small clique of militants committed the horrific Oct. 7 attack on Israel, without telling anyone else what they were planning. There is no military or other justification for using an artificial intelligence program to identify all members of Hamas's paramilitary (some of which is the equivalent of a neighborhood watch for local security) and to murder them from the skies along with their spouses, children, extended families, and

neighbors.

Iran is pledged to defend the Palestinians and has been made to look ineffectual and foolish by the ongoing Israeli atrocities, which have set the blood of the publics in the Middle East to boiling and much raised the esteem in which they hold Iran. The embassy strike was the last straw. If Iran did not reply to it at least symbolically, its credibility, and any deterrence it was perceived to have, became a joke.

Netanyahu, for his part, was attempting to provoke Iran, in the hope that Tehran would take the bait. He knew that even Washington had come to see Israel as the aggressor in Gaza, and that he was losing support in Congress. He knew that if the issue became an Iranian attack on Israel, the Western capitals would all rally around him and forgive him at least for a while for having brought the Israeli equivalent of Neo-Nazis into his cabinet and then gone Amalek on tens of thousands of innocent Palestinians.

In the end, Khamenei and the Revolutionary Guards let their devotion to the late Gen. Zahedi sway their emotions and they fell for Netanyahu's trick.

Earlier on April 13 the naval section of the Iranian Revolutionary Guards Corps boarded and confiscated a container ship in the Gulf of Oman that belongs to the company of one of Netanyahu's billionaire backers. While this action violated the law of the sea and can't be condoned, it was a wiser way of replying to the embassy attack than sending missiles against Israel. It hit Netanyahu where it hurts and no one would have cared about it in the outside world.

Now, we have to suffer with Netanyahu proclaiming his victimhood (he started it) and suffering through statements of solidarity with his fascist government in the face of the ayatollahs, with the ongoing genocide in Gaza cast into the shade.

As many observers are pointing out, this very dangerous situation was caused by President Joe Biden's mishandling of the Gaza crisis. He should have cut Netanyahu

off at the knees by Jan. 1, once it became clear that the Israelis were implementing their notorious Amalek imperative, which implied genocide. By vetoing three United Nations Security Council resolutions demanding a ceasefire and by undercutting the only one he allowed to pass by branding it nonbinding, Biden let the butchery continue apace. It continued the past month, during which Israel continued to bomb the bejesus out of Gaza, to kill hundreds of innocents, and to starve them (despite phony pledges to let more aid in, on which Netanyahu did not follow through.)

Biden, UK PM Rishi Sunak and other leaders could also have defused the deliberate provocation of Iran by Netanyahu by simply condemning the embassy attack of April 1, and defending the Vienna convention. Again, the Iranian mission to the UN said this plainly:

"Had the UN Security Council condemned the Zionist regime's reprehensible act of aggression on our diplomatic premises in Damascus and subsequently brought to justice its perpetrators, the imperative for Iran to punish this rogue regime might have been obviated."

Instead, Biden and his allies declined to condemn Netanyahu's action, continuing the North Atlantic insouciance toward Israeli war crimes and continuing the implementation of their double standard whereby International Humanitarian Law applies only to White people. That is, there is not as much difference between Trumpian white nationalism and Biden's foreign policy as it might seem on the surface, though Trump is of course far worse.

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

What You Might Have Forgotten About OJ Simpson and His Trial

By ELWOOD WATSON

For those too young to fully remember the OJ Simpson trial, it was a television spectacle with all the makings of a Hollywood blockbuster.

Sex and violence, interracial relationships and marriage, infidelity, alcoholism, sexual deviancy and a host of lurid details that titillated and fascinated the public. Stories covering the trial became daily tidbits, as just about every outlet – from weekly tabloids to highbrow magazines and newspapers – intensely covered the trial. You also had a real life cast of characters that would have been a fiction writer's dream.

The strong, handsome, sex symbol former Hall of Fame athlete. The former beauty queen, blonde-haired, blue-eyed murdered wife. Her tall, dark and handsome murdered body builder friend. The blond-haired hedonistic beach boy. The Latin housekeeper. The Asian judge. The White/Jewish female prosecutor. The Black male prosecutor. The Black male defense attorney. The legendary WASP attorney. The Jewish defense attorney. The Black ex-wife and kids from his first marriage. Biracial kids from his second marriage. The White racist cop and police force.

It went on and on. A theater of the surreal.

The trial, like many other issues in America, exposed the large racial divide in our nation. The country was largely divided among racial lines, with 62% of Whites believing Simpson was guilty of murder and 68% of Blacks feeling that he was innocent, according to a CNN poll conducted at the time. Charges that the defense team, led by the late Johnnie Cochran, was playing the "race card" to *Time* magazine darkening Simpson's face on its cover elicited outrage from certain segments of the Black community and further divided the public. The racial gulf remained after the trial.

Many White Americans were shocked

and outraged by witnessing groups of Blacks cheering the verdict. To many, such jubilation demonstrated a high level of callousness and indifference to the plight of two brutally murdered victims.

On the contrary, for many Black Americans, the verdict represented vindication from a justice system that had for so long mistreated and incarcerated so many Black people, who in a number of cases were unjustly prosecuted without probable cause. Simpson was probably an afterthought. The cheering was for how Johnnie Cochran, the Black lead defense attorney, so skillfully, eloquently and powerfully commanded that courtroom.

Once he was implicated in the murders of his ex-wife Nicole Brown Simpson and her body builder, waiter friend, Ronald Goldman, the once Black Prince Charming image Simpson worked so hard to cultivate quickly evaporated. The fact Nicole Brown Simpson was a blond haired, blue eyed former beauty queen intensified the hatred toward Simpson, particularly in racially-conscious social circles. Race did indeed matter!

It is very telling that many of Simpson's critics (mostly White) who ruthlessly took him to task (and in my opinion, justifiably so) for two gruesome murders seemed to either overlook or ignore the fact that Claus Von Bulow, Robert Blake and several other White men were exonerated under similar circumstances. In the case of Von Bulow, he went on to appear on the cover of *Vanity Fair* and became a social fixture in New York society circles.

Both sides were passionate in their stances. However, most rational people know that Simpson was incarcerated in 2008 for nearly a decade, largely for failing to be convicted in 1995. The judge and predominately White jury in the second trial were determined to see Simpson face justice for what they saw as his failure to face consequences in his initial 1995 acquittal. Even most legal experts conceded as much, arguing that under normal circumstances, most people would have likely received less than three years or even probation for the sort of crime Simpson was involved in.

Moreover, anyone being honest with themselves knows that if Simpson had been accused of murdering his first wife, Marguerite Henry Simpson, a Black woman, the searing level of public outrage and craven level of print and electronic media coverage would not have been anywhere near as intense. I would argue that might have ended up a minor cover story in *Jet* or *Ebony* Magazine, and not much elsewhere. Such attitudes demonstrate that Black lives are too often of little significance to the larger society.

I was among those Black Americans, in

Ocampo...

Continued from previous page

It would raise \$50 billion a year over the next decade, making our tax system a bit more equitable.

Senator Ron Wyden's (D-OR) similarly named Billionaire Income Tax (BIT) is more straightforward. It would target asset gains that can easily be tracked by the public, like a billionaire's stock holdings in a publicly traded company.

Another idea? A well-designed progressive tax on billionaire wealth.

A modest 5% tax on all wealth above \$1 billion would raise more than \$244 billion this year alone. And that's likely an underestimate, since some billionaires keep their wealth concealed from Forbes. Wealth-X, a private research firm, identified 955 billionaires in their Census last year, 142 more than what Forbes just registered.

A wealth tax wouldn't hurt investment and innovation – most innovation in the US is driven by people worth less than \$50 million. But for billionaires, it would function "as a constraint on their rate of wealth accumulation," according to Patriotic Millionaires, a

group of wealthy people who support higher taxes on the rich.

Of course, a wealth tax alone isn't enough to ensure the safety of our democracy. We also need campaign finance reform to limit political spending. And stronger labor unions could prevent extreme concentrations of wealth from occurring in the first place. Unions not only increase the collective power of workers, they also close wage gaps between workers and CEOs.

Finally, we need better tax enforcement. The Inflation Reduction Act gave the IRS more resources to track down wealthy tax dodgers, and now the agency is projecting an unexpected windfall in tax revenue over the next decade.

That's a great first step towards strengthening our democracy and democratizing our economy. Now let's take the next step and fix the tax code itself.

Omar Ocampo is a researcher for the Program on Inequality and the Common Good at the Institute for Policy Studies. This op-ed was adapted from a longer version at Inequality.org and distributed for syndication by OtherWords.org.

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Trump's Luck and Mojo Run Low

By JAMIE STIEHM

At last, former President Donald Trump is on trial, a criminal defendant for election interference, in silencing a sordid brush with Stormy Daniels. The judge, Juan Merchan, made clear he's in charge here.

A harbinger of spring light in the American soul after a long winter occupation? Let it be so.

April is turning out as the cruelest month for the Republican presidential contender. The actual president, meanwhile, acts presidential, handling foreign policy crises like a seasoned pro.

I think Trump knows it.

But his legions of followers don't. So the show must go on 'til the end, dividing Americans into Us vs. Them. Just like Frederick Douglass, as Trump once said, he's doing an "amazing job." His great gift is polarizing the body politic and, let's be honest, bringing out the base in us.

Performative Outrage

By BARRY FRIEDMAN

Back in March, Rep. Nancy Mace (R-South Carolina), who was raped at age 16 — it is a story she herself shares frequently — was asked by ABC's George Stephanopoulos how she could support Donald Trump for president, after he has been found liable for sexual abuse in the E. Jean Carroll case.

"It was not a criminal court case," Mace shot back, adding, "Number one. Number two, I live with shame. And you're asking me a question about my political choices trying to shame me as a rape victim."

The train had already jumped the tracks. "It's actually not about shaming you," Stephanopoulos responded. "It's a question about Donald Trump."

Mace, though unprovoked, went ballistic.

"I have dealt with this for 30 years. You know how hard it was to tell my story five years ago when they were doing a fetal-heartbeat bill [in South Carolina to restrict abortion] and there were no exceptions for rape or incest in there. I had to tell my story because no other woman was coming forward for us. No rape victims were represented, and you're trying to shame me this morning. And I find it offensive, and this is why women won't come forward."

Stephanopoulos is not the reason women aren't coming forward — and Mace knows it.

His research staff didn't discover Mace's rape and ambush her with a question about it. She reminds viewers often that, as a survivor, she understands the plight of the abused better than most.

All power to her.

But she is a member of a party that has

The bitter, twisted glare on his face now reveals a man living a life of loud desperation. Trump is shrewd and canny enough to know when the con is up. He is asking aides what prison will be like. Making license plates and all.

Let us review. Trump is slipping in the polls against President Joe Biden. His Truth Social media stock is plunging. Biden is raising more money. Arizona's new harsh abortion ban (from a frontier 1864 law) will cream him with women voters.

The best part is that Trump is aware Arizona just pitched a wild game-changing election loser.

Bragging about naming three Supreme Court members to deny human rights for women and girls has backfired beautifully. The three Trump appointees acted swiftly to strike down reproductive freedom at the first chance, defying their sworn Senate testimony.

The Republican John Roberts Supreme Court struck down *Roe v. Wade* in June 2022, a bellwether moment.

But the danger is, Trump will never surrender without the ugliest clash since the Civil War. If he has his way, he'll incite more political violence ("a bloodbath") against the government than he did on Jan. 6, 2021. That day is still a nightmare from which we

nominated a sexual predator — she is supporting him herself — and has removed protections, certainly in terms of access to abortions, for those raped and the victims of incest. Why shouldn't she be asked about her comfort level? Why shouldn't Nancy Mace, victim of sexual abuse, endorsing Donald Trump, perpetrator of sexual abuse, for president be a suitable topic of conversation?

She is vouching for a man who once bragged about grabbing women by the "pus*y." She is in a party that doesn't care.

Maybe that is why women won't come forward.

A few weeks back, the Arizona Supreme Court upheld a law passed in 1864 — the Civil War wasn't over yet, women couldn't vote, the medical community still wasn't universally convinced it was a good idea for doctors to wash their hands before surgery, and it would be 48 years before the place even became a state — that made abortion a felony punishable by two to five years in prison for anyone who performs one or helps a woman obtain one.

Mace said, "Arizona's 1864 law is a terrible law. I don't know anybody in my state who would support that kind of thing. And I can't imagine the majority of Arizonans would support it either. It needs to be repealed immediately."

Except maybe South Carolina, her state.

Since 2022, South Carolina has banned after six weeks of pregnancy, following the US Supreme Court's decision to overturn *Roe v. Wade*. The legislation, wait for it, removed the exceptions for rape and incest.

Mace's outrage is not just selective. It's performance art.

The 1864 bill, as mentioned, as do most of the abysmal pieces of current anti-abortion legislation, only has an exception if the life of the mother is at stake. God knows how that was defined then in the middle of the 19th century. In 2023, a woman in Okla-

homa was told to wait in a hospital parking lot because she wasn't bleeding enough to qualify for that state's "life-of-the-mother exception."

Unfortunately, but by design, there's no consensus on what that means — or when it means it. Does it mean the woman will die if the abortion is not performed? Does it mean she is likely to die? When does "spotting" become "hemorrhaging"? And who decides this? Doctors, hospital administrators, Samuel Alito?

If you make the term ambiguous, fewer abortions will occur. Women will be afraid to ask. Doctors will be afraid to perform them.

That's today's GOP.

Here in Oklahoma, Republican State Rep. Justin Humphrey believes pregnant women are hosts. Former Rep. Madison Cawthorn of North Carolina said pregnant women are "earthen vessels" and pregnancies are like Polaroids. In Michigan, Republican Robert Regan wondered if rape victims should just "lie back and enjoy it." Former Rep. Todd Akin of Missouri said women's bodies have a way of avoiding pregnancies in cases of "legitimate rape."

One party attracts such people — one!

And Mace is a member of that party, a party that would have denied her an abortion — assuming her body didn't have a supernatural power to avoid it — if her rape had resulted in a pregnancy.

In 2016, MSNBC host Chris Matthews asked Donald Trump, then a candidate for president, what penalties should be imposed on women who get abortions.

"The answer is there has to be some form of punishment," Trump said, adding that abortion is a "very serious problem."

He eventually walked back his answer. He needn't have bothered.

In 2016, after he made the comments, 41% of women voters went for Trump.

tor on the first day, Trump said.)

Tragically, Lincoln's mercy on the defeated Confederacy was met with an assassin's bullet in a full-house theater that was celebrating the Union victory in the Civil War.

As someone who loves the sound of music in words, the crude way Trump speaks to crowds robs the English language. The swagger suggests a bar brawl. If he said something charming, witty or wise in seven years, I never heard it.

The Japanese prime minister, Fumio Kishida, told Congress that our allies depend on America to champion freedom, to stand against authoritarianism.

Instead, Trump pressed House Speaker Mike Johnson, R-La., to delay a key floor vote on aiding Ukraine in its war against Russia. After two months, the vote may go ahead.

Trump's first day in criminal court, April 15, was the date that Lincoln died. And the nation wept.

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In 2020, after Trump put Neil Gorsuch, Brett Kavanaugh and Amy Coney Barrett on the Supreme Court — all three eventually voted to gut *Roe v. Wade* — 42% of women voters picked him.

Nancy Mace voted for him.

She will again.

The 1864 Arizona decision, like most of the anti-abortion statutes now, doesn't punish the woman who has the abortion, just the doctors who perform it, the cousins who drive the woman to the abortion clinic, and anyone else who facilitates the procedure. Think about that. So little does the GOP think of women, it won't even hold them accountable for what goes on in their own bodies.

The condescension is almost as bad as the cruelty.

In Arizona, shortly after its Supreme Court ruled in his favor, State Senator Anthony Kern, an Arizona Republican, who is currently under investigation for trying to serve as a "fake elector" for then-President Donald Trump following the 2020 election, led fellow Republicans in prayer ... in tongues ... on the senate floor. Later he said, "Looks like our prayer team stirred up some god-haters."

Nancy Mace belongs to a party that is theocratically dangerous. It's OK to ask her about it.

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 ... soon. 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.

Living Left: Reviewing Helena Sheehan's New Autobiography

By SETH SANDRONSKY

Helena Sheehan's autobiography "Until We Fall: Long Distance Life on the Left" (Monthly Review Press 2023) delivers a firsthand account of world-historic events such as the fall of the former Soviet Union and its impacts from the eastern bloc to the UK and US. Her book doesn't stop there, as she also travels to South Africa to participate in the fight for justice there.

For readers who did (not) live through this era, Sheehan offers a unique perspective of Soviet communism's demise, a disorienting arc to progressive tendencies and trends in the West. The shadows of this history continue to cast a dark cloud over the

planet. Take the new US Cold War against China and Russia. We see the slow motion train wreck of US economic power power in decline and its military drive to dominate the world.

A university professor of philosophy, Sheehan dives deeply into the practices and thoughts of the parties and people, East and West, as the Soviet Union dissolved, and produced demoralized and disoriented working classes on both sides of the Berlin Wall. The attractive myths and harsh realities of capitalism have exacted a terrible toll on the past social order in the USSR and its former eastern bloc. The impacts on capitalist democracies are no less striking, especially left political formations. She brings decades of political activism distilled into the book's six chapters.

Two intellectual trends Sheehan wrestles with are positivism and postmodernism. I think of the latter as a pernicious force that underscores identity politics. Its logic facili-

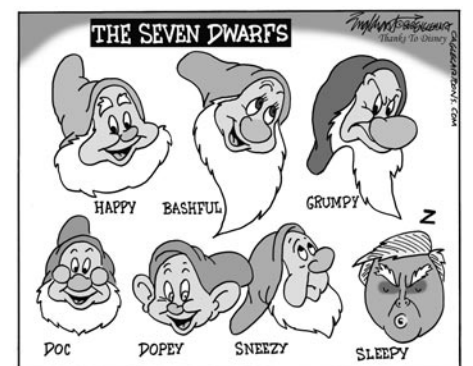
tates social fragmentation, anathema to a class analysis. The results encourage a rightward shift in politics, linked to the widening income and wealth gap between the prosperous few and everyone else.

Sheehan prefers the works of Marx as an analytical tool to understand world historic events such as the demise of the former USSR and expansion of capitalism globally. NATO's expansion eastward and subsequent Russian invasion of Ukraine is an outcome of this capitalist counterrevolution that requires war and the threat of thermonuclear war. Sheehan notes the role of war in the downfall of the USSR, eventually "crashing into a brick wall in its war in Afghanistan."

Her foray into the struggle against apartheid in South Africa is a gripping narrative. How did apartheid end in ways that strengthened capitalism? Suffice it to say that it is a complex tale that Sheehan illuminates as an active participant.

The struggle for justice is a marathon. Sheehan shows and tells of the steps and missteps along the way.

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New Book: Choosing Regular Food to Extend Longevity

It is not often that a best-selling author and correspondent on consumer, food, medical, and health issues comes up with an idea for all eaters that nobody has thought of before. Jean Carper, with 60 years of experience, has done just that with her brand-new book provocatively titled “100 Life or Death Foods: A Scientific Guide to Which Foods Prolong Life or Kill You Prematurely.”

Based on scientific studies about the life-expectancy effect of different foods – positive and negative – (many cited in the book’s Appendix and available at the National Institutes of Health Library of Medicine). Carper writes: “The evidence is stunningly clear that people who eat ‘opti-

mal’ diets can slow their aging process and add years to their lives.”

Carper reports that researchers have found common legumes (beans, peas, soybeans), whole grains, and nuts, extend longevity, while refined grains (white bread), sugar-sweetened beverages, heavy salt use, and red and processed meats can shorten one’s life.

Carper’s book is instantly usable because she efficiently runs through specific foods. For example, studies give high life-extension marks to apples, bananas, beets, berries, cabbage, carrots, hot chili peppers, coffee, eggplant, fermented food (pickles and sauerkraut), garlic grapes and raisins, green leafy veggies, herbs and spices, kale, oats, olives and olive oil, brown rice, tea, tomatoes, vinegar, yogurt and whole grain cereals.

On the life-shortening side, she names alcoholic beverages, candy, diet sodas, cured meats (bacon, hot dogs), fried foods, ice cream, fruit juices (stripped of fiber and called “high-calorie sugar water”) ultra-processed foods, including those labeled with high amounts of sucrose, glucose, fructose, corn syrup, and refined sugary cereals that corporate hucksters advertise to

youngsters.

In addition to specific foods, Carper explains why the Mediterranean Diet is so superior to the corporate Western Diet. She also praises the Dash Diet (similar to the Mediterranean Diet) which she reports as a “famous blood pressure downer.” She advocates getting your protein more from plants than from animals.

Much of the “bad food” cited in “100 Life or Death Foods” is high on the list of the corporate marketeers who exploit “taste and texture” – meaning sugar, salt, and fats – to seduce children at a young age for a lifetime of ingesting junk food and junk drink. Their advertising is relentless, with heavy psychological manipulation. Fast food companies know from their own research the damage they have been doing to the health of their customers. That is why they fill their ads with lies and deceptions and have focused promotions on “kiddy TV,” over the decades.

The natural foods grown locally for generations have been mostly displaced by pesticide-heavy factory farms that fuel processed corporate diets.

This book is a guide for all eaters to work their way back to unprocessed natural foods, with organic-certified labels. These foods have another advantage – they frequently come in at lower prices than steaks, chops, and highly processed foods, including those from fancy bakeries.

Carper recognizes, of course, that many factors influence life expectancy, such as genetics, exercise, lifestyles, smoking, pollution, alcohol abuse, and, of course, endemic poverty. Inadequate healthcare and health insurance also contribute to shortened life expectancies. However, food is something people can have personal control over without asking the permission of higher authorities.

Some people are in a position to grow their own vegetables and fruits and share the harvest with neighbors. Now you have what Carper calls “a unique, up-to-date, one stop guide to more than 100 common foods, beverages and popular diets, revealing whether they prolong health and life or accelerate aging and death.”

The guide works for all ages as well. It will show you that nutritious and delicious food prepared with all kinds of simple recipes can be healthy and tasty. (See, “100 Life or Death Foods: A Scientific Guide to Which Foods Prolong Life or Kill You Prematurely,” Dec. 9, 2023).

Ralph Nader is a consumer advocate, lawyer and author. His books include “How the Rats Re-formed the Congress” and, with Mark Green, “Fake President” and “Wrecking America: How Trump’s Lawbreaking and Lies Betray All.” Contact Nader c/o PO Box 19312, Washington, DC 20036. See www.nader.org, reportersalert.org or facebook.com/ralphnader.

TED RALL

Biden’s Secret Border Agenda: Migrants Fill Our Baby Gap

I didn’t question the incoming Biden administration when they rolled back the Trump era’s stricter border control policies in 2021. There’s nothing unusual about reversing a previous president’s approach, especially when he belongs to the other party and the policy in question is roundly criticized.

You didn’t have to be a proponent of open borders to feel discomfort about former President Donald Trump’s zero-tolerance stance toward both economic migrants and political asylum applicants, which led to kids in cages, his draconian family separation policy, which caused nearly 1,000 children to get disappeared into the system and never reunite with their parents, or his Remain in Mexico scheme, which subjected immigration applicants to gang and cartel violence. By the time he left office, Trump’s handling of undocumented people who attempted to cross the US-Mexico border was viewed as inhumane and highly unpopular.

As we see so often in American politics, we have gone from one extreme to the other. President Joe Biden has swung past the status quo ante toward immigration policies more liberal than anyone alive today can remember. Slightly fewer than two million people illegally crossed the US-Mexico border during Trump’s four years in office; there have been well over six million under Biden, who still has nine months

left to serve. Biden has deported more than half of these.

Where the two administrations’ policies *really* differ is their handling of applicants who present themselves to border patrol agents and follow the federal government’s legal application process for asylum. Fewer than 200,000 asylum seekers were paroled (i.e., admitted into the US pending the resolution of their claim) under Trump. Biden has paroled nearly 500,000, and he still has nine months to go, with big spikes over the past two years. Between those people and others allowed into the US under Biden’s special refugee programs for people fleeing conflict zones like Ukraine, Afghanistan and Venezuela, more than 1,000,000 are now in the country.

Now it’s Biden’s turn to feel the heat of popular discontent in an election year. More than two-thirds of voters disapprove of the president on immigration (68%) and border security (69%), according to an Associated Press-NORC poll conducted on March 29. After the economy, health care, crime and guns, immigration is tied for fifth with abortion among the issues voters care about most right now.

Like other leftists, I long assumed Biden’s “open-border” approach was driven by a pair of common, well-intentioned – albeit shortsighted – liberal impulses: opposing all things Trump *just because* and, in the spirit of Emma Lazarus, opening America’s doors to the poor and oppressed masses desperate for the chance to make new lives here, in homage to our history as a Nation of Immigrants.

Now I think something else is going on. Biden and the Democrats read polls; they know their border policies aren’t playing well with the swing voters they need to win this fall. Trump’s fearmongering seems to be landing punches. So why is the administration staying the course? Why are they just standing by and watching as cities like New York and Chicago reel under the

financial stress of hundreds of thousands of new arrivals they can’t handle?

As James Carville famously observed in 1992, it’s the economy, stupid. It’s *always* the economy, especially in an election year. And you can’t hit the ideal GDP growth rate of 2% or 3% a year if your population – your consumer base and your labor pool – shrinks.

But Team Biden is looking far beyond November.

The developed world is facing a fertility crisis. For the population to remain stable, the average woman needs to have 2.1 children. (The fraction over two accounts for disease, accidents and mortality in general.) A study published in *The Lancet* finds the fertility rate for Western Europe, 1.53 in 2021, is expected to drop further to 1.37 by 2100. A major population dropoff could cause a crisis as a smaller workforce is unable to support an older, larger cohort of retirees. Demand for homes and other transgenerational products could collapse, dragging down consumer goods and leading to a deflationary doom loop.

Fortunately, study co-author Natalia V. Bhattacharjee says, there’s a solution: liberalizing immigration from places like the Global South, where birthrates remain high. “Once nearly every country’s population is shrinking,” Bhattacharjee says, “reliance on open immigration will become necessary to sustain economic growth.” She told Al Jazeera that “sub-Saharan African countries have a vital resource that ageing societies are losing – a youthful population.”

The US fertility rate has dropped from 3.65 in 1960 to 2.08 in 1990 to 1.66 in 2021. At the same time, population has risen from 181 million in 1960 to 250 million to 333 million in 2021. Immigration, legal and illegal, has filled the void created by our failure to make enough babies.

Under Trump, not so much.

I am increasingly convinced that, behind securely locked soundproof doors in

the White House and other corridors of power, top Biden officials are staring at demographic charts that show the rate of population increase leveling off toward even, and dripping sweat over the fact that the current economic model, which is predicated on consistent expansion, is imperiled by a fertility crisis neither they nor the media ever talk about. Where Republicans see an uncontrolled flow of people from Central America and elsewhere pouring across the US-Mexico border as threats to American jobholders, possible criminals and perhaps cultural harbingers of a “great replacement theory,” Democratic economists like Bhattacharjee view them as a convenient solution to the intractable demographic issues of Americans getting married later, and in fewer numbers, and thus having fewer children than required to keep growing the economy.

There are ways to encourage American citizens who already live here to have more kids. One city in Japan, whose economy has struggled against a fertility crisis since the 1990s, has succeeded in growing family sizes by providing free medical care for children, free diapers and, most effectively, free daycare. Other places have achieved similar results. There is a direct correlation between low birthrates and expensive child daycare. But there’s no sign that Washington cares about the issue, much less is about to act.

That leaves immigration. Given the stakes and the undeniable capitalistic logic that necessitates throwing open the floodgates, Biden might want to take a shot at something he seems both to hate and is not good at: explaining the facts to the public.

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

Hartmann...

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one major Democratic donor is looking into buying radio stations. As Semafor recently reported:

“Over the last two years, Soros Fund Management, the firm founded by the billionaire investor and now controlled by the Open Society Foundations, has become an increasingly key player in the oldest electronic mass media: radio.

“In February, the company became the largest shareholder in Audacy, the bankrupt second-largest radio company in the U.S., with more than 230 U.S. stations and a podcast arm that includes Cadence13 and Pineapple Street Studios. In 2022, Soros in-

vested an undisclosed amount in Crooked Media, the liberal podcast network behind the ultra-popular Pod Save America.”

If it works out, it’s a beginning. But we have miles to go to catch up with the massive rightwing media machine that includes three television networks, over two thousand radio stations, and thousands of podcasters and conservative talk hosts given the opportunity because of that infrastructure.

It’s time to get started!

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

Kuttner...

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high interest rates can’t fix that either. Nor can they solve the housing shortage.

This is wonky stuff, but not that wonky. The media should be doing a better job of explaining it, as a counterweight to Powell’s bad instincts; and the economists in the Fed’s employ should be bolder about pointing out Powell’s bad economics.

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



An Invitation to Play the Climate-Change Game

By PEPPER TRAIL

Let's play a game, the climate-change game that every living thing on Earth has no choice but to play, starting ... now.

The game is called Adapt/Move/Die, and the rules are simple. The object of the game is not to die. And the winners, well, the winners get to keep playing the game.

You may say wait, what about Solve? Isn't solving the climate crisis an option? Yes, of course, and a worthy goal.

But even if humanity somehow musters the now-lacking resolve to rapidly phase out fossil fuels, greenhouse gases already in the atmosphere are higher than at any time in hundreds of thousands of years. The effects on climate will continue to unfold for centuries.

Adapt/Move/Die used to have another name: Evolution. But Evolution was played without a time clock over centuries or millennia. Adapt/Move/Die is customized for

our fast-paced world. Every round is a lightning round, and there are no time-outs.

Let's get started! Who's on Team Adapt? You already know some of them well because they are all around us — pigeons and rats, cockroaches and coyotes, dandelions and thistles. No matter how the climate changes, these adapters will find a way, and a place, to survive.

Under the old evolution rules, most species belonged to Team Adapt. But the pace of the new game has changed everything.

Just take a look at your local forest. Its trees were once adapted, attuned to the temperature, soil, patterns of rain and snow and natural pests.

But now, every forest is full of dying trees. A report from the Forest Service estimated that over 36 million, yes, million, trees died in 2022 just in California.

For many plants facing rapid climate change, their only choices are Team Move, or Team Die. It is an unanswered and existential question whether the plants that support the biosphere can move fast enough.

And what of people? As befits our huge numbers and our great cleverness, it is likely that no species on Earth will show such complicated game play.

Team Adapt will mostly be drawn from the global North, where climate extremes

may (repeat, may) be somewhat buffered, and where great economic resources can be brought to bear in the name of adaptation.

Here, we hope, coastal cities can be protected behind seawalls and levees. Infrastructure can be strengthened or moved or repaired. Some emergency assistance will be available for victims of "natural" disasters.

Tragically, none of these fixes will be available, or be enough, for huge numbers of people. The United Nations estimates that extreme weather caused 2 million deaths in the past 50 years, but that pales in comparison to what's coming.

The World Health Organization predicts that climate change will cause an estimated 250,000 additional deaths per year between 2030 and 2050 from disease, starvation and heat stress.

If true, Team Die will claim 5 million members over that 20-year span. Many of those deaths will come from the poorest countries, where people lack even the resources to join the last team: Team Move.

"Move" will, in fact, be the most disruptive play in the game. The UN High Commissioner for Refugees estimates that between 2008 and 2016, an average of 21.5 million people per year were displaced by climate-related events like floods, storms and wildfires.

But again, that is just a mild preview of

what could be coming. The same report concludes that 1.2 billion people, or over 10% of the world's population, could be displaced globally by 2050.

When playing "Move" involves crossing national borders, it often has another name: illegal immigration. From the United States to Europe to Australia, illegal immigration is already considered to be a crisis, and has been a key factor in the rise of right-wing political parties. Given the harsh response to the existing level of illegal immigration, it is frightening to imagine what the future flood of climate refugees could face.

There is only one way to win the game of Adapt/Move/Die. That is to recognize that we all share this critically damaged planet. To succeed, adaptation will require cooperation. To survive, those who must move will require help and compassion.

We can play the game together and win the right to keep playing, that is, to live. Or we can enlist in Team Die by choosing isolation and conflict.

Anyone want to roll the dice?

Pepper Trail is a contributor to *Writers on the Range*, writersontherange.org, an independent nonprofit dedicated to spurring lively conversation about the West. He is a conservation biologist who has written widely on evolution and climate change. He lives in Ashland, Oregon.

Where's the Music Ripped from the Headlines?

By ROB PATTERSON

Not that this publication's readers need to be reminded: We are already in the midst of the most consequential American election in not just my lifetime but the history of our democracy. So where's the left-leaning popular music brigade when we need them now more than ever?

All I seem to hear is crickets. Which evokes from me the observation (with obvious curse word softened): What in the eff is the deal?

There is one musical artist, arguably the industry's biggest, who I fully expect will go public with support for the Biden/Harris ticket: Taylor Swift. And she does have considerable influence with a good swath of young adults old enough to vote. Many of those fans came of age alongside her.

But where's the blue-collar champion Bruce Springsteen? I'm also surprised that Neil Young hasn't weighed in. And I could keep going on down the list of absentees.

Country music isn't totally locked down by Donald Trump, but the genre does largely lean MAGA. All the more reason for rockers, rappers, the R&B brigade, the punk rock rebel and others to come out strong and loud for the only sane and morally correct choice to decisively define America as a humanist, pluralist and decent bulwark against the racist racism, sexism, misogyny, homophobia, xenophobia and surrounding intolerance as well as the dangers of autocracy and false-religionist dreams of dominion emanating from the GOP and right wing.

There's still time, if barely. A couple of multi-artist tours based on genre commonality could still be mounted to barnstorm venues across the nation. The music would be the focus and draw. But the shows could include brief appearances by national candidates and those running in the locales where the concerts are held as well as celebrities and activists. Alongside the merchandise sales booths there should be voter registration stations and booths for get out the vote and fundraising efforts, etc. The tour profits could be directed towards political contributions.

Such efforts could be duplicated by tours and shows in smaller venues by acts at all levels, all the way down to the grassroots. The Democrats need to take the White House again and score majorities in

both houses of Congress. (And then Biden needs to do what my favorite Dem, FDR, considered, and pack the Supreme Court.) The Dems and leftists also need to make strides at state and local levels. The popular music community can help make this happen.

It's sadly ironic in a time when the presence of female artists is blossoming in music that abortion, contraception and other women's rights are under severe attack. But a wise response by female musicians would be a political version of the Lilith Fair in the late 1990s. A similar LGBTQ+ tour is another option.

Political, topical and activist music proverbially marched alongside the movements of the 1960s. It was not just a soundtrack; it inspired, informed, open eyes, minds and hearts. Music can and at this juncture should if not must be an essential part of saving our democracy.

Now is the time for a good man and woman and all those in between on the gender continuum who both make music and love music as fans to come to the aid of our country. A good, fair, just future depends on us all.

Plus there's the added bonus of how it will all get under the skin of the MAGA maggots, forces of repression and intolerance as well as the faux-Christians who ignore the obvious teachings of Jesus. As well as the joyful sound, I hope and, yes, also pray, when victory comes in November.

Populist Picks

MUSIC ALBUM (Classic Category): *Infi-dels* by Bob Dylan — The lingering question when political music comes up is: Where's Bob Dylan? To which I say, he's done more than his bit already. And many of his songs continue to ring with relevance. And to wit, I find it quite interesting that much of this excellent yet somewhat overlooked 1983 disc touches on and applies to our big issues some four decades later. Who's the "Jokerman?" (one of my many favorite Dylan songs). Could be tRump. "Neighborhood Bully" was reportedly written about Israel, and the notion sure fits the horrors of today's Gaza war. While I may not totally align with all Dylan says in "Union Sundown," it still hits the nail on offshoring manufacturing and the current labor/management struggles. "Man of Peace" is an eternal warning about false prophets. All that, plus three superb songs about love, make this a record well worth hearing.

Rob Patterson is a music and entertainment writer in Austin, Texas. Email orca@prismnet.com.



SATIRE/Rosie Sorenson Deeply Fakey

The U.S. Department of Agriculture reported that in the past two weeks, infections of H5N1 (bird flu) have been detected in cattle across six states. This has farmers understandably worried.

Jens and Ingeborg Johansson, who farm 3,000 acres near Storm Lake, Iowa, have come up with a novel way to keep their cows and other livestock safe from bird flu.

"This herd's our fortune," said Ingeborg during a recent NPR interview. "We have to do whatever we can to protect our cows."

In the middle of one of their largest fields, stands a 20-ft tall deep-fake of a naked, anatomically correct Donald Trump — the first Presidential Scarecrow in the nation's history.

"We know we're pissing off Trump and that's regrettable, but we can't afford to lose our cattle," said Jans. "Nothing else was working to keep the damn birds away."

People from neighboring counties have been known to drive slowly past this field, cover their faces and snicker to each other over sidelong glances, "Oh. My. Gosh! Stormy was right!"

"Has Trump seen this?" asks Jack Denison, the Johansson's MAGA-hat-wearing neighbor. "Boy, he's gonna be mad."

"He did send us a cease and desist order," Jens replies. "I guess he forgot about the First Amendment. We prevailed in court."

The Scarecrow has suffered many attacks during his short controversial life—each time burned to the ground. Another one has always popped up to take its place. The Johansson's investment in a sturdy 3D printer is paying off—no one is going to stop

them.

Reporters fly in from all over the world, asking the same question: "You say you've voted for Trump before, so why do this now?"

"It's the only thing we've found to protect our cows. We don't mean no disrespect, but we've got to protect our own. We voted for him last time, despite the soybean kerfuffle with the Chinese, but probably not this time. He's always going on about raising some damn tariffs and that's what hurt us last time when the Chinese went elsewhere for their soybeans."

Meanwhile, at Mar-A-Lago

Stephen Miller, Trump's consigliere, tries to take Trump's temperature over the scarecrow caper. He knows Trump hates it, but he also knows Trump lost in court. Even though Trump's supporters have burned it down over and over and over again, it hasn't dissuaded the Johannsons.

"This is not a joke, Stephen," says Trump. "It's blasphemy! Would our Lord Jesus like to be portrayed this way? I don't think so. So why should Lord Trump be made the butt of a filthy joke?" He throws up his hands and slaps hard his desk.

Suddenly, Trump whirls around and says, "But, hey, how about this? Why don't we play along—just say that this little joke has been good for farmers, and that Trump approves it? I mean, everyone knows it's a cartoon, and that the scarecrow does not represent the real me in any way, shape or form."

Miller scuffs at the floor, clears his throat and murmurs, "Uh. Sure. Of course."

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

Remember The Progressive Populist in your will.

FILM REVIEW/Ed Rampell

It's Racism or Solidarity for Syrian Refugees and Ex-Miners at Northeast England in Ken Loach's 'The Old Oak'

An Interview with Screenwriter Paul Laverty

By ED RAMPELL

Paul Laverty is one of the world's leading lefty screenwriters. His historic collaboration with director Ken Loach, British cinema's lion of the Left, has spanned 30-ish years, producing 14 films. The Loach/Laverty team's latest film is the awards-nominated "The Old Oak," likely the last feature helmed by Loach, who is turning 88. Since 1964, Loach's socially committed oeuvre has dramatized leftwing subject matter including the Spanish Civil War, the Irish rebellions, union organizing by Hispanic workers in L.A., struggles of British workers, etc. Many Loach films have been written by Paul Laverty, starting with 1996's "Carla's Song," about an exile in the UK from Nicaragua, where Laverty lived during the Contra Wars, working for a human rights organization. Laverty was born 1957 in Calcutta to an Irish mother and Scottish father and was interviewed via phone in Edinburgh, Scotland.

ED RAMPELL: How did "The Old Oak" come about?

PAUL LAVERTY: After long discussions with Ken and our producer, Rebecca O'Brien. We had done two films in the Northeast of England, I, Daniel Blake and Sorry We Missed You. Both were tragedies, really; very tough stories. And we thought this might be Ken's last film, because he was 86 at the time. So, for the last film, we wanted to end off on a different type of note. And something that was important to both of us, ever since we started working together over 30 years ago, was the notion of hope, where we find it, how we nourish each other.

You just can't copy a screenplay or a story from the street. You have to make the connections. Anyway, I thought we'd go back to the Northeast of England again, where we made the last two films at Newcastle, the big industrial city. The Northeast is an area of high deindustrial-

ization and mining. There were lots of mining villages all around Newcastle. I wandered around them. What was very, very striking was how they had deteriorated ever since 1984, a huge and important year because that was the year of the miners' strike. The miners went on strike for over a year and Margaret Thatcher, with the help of the state really crushed the miners. After the miners' strike was lost in 1984, many of these villages came upon hard times, people lost their jobs and there was gradual deterioration of these communities. Post offices and banks and their livelihoods would go. They became very, very tough, bleak areas. There was a real rich cultural life. But after 1984 that fell by the wayside.

And then what happened was the housing in those areas began to fall in price. Local authorities started dumping people who had evictions, were coming out of prison, and then they started putting Syrian refugees fleeing war, enormous mass murder and mass incarceration, into these cheap houses as well. So, the people who lived there were under great stress, saying: "Why are you sending needy people to some of the poorest areas in the country? Why not send them to Chelsea or Westminster, rich areas in England and London, and not to us?" People felt that everything was being dumped upon them, wrongly. They felt angry, alienated and had little control over their lives... They become furious, then of course, the racists come in, they find the easiest targets, and they target people. It's not their fault — they're Syrian refugees, they fled war and ended up there because the housing was cheaper. The racists blame them and try to capture and harness all that anger, alienation and fury...

So, I went back to talk to Ken and we just felt there was something here that was very much of the moment. The whole question of people looking for asylum has become a bigger and bigger issue. Not only in the UK, but in America, too.

Ken said "Syrians in the film should be those who have settled in the area." Were most of the film's refugees non-professional actors?

"The Old Oak" is set in 2016 because that's the year thousands of Syrians came in. All of the Syrians, apart from Ebla Mari, were people who lived in the area. Like Amna Al Ali, she played the mother [Fatima], lived in a little village close by. The character of Yara was played by Ebla Mari from the Golan Heights. Ebla had not worked in film before, but she had worked in theater.

How about the English locals?

Some were professionals; others weren't. A mixture of actors and ex-miners who hadn't acted before. Trevor Fox [2004's "Bridget Jones: The Edge of Reason"] plays Charlie, who used to be T.J.'s friend. He's a very well-known

actor. Dave Turner, who played T.J. Ballantyne, used to be a fireman. He'd done one scene in "I, Daniel Blake" and "Sorry We Missed You." Claire Rodgers, plays Laura, an activist in the community. Claire in real life is like her character in the film, an activist [for the national charity Citizens UK].

"The Old Oak" ends with a huge parade, with workers carrying banners, including a union banner inscribed with Syrian writing, another honoring the International Brigade that fought in the Spanish Civil War, a Palestinian banner. Is this march meant to be real or a fantasy sequence?

Oh no, this is based on the Durham miners' march that goes on every single year for 130-ish years. It's been traditionally a day when the miners used to gather and march through Durham, in the Northeast, where the mining communities were. This is a long-standing tradition, one of the biggest gatherings of the working class in all of Europe. There are hundreds of thousands there — not even Hollywood could manage to organize marches of 100,000. The trade unions meet there every year. We asked permission if we could join in with them with our fictional characters and our banner of solidarity among all the real demonstration that was taking place. All that was real.

How would you describe your convictions?

I don't think you can understand the world unless you see it in class terms.

You in the US are faced with an aberration, two pathetic candidates in Biden and Trump, a product of a broken political culture, and we are faced with a similar pair of two lightweight apparatchiks in [Conservative Prime Minister Rishi] Sunak and [Labour Party leader Keir] Starmer climbing the greasy corporate pole to power, while leading us to doom. Maybe it takes stories to try and disentangle how we have come to such a crisis, and maybe it takes stories too to try and find a way out, and find the energy to change things. When we made The Old Oak we shot a scene in Durham Cathedral built by the Normans 1,000 years ago, I was reminded of Saint Augustine's words of, from five centuries earlier: "Hope has two beautiful daughters, anger at the way things are, and the courage to try and change things."

For more information on the film, see <https://zeitgeistfilms.com/film/the-old-oak/>.

Ed Rampell is an LA-based film historian/critic, author of "Progressive Hollywood: A People's Film History of the United States," and coauthor of "The Hawaii Movie and Television Book." This is an edited version of an interview published April 13 in Jacobin. See the original interview online.

EDGE OF SPORTS/Dave Zirin

Oakland Has 2 New Baseball Heroes — and a Billionaire Owner Ruining Everything

Outfielders Estey Ruiz and Brent Rooker stood with their fans against a planned move to Las Vegas. They were punished, and the owner is pulling the team from Oakland early.

There are few sports more institutionally conservative than Major League Baseball. Team owners expect their employees to shut up and hit; players are allowed to be quirky—not political. Over the 150 years of the sport, there aren't many who have earned the right to be called rebels. (See this book ["Baseball Rebels: The Players, People, and Social Movements That Shook Up the Game and Changed America," by Peter Dreier and Robert Elias, foreword by Dave Zirin] if you want a sampling of the daring few.)

That changed in Oakland at the beginning of the season. Two Oakland A's players decided to show solidarity with their hometown fans who are outraged by the team's planned 2028 move to Las Vegas. Outfielders Estey Ruiz and Brent Rooker wore wrist bands from an organization called Last Dive Bar, which has been organizing protests at A's games against the move. As an alleged result, Ruiz was sent down to the minor leagues, despite a .429 batting average, and Rooker was shown the bench, even though he was the A's lone all-

star a year ago. The same A's organization that banished catcher Bruce Maxwell to the minor leagues when he took a knee during the anthem is once again apparently punishing players for choosing to use their minds. (*The Nation* contacted the players' union, the Major League Baseball Players Association, about whether it would be investigating, and it issued a "no comment.")

The alleged crackdown on dissent now makes even more sense. The team's owner, John Fisher, a petty authoritarian and Gap clothing heir, announced on April 4 that until the 2028 move to Vegas, he will be moving the team out of the Oakland Coliseum and to West Sacramento where they will play in a minor league ballpark called Sutter Health Park. For their three years in Sacramento, they will be known only as the A's. No Oakland. No Sacramento. Just the stateless A's. Sutter Health Park seats 10,000 people, but the numbers can swell as high as 14,000 when accounting for lawn seating. This is where Fisher, who has been gutting the team for years despite inheriting most of his net worth of \$3.3 billion, will perch until 2028, when a \$1.5 billion monument to Las Vegas greed awaits him in the form of a new stadium. Until that ballpark opens, it's Sacramento (though we won't say Sacramento).

This is a disgrace: a Major League all-timer up there with Disco Demolition Night at Comiskey Park and the day in 1976 when the Chicago White Sox all wore shorts as a publicity stunt. Fisher, an aggrieved baby, would rather be a national

punch line than spend one more moment in Oakland. Meanwhile, the people of Oakland, just a few years after losing the NFL's Oakland Raiders, are faced with another defection. It's painful to anyone who cares about baseball history and one of the best fan bases in the sport. This is the team of Rickey Henderson, Rollie Fingers, and Vida Blue. This is the team of Reggie Jackson of the Bash Brothers of Moneyball. To see Fisher humiliate this franchise and the city of Oakland on his way out the door demands a rebuke.

One may imagine that strong words would be coming from Major League Baseball Commissioner Rob Manfred. One would be wrong. All Manfred has done was to issue congratulations to the people of Sacramento. Not a word of endearment for Oakland's baseball history. As I've written before, it staggers me how much Manfred apparently hates baseball: its fans, its players, and the best of its traditions. Oakland losing the A's is an indictment of Manfred, Fisher, and all the billionaires trying to tell us that we should be paying for their stadi-

ums. The people of Oakland stood up to this logic, and now they are being punished. This isn't about baseball. It's about capital flight from our cities. It's about the subjugation of our history. It's about the 1 percent picking the meat off the bones of our cities.

But Las Vegas residents aren't patsies. Currently, there is a citizen's movement being funded by the Nevada Education Association to get the question of whether to fund the stadium on the ballot. They appeared before the Supreme Court of Nevada April 9 to see if they can put whether to spend \$380 million in public funds for a ballpark up for a vote. The case was submitted for a decision. The name of the case? Schools Over Stadiums v. Thompson. Let's go, Schools!

Dave Zirin is the sports editor at *The Nation*. He is the author of 11 books on the politics of sports. He is also the coproducer and writer of the new documentary "Behind the Shield: The Power and Politics of the NFL." Email edgeofsports@gmail.com.



AMY GOODMAN



The motto of USC's sports teams is 'Fight On.' But USC abandoned valedictorian Asna Tabassum, canceling her commencement speech.

USC Silences Its Valedictorian. She Vows to Fight On

At the center of the University of Southern California's campus in Los Angeles stands a statue of Hecuba, queen of ancient Troy. "A statue celebrating the women of Troy," says USC's website. "Hecuba would defend her children and her city with fierce passion and loyalty. She would urge the Trojans to fight on, even when they were outnumbered, exhausted, facing impossible odds." USC is suffused with the imagery of Troy, said by ancient writers like Homer to have been sacked by the Greeks after they entered the walled city by hiding inside the fabled Trojan Horse. The motto of USC's sports teams, the Trojans, is, "Fight On!" But USC decided to abandon one its most prominent young

women students, its 2024 valedictorian Asna Tabassum, and to give up the fight, buckling under a wave of neo-McCarthyism sweeping campuses nationwide.

On April 15, USC announced it was canceling Tabassum's valedictory commencement address. "The intensity of feelings, fueled by both social media and the ongoing conflict in the Middle East... has escalated to the point of creating substantial risks relating to security and disruption at commencement," USC Provost Andrew Guzman explained in the statement, adding, "To be clear: this decision has nothing to do with freedom of speech. There is no free-speech entitlement to speak at a commencement."

Asna Tabassum is a first-generation South Asian-American Muslim, graduating with a major in biomedical engineering and a minor in resistance to genocide. She posted a response to USC's announcement on the website of CAIR, The Council on American-Islamic Relations, saying in part, "I am not surprised by those who attempt to propagate hatred. I am surprised that my own university—my home for four years—has abandoned me... on April 14, I asked about the alleged safety concerns and was told that the University had the resources to take appropriate safety measures for my valedictory speech, but that they would not be doing so since increased security protections is not what the University wants to 'present as an image.'"

Speaking on the *Democracy Now!* news hour, Asna described the vitriol she suffered after being named valedictorian: "It only took a few hours before... a very general-

ized and, honestly, very hateful and disappointing campaign to remove me as valedictorian."

USC officials wouldn't share details of the threats they allegedly received. "I was offered no information and was told it was not appropriate for me to know," Asna said.

Her major and minor may seem completely disparate areas of study, but Asna explained, "My minor in resistance to genocide allows me to study the human condition at possibly one of its worst conditions."

She continued, "Biomedical engineering is my way of learning technically, how we can improve the human condition through increasing health accessibility... so that we can improve the ways in which people experience healthcare when they are most in need."

One likely reason she was targeted, not raised by the USC administration, is her solidarity with Palestinians. In her Instagram bio, she links to a website detailing the Israel/Palestine conflict. On that site, both the two-state solution and the one-state solution, the two principle proposals for a permanent peace in the region, are described. One sentence reads, "one palestinian state would mean palestinian liberation, and the complete abolishment of the state of israel."

Asna responded on *Democracy Now!*, "The sentence right after talks about coexistence between Arabs and Jews... I'm only advocating for human equality, and for the sanctity of human life when I say that Palestinians, as well as Jews, as well as Muslims... and anyone else who has invested in this conflict has the equal right to life and the equal privilege of the fullest extent to life."

We All Deserve Space To Pursue Our Dreams

By BONNIE JEAN FELDKAMP

The Erma Bombeck Writers' Workshop saved me from making a huge mistake recently. I emailed my editor before I left and told her that I didn't think I'd have time to continue writing this weekly column. I told her I was too busy. I have a full-time job for our local newspaper, where I write and edit columns for the Kentucky community.

I am busy. I do have a lot on my plate. I'm the mother of an 8-year-old, for pity's sake. I took two weeks off, and my editor said to reach back out when I returned. I was one of the conference speakers. (See how busy I am?) When I wasn't presenting, I attended other sessions. It was there that I heard the

hard truth I needed.

Author and coach William Kenover said I should disconnect from the world and "close the door." This was the very first session I attended, and I admit I rolled my eyes at the man, who clearly doesn't have a child shouting through that door about a Lego he lost under the bed and asking, "Mom, where are my Crocs?" but I wrote Kenover's advice in my notebook anyway as a wish whispered to the universe.

In sessions led by novelist Katrina Kittle and authors Kathy Kinney and Cindy Ratzlaff, I experimented with writing prompts. In as little as six minutes, I wrote rich descriptions simply because they held space for it.

We all have timers on our phones now. Could I possibly incorporate this practice into my daily life somehow? It felt like too much to ask of my bulging calendar. But the answer was yes — if I really wanted to.

Memoirist and novelist Wade Rouse spoke of getting up at 4 a.m. to write his books

when he still had a "day job." Another speaker said she wrote in her car, parked in the garage. I also remembered the image of Erma Bombeck writing with a typewriter placed on the ironing board. Each of these writers made room in their busy lives to write. I also kept hearing Kathy Kinney's voice in my head saying, "All the creativity you need is right above you. All you have to do is grab hold and get out of your own way."

Jacquelyn Mitchard, bestselling author of "The Deep End of the Ocean," really hit me over the head with needed advice during her keynote. Nine years ago, she gave up her syndicated column with Tribune because she was "too busy." Mitchard said she now has ideas come to her with no column to publish them in. "It was the worst decision I ever made," she said.

How could I have possibly considered walking away from a dream I'd held so deeply for so long? All of that work, perseverance and due diligence for my own syndicated col-

umn, and I almost discarded it. Besides, Erma Bombeck had kids (three of them!) and she wrote three columns a week. If I can make space for all of the other very important things in my life, I can also make space to hold onto this dream that means so much to me.

When I returned from the Erma Bombeck Writers' Workshop, I talked it over with my incredibly supportive husband. Then, I walked into my bedroom, opened my laptop and closed the door.

What dreams should you be holding space for?

What dreams should you be holding space 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."

Dispatches ...

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fight to get more time with your families. The real fight is the fight for our union contract."

"And I can guarantee you one thing," Fain continued, "this international unionist leadership, this membership all over this nation has your back in this fight."

GREEN GROUPS CALL RFK JR. 'DANGEROUS CONSPIRACY THEORIST AND SCIENCE DENIER.'

A dozen national green groups on April 19 published an open letter exposing what they say are the dangers of Robert F. Kennedy Jr.'s quixotic Independent U.S. presidential bid by highlighting his embrace of conspiracy theories and his use of language often spoken by climate deniers, Brett Wilkins noted at CommonDreams (4/19).

"Robert F. Kennedy Jr. is not an environmentalist. He is a dangerous conspiracy theorist and science denier whose agenda would be a disaster for our communities and the planet," the letter argues. "He may have once been an environmental attorney, but now RFK Jr. is peddling the term 'climate change orthodoxy' and making empty promises to clean up our environment with superficial proposals."

"The truth is, by rejecting science, what he offers is no different than Donald Trump," the signers asserted, referring to the former Republican president and presumptive 2024 GOP nominee.

The letter continues:

"In the fact-free world that both he and

Trump live in, objective reality simply does not exist. Their policy platforms are instead driven by what will benefit Big Oil and the greedy corporations that fund them. We know, however, that environmental progress depends on following scientific fact and putting people over politics.

"With so much at stake, we stand united in denouncing RFK Jr.'s false environmentalist claims. We can't, in good conscience, let him continue co-opting the credibility and successes of our movement for his own personal benefit.

"RFK Jr. is a bleak reminder that our democracy is incredibly vulnerable," the letter adds. "Any support for this Kennedy-in-name-only will inevitably result in a second Trump term and the complete erosion of vital environmental and social gains made to date."

The letter is signed by the Center for Biological Diversity Action Fund, Friends of the Earth Action, LCV Victory Fund, Natural Resources Defense Council Action Fund, Climate Emergency Advocates, Climate Power, Earthjustice Action, Food & Water Action, NextGen America, Sierra Club Independent Action, Sunrise Movement, and 350 Action.

The Biden campaign also released a new ad featuring a handful of the most prominent descendants of Camelot sharing their endorsement of President Joe Biden over their RFK Jr., Kerry Eleveled noted at Daily Kos (4/19).

The ad opens with a succession of Kennedys introducing themselves, including Joe Kennedy III, a former Congressman and nephew of RFK Jr.; RFK Jr.'s sisters Kerry Kennedy, Rory Kennedy, and Kathleen Kennedy-Townsend; and RFK Jr.'s brother Chris Kennedy,

BIDEN RENT-INCREASE CAP SHOWS TENANT UNION WIN.

For the past several years, tenant unions from disparate locations, like Kansas City, Missouri; Bozeman, Montana; and Louisville, Kentucky, have been canvassing door-to-door, lobbying at the White House and Congress, and convening loud, passionate demonstrations in their home communities and at the national headquarters of corporate landlords. They have earned admiring profiles in the *New York Times* and *Time* magazine and have been featured on National Public Radio. What they have not done is win a tangible federal victory for renters, Fran Quigley, director of the Health and Human Rights Clinic at Indiana University McKinney School of Law, noted at CommonDreams.org (4/17).

That may be changing, as the Biden administration In March announced it would impose a cap on rent increases on Low-Income Housing Tax Credit (LIHTC) housing. The 10% annual increase limit is far higher than the 3% cap that tenant unions have been pushing for, and the limitation to the LIHTC program leaves out a great deal of other federally financed and subsidized housing. But the new rule could apply to over a million households. And perhaps more importantly, it shows for the first time that the tenant union movement can make its power felt on the national stage.

"It's a huge win, and it wouldn't have happened if not for tenant unions beating the drum for the past several years demanding that every dollar of federal financing and subsidies be conditioned on tenant protections," says Tara Raghuvver of the National Tenant

Union Federation. "The federal government is finally recognizing its responsibility to protect tenants from price-gouging."

Landlords were disturbed by the Biden administration explicitly dismissing their increasingly discredited argument that rent limits decrease the supply of affordable housing.

"We've seen no evidence that this limitation—even those much lower than 10%—have limited the supply of new affordable housing nationally," said Department of Housing and Urban Development spokesman Zachary Nosanchuk.

The new rent cap also heralds a shift in tenant organizing in the US. Although tenant unions have traditionally built their power through local struggles, laws passed by state legislatures in places like Missouri and Kentucky put ceilings on local housing reforms. At the same time, federal financing plays an enormous role in the housing industry. In 2022, the Federal Housing Finance Agency, or FHFA, which manages both Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac, purchased \$142 billion in mortgages issued by banks to multifamily landlords, thus assuming the risk of nonpayment. So tenant unions argue that this federal government largesse should come with conditions, specifically limits on rent hikes, obligations to keep the housing clean and safe, and promises not to evict tenants or not renew leases except for good cause. These types of tenant protections on federally backed housing could apply to over 12 million rental units, nearly one in three renting households in the country.

Continued on next page

This is Why Trump Supporters Will Believe Absolutely Anything

By DANA MILBANK

Donald Trump caused a minor kerfuffle the week before his “hush money” trial started in Manhattan, when he styled himself “a Modern Day Nelson Mandela.”

Specifically, the former president saw a common thread connecting the beloved anti-apartheid icon’s 27 years in prison and his own trial, which began April 15, over hush money paid to an adult-film actress.

“He is definitely delusional,” Zwellivilele “Mandla” Mandela, grandson of the great man, told the *Times of London*.

Delusional, maybe — but also modest! Mandla Mandela must not have realized that Trump, in comparing himself to one of the towering figures of the 20th century, was in fact demoting himself. A couple of weeks earlier, Trump had shared a post on his social media site that likened him to Jesus.

A humble Trump said on Truth Social that it would be a “GREAT HONOR,” to be

a modern Mandela. But this honor apparently wasn’t great enough. Two days later, Trump suggested in an interview that he is even greater than the Great Emancipator, Abraham Lincoln, though he had been advised not to say so publicly.

Trump explained to his host on the MAGA outlet “Real America’s Voice” that “nobody’s done more than I have” for Black people. “I say nobody’s done more since Abraham Lincoln,” he elaborated. “I actually wanted to go beyond Abraham Lincoln, but some people thought that wasn’t a good thing to do.”

Hey, it ain’t bragging if it’s true.

To borrow a Lincoln phrase (Trump has the “best words,” but Lincoln’s were pretty good, too), it is altogether fitting and proper for Trump to compare himself with a Civil War-era leader. This is because, thanks largely to Trump, the rights of American women have just been returned to where they were 160 years ago.

Trump accurately boasts that “I was able to kill Roe v. Wade” and “I was proudly the person responsible.” As a result of his achievement, conservatives on Arizona’s Supreme Court, freed by Roe’s demise, resurrected on April 9, an 1864 law that bans nearly all abortions, even in cases of rape and incest, from the moment of conception. Trump invited just such Wild West jurisprudence the day before, when he said abor-

tion policy should be left “up to the states.”

The truly historic nature of Trump’s many assertions of his own greatness is that he can portray himself as Mandela, or Jesus, or Lincoln or Alexei Navalny (which he has also done), and a significant proportion of his followers will believe it. A *Washington Post*-Schar School poll shows just how deep this pathology runs.

As the *Washington Post*’s Fact Checker, Glenn Kessler, and pollsters Scott Clement and Emily Guskin report, Trump’s supporters have become substantially more persuaded by disinformation than they were six years ago. They are more likely to say today that the 2016 election was marred by millions of fraudulent votes and that Russia did not interfere in that election — both demonstrably untrue. A majority of strong Trump supporters today believe his provably false assertions that Joe Biden won the 2020 election because of fraud, that the United States funds most of NATO’s budget and that global temperatures are rising because of natural, not human, causes.

In small but measurable ways, Trump’s lies are catching up with him.

The week before his trial, the Trump Organization’s former CFO, Allen Weisselberg, began a five-month prison term for lying under oath. And Trump lost his latest effort to delay the start of the Stormy Daniels hush-money trial.

Also that week, Trump Media stock continued its downward spiral. Those who bought in at the peak of the “AMAZING” (according to Trump) company’s initial public offering on March 25 had by April 11 lost almost 60% of their investment.

Then there was his abortion statement in which he expressed his belief that states would “do the right thing.” He also repeated the fiction that “Democrats are the radical ones” on abortion because they support infanticide — “execution after birth.”

But Arizona’s highest court disproved both claims the very next day, vividly showing the wild extremism Trump has unleashed in the states.

Trump, the day after the Arizona decision, defended his original abortion statement (“people are very happy”) by expounding on his even more preposterous claim that Democrats wanted *Roe v. Wade* overturned. “Every legal scholar, everybody from the Democrats and Republicans, they wanted to bring it back, for 53 years, bring it back to the states,” he said after arriving in Georgia for a pair of fundraisers.

Hmm. That’s not how I remember it. But if Nelson Mandela says it, it must be true.

Dana Milbank is a political columnist for the Washington Post, where this appeared. Follow him on Twitter @Milbank. Email dana.milbank@washpost.com.

The Time Travelers’ Wives

By ALEXANDRA PETRI

“Before you get too attached to me,” the woman said, “I must tell you my horrible secret: I can travel through time.”

“Forward?” her husband asked. “Everyone can.”

“No,” she said. “Well, not just forward. I thought it was just forward for a long time. That would make sense. But after 2022, it stopped being just forward.”

“How does it work?” he asked.

“It’s a curse,” she said.

“What caused it?”

“The Supreme Court,” she said. “The judiciary generally. One afternoon in June of 2022, I discovered it was actually 1973. At best.”

He looked worried.

The woman had not had the power for as long as she could remember, she explained. Just since 2022. Specifically, June of 2022. Indeed, for most of her life she had thought of herself as a normal citizen of the 21st-century United States, endowed with the same rights and privileges as anyone else, and certainly not possessed of any special capacity for time travel.

But it turned out that such gifts could be bestowed at any time. This one was a gift of the Supreme Court. Now she, and millions of others around the country, could travel back in time at will. Not even at her own will. Sometimes it would just be the will of a particularly gerrymandered state legislature. It was a terrible way to spend a Tuesday, worrying that without warning you were going to be thrust back in time.

All across the country it was different. She was not the

only person traveling like this. Almost everyone with a uterus was experiencing some form of temporal displacement. Some found themselves hurled back to the 19th century, others just to the mid-20th. Some felt no disturbance at all unless they moved closer to their respective state lines.

The odd thing about these powers, they were quick to notice, was that they brought no benefits whatsoever. “Can you hear ragtime music?” people would ask when a woman discovered she was being taken back to the dawn of the 20th century. “Can you see the stars without satellite interference? Is the rainwater potable?”

“No,” she would answer. “No, everything is the same, except, for some reason, the laws governing my body.”

“Did you feel that?” the woman asked her husband. He had been supportive, if confused, since she had begun time traveling. She knew something was amiss. She felt the vertiginous sensation that always accompanied one of these jumps through time.

“What year is it?” she asked, worried.

“It’s 2024,” her husband said. “We’re in Arizona. Why?” She shook her head. “Not where I am.”

He checked the news. And sure enough: Her body was in the 19th century again. “1864,” he said. “Why would it be 1864?”

“No good reason,” she said. “The state supreme court.”

“Can you see a herd of buffalo, at least?” he asked. “If you’re in 1864 now? Moving thickly over the plain?”

“I don’t think that modifier is in the right place,” she replied. “And, no. Everything looks the same.”

“Are you wearing a crinoline?”

“I am obviously not.”

“Then how can you be sure?”

“The laws governing my body,” she said grimly. “Just watch me try getting some routine 21st-century medical care without my doctor facing the loss of their license.”

Sure enough, she couldn’t.

“It’s ridiculous!” he fumed. She could still hear him, even across the gap of time. “Why would they want to return you to a time before women could vote, when maternal mortality was still sky-high? Do they think this is a game? People will have their lives ruined. People will die.”

She was glad he was so upset on her behalf. She had worried that the power she now possessed might alienate him.

“It’s not a power at all!” he shouted. He looked helplessly at her. She was wearing wide-legged jeans like it was 2024 or 2005, but he knew that inside the jeans, she was stuck far in the past.

“Can you change anything?” he asked. “While you’re back there?”

She shook her head. “Ironically, no,” she said. “We searched high and low for Anthony Comstock to ask who hurt him, but to no avail.”

“Could you bend the arc of history, or something?”

“No. It turns out we have to keep pushing at the arc all the time or it snaps right back into place. It seems we’ll have to travel forward.”

“Forward?”

“To November. We just have to hold on until November.”

Maybe if they could just hold on long enough to get to a voting booth, she would have rights again, instead of this mysterious power. Maybe, if they pushed hard enough at the arc, they could get back to where they had been in the past, instead of where they were in the present.

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

EMERGENCY ROOMS REFUSED TO TREAT PREGNANT PATIENTS AFTER ‘DOBBS.’ Complaints of pregnant patients turned away from emergency departments “spiked” after the reversal of *Roe v. Wade*, reported by The Associated Press, sparked fresh condemnation of efforts to restrict abortion rights, Jessica Corbett noted at CommonDreams (4/19).

Since the right-wing US Supreme Court ended nearly half a century of nationwide abortion rights with *Dobbs v. Jackson Women’s Health Organization* in June 2022, over 20 states have enacted new restrictions on reproductive healthcare, creating a culture of confusion and fear at many medical facilities.

Early last year, the Associated Press filed a public records request for 2022 complaints filed under the Emergency Medical Treatment and Active Labor Act (EMTALA), a federal law that requires hospitals and emergency departments that accept Medicare to provide screenings to patients who request them and prohibits refusing to treat individuals with an emergency medical condition.

“One year after submitting the request, the federal government agreed to release only some complaints and investigative documents filed

across just 19 states,” the AP’s Amanda Seitz reported. “The names of patients, doctors, and medical staff were redacted from the documents.”

“One woman miscarried in the lobby restroom of a Texas emergency room as front desk staff refused to admit her,” the journalist detailed. “Another woman learned that her fetus had no heartbeat at a Florida hospital, the day after a security guard turned her away from the facility. And in North Carolina, a woman gave birth in a car after an emergency room couldn’t offer an ultrasound. The baby later died.”

According to Seitz:

Emergency rooms are subject to hefty fines when they turn away patients, fail to stabilize them, or transfer them to another hospital for treatment. Violations can also put hospitals’ Medicare funding at risk.

But it’s unclear what fines might be imposed on more than a dozen hospitals that the Biden administration says failed to properly treat pregnant patients in 2022.

It can take years for fines to be levied in these cases. The Health and Human Services agency, which enforces the law, declined to share if the hospitals have been referred to the agency’s Office of Inspector General for penalties.

Slate’s Mark Joseph Stern, who covers US legal battles, noted that this “devastating and timely story” from Seitz comes “just days be-

fore the Supreme Court considers whether emergency rooms can legally force patients to the brink of death before terminating a failing pregnancy.”

The high court was set to hear arguments in that case April 24. The Biden administration is challenging Idaho’s near-total ban on abortion, which “would make it a criminal offense for doctors to comply with EMTALA’s requirement to provide stabilizing treatment, even where a doctor determines that abortion is the medical treatment necessary to prevent a patient from suffering severe health risks or even death,” as the US Department of Justice’s lawsuit explains.

The Justice Department is seeking a judgment that Idaho’s law is invalid under the supremacy clause of the US Constitution and “is preempted by federal law to the extent that it conflicts with EMTALA.”

GREEN GROUPS CHEER \$7 BILLION IN ‘SOLAR FOR ALL’ GRANTS. President Joe Biden on Earth Day announced that his administration is distributing \$7 billion in Solar for All grants “to develop long-lasting solar programs that enable low-income and disadvantaged communities to deploy and benefit from distributed residential solar, lowering energy costs for families, creating good-quality jobs in communities that have been left behind, advancing environ-

mental justice, and tackling climate change.”

The US Environmental Protection Agency estimates that the awards—which are going to 60 applicants, including states, territories, tribal governments, municipalities, and nonprofits—will fund solar projects that positively impact over 900,000 households nationwide while reducing 30 million metric tons of carbon dioxide equivalent emissions. The grant competition was made possible by the Inflation Reduction Act, which Biden signed in August 2022, Jessica Corbett noted at CommonDreams.org (4/22).

“The United States can and must lead the world in transforming our energy systems away from fossil fuels,” said Sen. Bernie Sanders (I-Vt.), who joined Biden in Triangle, Va., April 22 to announce the solar grants—\$62.45 million in funding will go to his state—and the Vermont Climate Corps.

“The Solar for All program—that I successfully championed—will not only combat the existential threat of climate change by making solar energy available to working class families, it will also substantially lower the electric bills of Americans and create thousands of good-paying jobs,” noted Sanders. “This is a win for the environment, a win for consumers, and a win for the economy.”

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