



Campus in Crisis: Clueless on Gaza?

The energy and idealism of college students is a precious resource in the risk-taking vanguard of major political movements and changes. Problems occur when youthful enthusiasm is peer-pressured and ill-informed.

By HAL CROWTHER

As an ancient but still truculent member of the anti-establishment, I nearly always side with protesters against the institutions that provoke and suppress them (the D.C. riots of Jan. 6, 2021, were a notable exception), as long as the protests don't veer into violence and mob hysteria. But this tidal wave of pro-Palestinian campus protests, coast-to-coast and spreading internationally, has left me trapped between surprise and déjà vu.

I'm no stranger to campus protest, or the Columbia University landscape where much of the media attention has been centered. In 1968, as a stringer for *Time* magazine, I covered some of the Columbia demonstrations against the war in Vietnam and interviewed a group of students presented to me as the "war council" of the SDS. I probably got the assignment because my editor assumed that a recent graduate of the university's Journalism School would at least know the campus buildings and bypaths and waste no time finding his way.

It was a radicalizing experience, especially when I witnessed a violent police riot and saw one officer break a tenured professor's nose and eyeglasses with a billy club. I was a small-town person barely acclimated to the big city, and until that moment I had never doubted that people wearing badges were all on my side.

My sympathies were with the protesters; a draft board was actively tracking me down. But their militant tactics—occupying buildings, taking deans hostage, fire-bombing faculty offices—were a little too Bolshevik for my taste. I remember the posters of Che Guevara and Malcolm X on the walls of occupied buildings. I met the later-notorious Mark Rudd, whose career as a radical fugitive included years of hiding and a prison term. Rudd and company, even when I agreed with their principles, were alarmingly more intense and excitable than any campus dissenters I had encountered as a student. The part of the Sixties that we all remember best was well underway, and 1968 was a critical year.

The energy and idealism of college

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Illustration by DOLORES CULLEN

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AN EDITORIAL

Big Lie Party Clowns

A month into Donald Trump's criminal trial in New York City, we've heard adult film star Stormy Daniels testify that Trump pressured her to have sex with him, with a vague offer to put her on his reality TV show, while Trump's third wife was home with their infant son, Barron. Trump's former lawyer, Michael Cohen, testified that Trump ordered him to pay Daniels \$130,000 to keep quiet about the tryst before the 2016 election. Then Trump used his business funds to reimburse Cohen for making the payments, under the cover that they were "legal expenses."

We believe the Manhattan District Attorney's deputies have made their case that Trump directed the hush money payment to Daniels before the election to avoid a sex scandal he feared would derail his presidential campaign — and then authorized an illegal reimbursement scheme to conceal the coverup. And prosecutors brought the receipts from the payoff, as well as notes and recordings to corroborate testimony of witnesses.

Trump denies 34 counts of falsifying business records to conceal another crime. He still insists he never had sex with Daniels, but he dares not take the witness stand to say that under oath, because he is a liar, and was bound to be caught up in perjury, and his lawyers know it, and everybody else in the courtroom knows it.

Trump's defense attorneys tried to discredit Cohen, who is now a convicted felon and lately has made a living criticizing his former boss. But Cohen was even-tempered as he testified about his 10 years as Trump's lawyer, which started with admiration for his employer and ended with him going to federal prison in 2018 for campaign finance violations relating to the payouts to Daniels and former *Playboy* model Karen McDougal, tax evasion and lying to Congress on Trump's behalf about plans to build a Trump Tower in Moscow.

Trump was OK with Cohen going to prison for him, but now that Cohen has turned state's evidence, the former president's best hope is that his lawyers can get at least one juror to insist on Trump's innocence, which might create a hung jury and a mistrial. Trump has brought in congressional Republicans to debase themselves as Trump flunkies, echoing his contemptuous claims that Bragg and Judge Juan Merchan are partisans working for Joe Biden.

House Speaker Mike Johnson made the trip to Manhattan to make the reckless claim that "the judge's own daughter is making millions of dollars" off of the trial, and a prosecutor in the case had "recently received over \$10,000 in payments from the Democratic National Committee." The House Speaker claimed that, in Trump's classified documents case in federal court in Florida, prosecutors "manipulated documents" and "might have tampered with the evidence."

"It was demeaning to the office of the speaker, and to Congress, for Johnson to be trashing the criminal justice system as 'corrupt,' and nakedly campaigning for Trump at the former president's trial," Dana Milbank wrote for the *Washington Post*. But Johnson was only one of a parade of MAGA legislators making the pilgrimage to the courthouse in mid-May. On May 13 came Sens. Tommy Tuberville (Ala.) and J.D. Vance (Ohio) and Rep. Nicole Malliotakis (N.Y.). May 14 produced Johnson and a quartet of Republicans all dressed as Trump mini-mes in blue-gray suits, white shirts and red ties: Reps. Cory Mills (Fla.) and Byron Donalds (Fla.), North Dakota Gov. Doug Burgum and former presidential candidate Vivek Ramaswamy. On

May 16 so many House MAGA Republicans showed up that the House Oversight Committee had to postpone a vote to hold Attorney General Merrick Garland in contempt of Congress.

Fifty years ago, between July 27 and July 30, 1974, the House Judiciary Committee, approved articles of impeachment of Richard Nixon for his role in covering up the burglary of Democratic National Committee offices in the Watergate complex. Nixon refused to turn over tapes of conversations with his aides. The Supreme Court took only six days after hearing arguments to order the release of White House tapes to Watergate investigators.

Nixon still hoped to keep support of enough Republican senators to block his removal. But after the text of the "smoking gun" tape on Aug. 5 proved Nixon's involvement in the cover-up, a delegation of Republicans, including Sen. Barry Goldwater of Arizona, Senate Minority Leader Hugh Scott of Pennsylvania and House Minority Leader John Rhodes of Arizona went to the White House on Aug. 8, 1974, to tell Nixon his game was up, and he needed to resign the presidency or face impeachment by the House and conviction and removal by the Senate. He resigned the next day.

There are not enough principled Republicans remaining in Congress with the authority to tell Trump it's time to step aside. A few Republican leaders expressed their outrage over Trump's failure to take action to stop the Capitol riot on Jan. 6, 2021, when the president refused to call on his supporters to leave the Capitol for several hours.

"Former President Trump's actions preceding the riot were a disgraceful, disgraceful dereliction of duty," Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-Ky.) said on Feb. 13, 2021. "... There's no question, none, that President Trump is practically and morally responsible for provoking the events of the day."

But McConnell made that statement less than an hour after voting to acquit Trump for his role in the storming of the Capitol. And less than two weeks later, on Feb. 26, 2021, McConnell said he would support Trump again, if he was the Republican nominee for president.

One week after the attack, House Minority Leader Kevin McCarthy said Trump bore "responsibility" for it. But by the time McCarthy spoke at the Conservative Political Action Conference (CPAC) on Feb. 27, 2021, McCarthy had pivoted to praising Trump for helping Republicans win races across the country.

Sen. Lindsey Graham (R-S.C.) has scrapped any principle he had since May 3, 2016, when he said, "If we nominate Trump, we will get destroyed ... and we will deserve it." Nowadays Graham has become one of Trump's fiercest defenders, despite Trump being the first president since Herbert Hoover in the Great Depression to lose the House, the Senate and the White House in a single term.

If a Trump partisan on the jury stands in the way of a unanimous verdict, that does not mean Trump is acquitted. If the jury is deadlocked, the DA can ask the judge to put the case before a new jury.

In any event, assuming the Republican-majority Supreme Court does not allow Trump's federal criminal trials to proceed before the November election, Trump will still emerge with the Republican nomination as a notorious liar, as well as a serial adulterer, who has already been found liable in civil trials for fraud and sexual assault.

The Republican Party is no longer the Grand Old Party of yore. As a subsidiary of the Trump Organization, it is now the Big Lie Party, because that's all that ties the cult together nowadays. Trump's enablers and defenders are just party clowns. — JMC

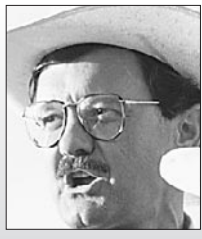
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JIM HIGHTOWER



In a national survey, more than half of nurses feel 'used up' and 'emotionally drained,' primarily because hospital executives keep goosing up profits.

God Bless the Nurses. And Please Hurry!

Every religion prioritizes care for the needy. Christianity's Benedictine Rule, for example, puts care of the sick atop the moral order, "above and before every other duty."

Really — even above the holy Wall Street mandate that medical and insurance conglomerates must squeeze every last penny of profits out of America's corporate-care system? Well, gosh, they say, let's not go crazy with this religious stuff! There's morality ... and then there's business.

Consider how today's monopolized and financialized hospital networks treat nurses — the high-touch frontline people who do the most to put care in "health care." Paid a pittance, thousands of nurses across America are now organizing and unionizing against the inequities of this system. The nurses' core grievance, however, is not their pay, but the gross understaffing imposed on them and their patients by profiteering hospital chains.

In a national survey, more than half of nurses feel "used up" and "emotionally drained." Why? Primarily because executives keep goosing up profits by eliminating care providers, making it impossible for the remaining, stretched-out staff to meet their own high moral standard of care. That's demoralizing for nurses ... and deadly for patients.

Yet, corporate-care lobbyists loudly squawk that hospital chains can't afford to pay fair wages and fully staff-up. Ironically, one of the loudest squawkers is the hospital mega-chain, Ascension, a Catholic church offshoot proclaiming to be "rooted in the loving ministry of Jesus as healer." Some healer. In a devilish partnership with a Wall Street huckster, Ascension has been slashing nursing staffs while paying its CEO \$13 million a year, hoarding \$18 billion in cash and allotting a pitiful 2% of its budget for charitable care of the poor.

What the hell! To help battle health care greed, go to NationalNursesUnited.org.

That Stench of Corruption You Smell is Coming from the Supreme Court

We Texans are long-accustomed to enduring stormy outbursts of corruption among our top state legislators. The spectacle of lawmakers taking corporate bribes to provide legislative favors, tax breaks, government contracts and such is as common as spring tornadoes — and even more destructive to the public good.

The state's prevailing ethical standard was articulated several years ago when a powerful legislator (nicknamed "Bull of Brazos") was caught personally profiting from a bill he was pushing: "I'd just make a little bit of money," he explained dismissively. "I wouldn't make a whole lot."

Before rolling your eyes at Crazy Texas, though, consider the sneak attack that corporate America is now making to legalize the wholesale bribery of every public official in America. Their ploy is a cynical effort to redefine bribery. Paying officials to do corporate favors, they insist, should only be considered a bribe if the payoff is arranged before the favor is done. Yes, with a straight face, these finaglers claim that if the payment comes *after* an official delivers the goods, it's not a bribe but simply a "gratuity." Like tipping a waiter for

good service.

Even the flimflammers Congress would balk at voting for such a blatant perversion of language and public integrity. So, the corporate connivers have slinked over to the corrupt plutocratic partisans on the Supreme Court, beseeching them to — Hocus Pocus! — autocratically decree that wrong is right. And they probably will, since a majority of the Supremes have themselves accepted corrupt freebies from corporate patrons. Take Clarence Thomas, please! He's been given millions in corporate bribes (excuse me, "gratuities"), so he's hardly an unbiased judge of official corruption.

To fight the stench of this legal freak show, go to Campaign Legal Center: campaignlegal.org.

Hoo Boy ... DeJoy!

Who is us (the American people) for having our jewel of a national Postal Service saddled with a corporate-minded postmaster general, Louis DeJoy. Formerly CEO of a private shipping contractor, DeJoy's chief qualification for running this invaluable public service is that he's been a major donor to Republican politicians — including Donald Trump, who appointed him to the post.

In 2020, the new honcho put forth a 10-year scheme to "save" the people's post office by imposing boilerplate corporate tactics — downsize staff, cut service and raise prices. He gave his plan a zippy PR slogan: "Delivering for America." But delivering less for more is a hard sell, and people soon started rebelling against absurdly late delivery, closure of local branches, long lines at understaffed postal counters, and relentless price hikes, including another 8% increase this year.

Excuse my bad play on words, but there is no joy in seeing an essential public service needlessly gutted. Millions of us rely on timely mail delivered by the amazing network of public postal workers. Their linking any one ZIP code to all others is a pillar of our democracy, not only servicing the well-off and corporate elites, but crucial to small businesses, rural communities, people getting medicines by mail — as well as to millions of us wanting to vote by mail this November.

Four years of DeJoy's corporate gimmicks to "improve" our postal service by shriveling it have proven disastrous — and the harm is spreading. Enough! This is a time when your voice can matter, for a bipartisan outcry is demanding that Congress and/or the postal board of governors step in pronto to terminate DeJoy's political meddling. For information and action go to: TakeOnWallSt.com.

Culture War Stupidity Plunges Into Absurdity

Right-wing culture warriors have been relentlessly attacking people's personal liberties — running hellish crusades to deny our freedom to vote, to read what we want, to form labor unions, to make our own reproductive decisions, etc.

Now, apparently having run out of freedoms to ban, here they come with a twisted attempt to politicize another of our inalienable rights: The pursuit of happiness! They've launched a campaign of psychobabble, preaching that those who embrace progressive ideas and causes are doomed to a life of perpetual unhappiness. "Don't go there!" they squawk.

This babaloney is even being advanced by such self-proclaimed "serious" conservatives as *New York Times* pundit Ross Douthat. He recently opined that "The left-wing temperament is, by nature, unhappier than the moderate and conservative alternatives." Yes, Douthat insists that we progressives are hampered by a "refusal of contentment," unlike the joyful serenity enjoyed by right-wingers.

Golly, Ross, how could we have missed the conservative blissfulness inherent in Trump's perpetual glower and nastiness? And that snarling, right-wing gaggle of quacks, prima donnas and haters in Congress sure offers a fine public example of intrinsic conservative conviviality.

But Douthat plunges deeper into his dark rabbit hole, theorizing that "youth unhappiness" increases "the further left you go." Not sure how many progressive youngsters he's actually met, but I've been lucky to meet and work regularly with young champions of environmental justice, union organizing, women's rights, etc. They have continuously lifted my spirits with their optimism, sense of fun and jubilant camaraderie.

And, by the way, young progressives

don't need me — much less an aloof, dour conservative — speaking for them. They have their own voice and are on the way up — laughing at the likes of Douthat.

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Tripping the Right Fantastic

By FRANK LINGO

It was a pleasant surprise to see an April 21 *New York Times* headline that read, "Some Faith Groups Call To Legalize Mushrooms."

"It may sound like blasphemy, but some religious scholars say they see an overlap between the pursuit of the divine and the use of psychedelic drugs," stated the article.

Far out, man!

Yeah, far out of the ordinary is a movement sweeping America to legalize tripping without going anywhere. You know it's widespread if even right-wing religious types approve it.

Last year, Colorado followed Oregon's lead from 2020 and passed a bill to decriminalize psilocybin, a naturally-occurring hallucinogen that psychological therapists have found brings relief to some people suffering from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder. The article said over 70 bills related to psilocybin have been introduced (but not yet passed) since December 2023.

Magic mushrooms grow on every continent and have been used for thousands of years, often for a spiritual experience. So have mescaline, peyote and other hallucinogens. In 1938, Swiss chemist Albert Hofman synthesized a similar psychoactive property and dubbed it lysergic acid diethylamide, or LSD, commonly known as acid. Acid is more concentrated and can be overwhelming for some. It's worth comparing this open-minded scientist's revelations to others' non-scientific mushroom experiences.

Hofman wrote his story in a book entitled "LSD — My Problem Child." Hofman's first trip was fraught with conflicting feelings. He felt that he had been invaded by demons and that he was going insane. A doctor came, but found no abnormal symptoms other than dilated pupils. Later that day, Hofman felt more relaxed and began to enjoy what he described as "kaleidoscopic, fantastic images." Finally, he was exhausted and fell asleep.

In the morning, Hofman wrote, "A sensation of well-being and renewed life flowed

through me. Breakfast tasted delicious and gave me extraordinary pleasure. When I later walked out into the garden, in which the sun shone now after a spring rain, everything glistened and sparkled in a fresh light. The world was as if newly created. All my senses vibrated in a condition of highest sensitivity, which persisted for the entire day."

Hofman's trip was similar to my own on psychedelics decades later. He probably took too high a dose on that first trip. And even tho he had a scary freakout, he discovered that the drug could be a positive experience, just as mushrooms and other psychedelics had been for inner adventurers around the world for ages.

I attribute discovery of my spirit to trips that took me out of my body. Others have tripped and had a bad time, even a psychotic reaction. But my experience, which I had meant just to get high, was enlightening. I was raised Catholic and, having rejected the Church, I was surprised to feel the very thing I had dismissed — a spirit that exists beyond my body. Religious strictures have tried to constrain and define the infinite, but psychedelics can help re-acquaint us with that part of our being that has been ironically repressed by religions. No need to throw the baby Jesus out with the bathwater of the Church.

A personal positive for me was at the age of 19, I was tripping and smoking a cigarette when I had an hallucinatory vision, like an x-ray, that revealed the smoke blackening my lungs. I quit smoking, and never had another. Over half a century later, the trippiest thing I do now is a cup of green tea.

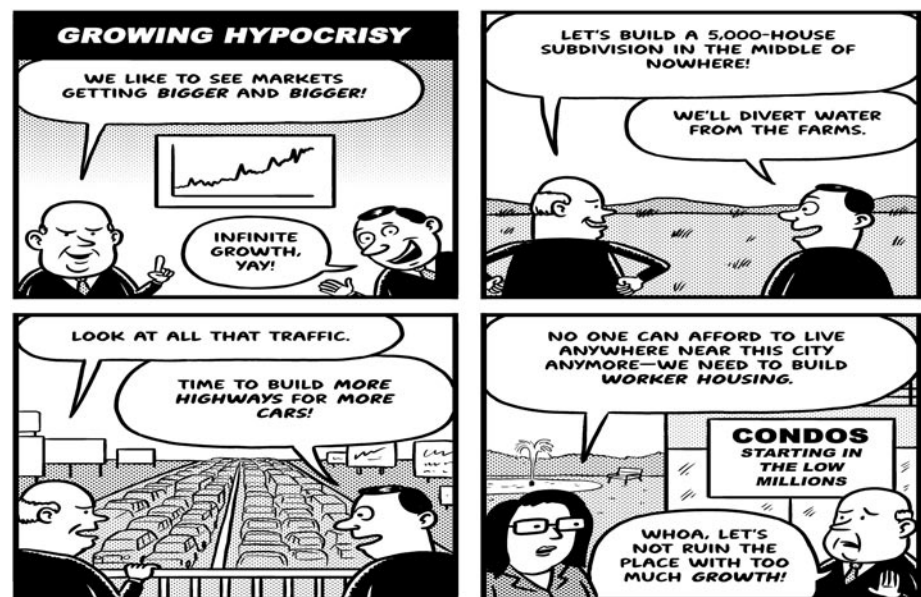
The mushroom movement needs professional supervision but it's a promising alternative to artificial prescription drugs in treating many conditions including drug addiction, manic-depression and PTSD. As with women's reproductive rights, we'll be much better off if we get the politicians out of our bodies — and our minds.

As Jefferson Airplane sang, "Feed your head!"

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Justice Denied, Security at Risk

US District Judge Aileen Cannon's decision to indefinitely postpone Donald Trump's trial for stealing and mishandling secret government documents is an attack on Justice. Not bringing the former president to account for his dangerous behavior also attacks our national security. With boxes of top secret documents stacked in his bathroom and elsewhere, there is no accounting for who may have seen sensitive military secrets. Indeed, we don't know whether the former president tried to trade some of those secrets for his personal benefit, as befits his character and previous schemes.

Prosecutor Jack Smith ought to call for a replacement judge. The judge's bias favoring Trump has been exposed by several of her decisions that were subsequently reversed by the higher appellate court. American voters need to know before the election whether this candidate engaged in traitorous disregard for our national security. Top secrets about nuclear weapons and foreign agents must be kept secret.

BRUCE JOFFE, *Piedmont, Calif.*

Cut Military Spending

There is one sentinel topic that has received minimal media attention in recent weeks. That subject is the US military-industrial juggernaut that threatens both all humankind and our beloved mother earth. We are facing two existential threats that are bearing down on humanity like a runaway train. Those threats are truly the co-joined twins of Hell — catastrophic climate change and the growing threat of nuclear holocaust.

The single greatest contributor globally to climate catastrophe is the United States' military Goliath. Couple that with the damning reality of US military spending and one can say without hesitation or exaggeration that no generation in recorded history has faced the realities and challenges that we must confront if we are to survive and offer any kind of future for our children and future generations.

Ten years ago US military spending broke all records with a \$400 billion price tag that dwarfed and eclipsed every nation on Earth. The war budget for 2025 is \$900 billion plus. Woven into this insanity that has Dwight Eisenhower rolling over in his grave is the trillions of dollars approved for "Nuclear Modernization" — a plan that insures a new global arms race that makes the likelihood of nuclear disaster probable if not inevitable.

Our survival is contingent and dependent on our ability as a nation and a people to come to terms with the realities of US militarism. We have roughly 800 military bases operating globally — and there is no end in sight. Americans need to accept the truth — the reality that endless military spending coupled with "Nuclear Modernization" makes the prospect for human survival a long shot at best. We need to urgently confront the dire threats of both catastrophic climate change and US militarism.

This is not an abstract problem that future generations will inherit and resolve. This is a looming crisis that we the people need to address and act on with immediacy for the sake of our children, future generations, and our planet. Our choices are stark and clear. Climate catastrophe and

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School Boards and the Fragility of Progress

By DON ROLLINS

"When you read about [Stonewall Jackson] — who he was, what he stood for, his character, his loyalty, his leadership, how Godly a man he was — those standards that he had were much higher than any leadership of the school system in 2020." — Tom Streett, board member, Shenandoah (VA) County Public Schools

Although the first recorded shot of the American civil war was fired in South Carolina, it was Virginia that witnessed by far the most bloodshed. Fully 123 of the 384 battles were fought there — three times the number staged in Tennessee, second on the list of states laid low by a brutal war.

Given this scale, Virginia's suffering has

gone as deep as any of the former Confederate states. The lingering effects of slavery are especially visceral when vista after vista, town after town bears a memorial to the mostly Southern dead.

But the last shots of the war were barely fired when the veneration of "Lost Cause" heroes became the norm, if not patriotic duty in many parts of the South, Virginia included.

Influential White leaders spearheaded efforts to name (or rename) streets, libraries and courthouses for military and political leaders that were in reality insurgents defending an inhumane, not "peculiar" institution.

Organized during the Reconstruction era, Virginia's nascent (Whites only) public school system was not spared the rush to glorify the rebel faithful and fallen. White locals could, and did name their new buildings after whomever they wanted.

As with every other state in Lincoln's salvaged union, history matters in Virginia. That history came alive in mid-May when the rural school district school board in

nuclear Armageddon is not inevitable. An informed and active citizenry is the planets best hope. The time to act and organize is now.

JIM SAWYER, *Edmonds, Wash.*

How Not To Talk About Climate

If asked the current temperature in the US, should someone answer in Celsius? If so, a warm 80-degree day would be 27 degrees. Most Americans would be confused. In discussing climate with them, saying the goal is an increase of no more than 2 degrees Celsius misses a chance to speak their language.

That's just one example of how those of us concerned about the effects of air pollution use words that are confusing and uninspiring for most Americans. Here are seven ways we can do better:

2 degrees Celsius (old) becomes 4 degrees Fahrenheit (new) — approximately 4 degrees F. is the temperature increase scientists say is a maximum before it may become like a runaway train. In addition to being unclear to most Americans, the use of Celsius reduces the perceived effect by almost half.

Tipping point (old), runaway temperatures (new) — what's a tipping point? Many of us do not inherently understand, but most do get the concept of runaway.

Fossil fuels (old), Dirty fuels (new) — fossil doesn't sound bad. Name them for what they are.

Renewable energy (old), clean energy (new) — we all know the simple power of clean.

Global warming (old), warming planet (new) — Global to some people implies a foreign or faraway problem. It is better understood that we live on planet Earth and should protect it.

Climate change (old), also warming planet (new) — opponents of clean energy measures argue that the climate is always changing, and they're right.

Costly (old), less expensive (new). The perception of clean energy being more expensive still lingers, in part because the cost decline has been so rapid in solar, wind, batteries. And now we're beginning to see that with electric vehicles. Current examples of lower costs can help deliver this message, such as the cost of fuel for EVs being approximately the equivalent of \$1.44 per gallon of gasoline (US Department of Energy).

Summary — scientists and analysts have conducted decades of research about climate science ... it's sometimes more challenging to communicate the problem.

The goal of these thoughts is to increase public support for cleaner air, especially from those who don't fully appreciate the threat to our warming planet. The very successful Clean Air Act of 1970 (consider the name) offers hints about how to do this. Somehow the clear messages of that time became confused when the conversation switched to climate.

WAYNE PARKER, *Eugene, Ore.*

What Do Dogs and Cats Sense About Trump?

Does Donald Trump dislike cats and dogs, or is he afraid of them? His fear and hatred is very clear when he calls human beings he regards with contempt, "animals." Has anyone ever seen him touch, let alone pet, an animal?

Maybe animals can sense that he is evil and therefore avoid him.

FREDA M. ALVERSON, *Hones Path, S.C.*

What Makes Photos Prize-Worthy

The Pulitzer Prizes for work done in 2023 were recently handed out, and the Associated Press won a prize in the "feature photography category," for 15 photos that were taken across Latin America and along the US-Mexico border. The photos all were of migrants.

The question that now needs to be asked: What makes a photo of humans suffering an award winning photo? The only answer is, the photo's artistic value.

This is all about the romancing of human suffering, especially the suffering that people of color endure. But human suffering in the real world is no one's art, and no one's artistic property. The Pulitzer Prize awards come with a cash award of \$15,000. Take photos of people of color suffering, with the Pulitzer judges seeing your photos as award-worthy, and you walk away with \$15,000.

This is arrogant, exploitive and racist. Take photos and publish them of people struggling and suffering to show the world what is happening — but don't judge which photos are the "best," when doing so you are putting art first, the people in the photos are no one's artistic property.

Who among us have the right to decide which photos of human suffering are award worthy?

It is all quite simple. Their suffering is not our art.

FRANK ERICKSON, *Minneapolis, Minn.*



Shenandoah County voted 5-1 to restore the names of Confederate generals to two of its buildings.

Previously named after generals Thomas "Stonewall" Jackson, Robert E. Lee and Turner Asby, the high and elementary schools were renamed Mountain View High and Honey Run Elementary in 2020 as part of a widespread racial reconciliation following the murder of George Floyd while in police custody.

Although resistance was high in the 95% White county, the subsequent board voted in a tie when the measure came before them. The names remained as they were. The board's center held, and their supporters cautiously rejoiced.

But after nearly two years of organized efforts to restore Jackson, Lee and Ashby to their racist glory, White locals have once again exercised their power to name school buildings after whomever they want.

A pro forma meeting preceded the actual vote, with supporters of the restoration citing chillingly familiar reasons for their position. The 2020 name changes have:

divided the community, been implemented despite majority opinion, and undercut the importance of teaching children about their "heritage." It was a clear win, transparent and likely lasting.

While Shenandoah Public may be the first district to officially take such steps, there are an estimated 190 schools across 19 states that still bear the names of Confederate figures and prominent sympathizers. There's no telling where all those school boards fall on the scale of change/no change, much less how many may be headed toward Shenandoah Public's fall from grace.

What we do know is bigotry and ignorance are by no means confined to a single state, nor the province of a single school board. Progress in public education is slow, progress in public education is exhausting. Worst of all, that progress is fragile.

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

Truth in Food Labeling: Bringing It Home



In 2022, Biden tried to straighten out corporate concentration of meat production. His order allowed small locker plants to expand meat processing.

What if I told you the meat at the grocery store, maybe labeled “Product of U.S.A.” really came from, say, Australia? Or Mexico? Or Canada? Overproduction of animals in many parts of the world means that their cheap meat has been exported to the United States, part of schemes devised by the top meatpackers. These are the companies that buy animals from farmers and process them into packages of meat for stores and restaurants. As middlemen, they control what is paid to farmers and also prices at the store.

In the US, four companies control 85% of our beef market—Tyson, Cargill, JBS and National Beef, which is owned by China. Looking at pork, JBS, Tyson, Hormel and WH Group, also owned by China, control 67% of the market. Tyson and Pilgrims Pride are the big winners in the chicken market, controlling about 45%.

In January 2022, Joe Biden signed an executive order asking USDA to straighten out this corporate concentration and the false “Product of U.S.A.” labeling. The order

asked for stronger rules under the Stockyards and Packers Act, which was passed in 1921 and then largely forgotten; enforcement could break up the giant corporations who, confusingly, sell their products under many labels. Tyson, for example, sells meats labeled Tyson, Jimmy Dean, Hillshire Farm, Ball Park, Raised & Rooted, Aidells, State Fair, Nature Raised, Sara Lee, Lady Aster and many other brand names. Most of the brands were once trusted local labels gobbled up by the giant Tyson.

Biden’s order mandated new rules for the “Product of U.S.A.” label. His order also poured money into local markets and allowed small locker plants to expand. In my county, a place with farmland that varies from flat and tillable for row crops like corn to almost-mountainous land suitable only for livestock, we have always had one or two meat processors. Thanks to government grants and loans, we now have five within an easy drive. For food security, it’s a win.

This local-food reality is a true bonus for Missouri. Our state has an estimated

40,000 cattle producers. But from 2017 to 2022, 10,000 called it quits while the big packers took in unprecedented profits and blamed inflation for price increases. In 2022, PolitiFact reported that in 2021-22, JBS made a record net profit of \$4.4 billion, a 70% increase over the previous year. Tyson raked in \$4.1 billion in profit, a 91% increase and Cargill made a record \$4.9 billion, a 60% increase.

Part of that increase comes because the “Big Four” take advantage of Country of Origin Labeling. In 2023, the giants imported 3.7 billion pounds of beef from other countries. Their interpretation of Country of Origin Labeling (COOL) means that they can import carcasses and cut them up here or even just move them from one packing crate to another. For the complete list of countries and the amounts, search for “usda beef imports by country” and the Agricultural Marketing Service will answer your questions.

In 2008, the Farm Bill insisted that COOL should be enforced but the order was immediately opposed by meatpackers. Then, in 2009, Canada challenged the rule in the World Trade Organization (WTO). Canada was quickly joined by other nations arguing that truth in labeling created an unfair advantage for US products. By 2015, COOL was unrecognizable.

Canada is, by the way, the leading exporter into the United States. In 2023, Canada sent us 306,099 metric tons of beef and they’ll more than double that in 2024. Some of that meat could have been raised elsewhere and imported through Canada. It is untraceable.

As the new Farm Bill waddles through

Congress, Biden’s order is on the floor as Senate Bill 52. It would require that all meat sold in grocery stores is labeled with the names of countries where animals are born, raised and processed so that American consumers can choose American meats. SB 52 has bipartisan support and much love from consumer groups and farm groups.

We’re hearing a lot about the failures of capitalism these days and how it’s not providing pathways to economic freedom for the majority. While I haven’t heard of mobs chanting Marxist slogans (yet) I have heard leftist pundits recommending that we go back to school and read up.

As the meat business proves, however, it’s not capitalism that’s to blame. Capitalism based in our communities provided competition and prosperity for a majority of folks. And I just heard you think “privileged folks” but remember that in the late decades of the last century there were prosperous Black neighborhoods in small to medium American towns and prosperous Chinatowns in the cities, sheltering more folks than the small privileged suburbs.

The lesson? Support your community. Buy local. Know where your food comes from. If you’re an activist type, drop a line to your senators and ask them to make SB 52 a part of the next farm bill.

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

DISPATCHES

POLL: TRUMP LOSING IN COURT OF PUBLIC OPINION. A YouGov poll for Yahoo News released May 14 found 52% of Americans now believe the central premise of Donald Trump’s hush money trial: that he did “falsify documents to conceal a hush money payment to a porn star.” Just 22% say he did not, while roughly one-quarter say they don’t know, Kerry Eleveld noted at Daily Kos (5/17).

Nearly half of Americans said they were following the trial at least somewhat closely, at 48%, while 52% said they were not.

Still, the trial itself appears to be affecting public opinion. Before the trial began in April, the same poll found that 48% believed Trump had falsified documents—a 4-point increase and a 7-point increase since March 2023.

Overall approval of the trial has also gotten a sizable bump, from a 7-point margin last month to a 12-point margin now, 49% to 37%.

In short, Trump is losing by a lot, to borrow a phrase, on most counts. Here’s how the three major pillars of the prosecution’s case poll:

- 45% believe that Trump and Stormy Daniels had sex, and just 14% disagree (the defense actually began the trial with the contention that the two did not have sex);
- 43% say Trump made a deal with the *National Enquirer* to buy and kill bad stories about him, and just 17% don’t believe that;
- 50% believe that deal was struck to protect Trump’s 2016 campaign bid, and just 18% say that’s false.

Even among Republicans, roughly 20% or more believe the central tenets of the prosecution’s case.

‘WE’LL BE BACK,’ SAYS UAW CHIEF AFTER ‘TOUGH LOSS’ IN ALABAMA. Workers at a pair of Mercedes-Benz plants near Tuscaloosa, Ala., narrowly voted against joining the United Auto Workers in mid-May, Jessica Corbett noted at CommonDreams.org (5/17).

The UAW webpage had the National Labor Relations Board tally at 2,045 in favor of joining the union (44%) and 2,642 opposed (56%).

Voting at the large facility in Vance and the battery plant in Woodstock kicked off May 13 and wrapped up May 17. Speaking to reporters after the vote was announced, UAW president Shawn Fain said it was “obviously not the result we wanted” but “we’ll be back in Vance.”

“These courageous workers reached out to us because they wanted justice,” Fain said of the Mercedes employees. “They led us. They led this fight, and that’s what this is all about—and what happens next is up to them.”

“Justice isn’t just about one vote or one campaign, it’s about getting a voice and getting your fair share,” he continued, noting that “workers won serious gains in this campaign.”

Fain added that “it’s a David v. Goliath fight. Sometimes Goliath wins a battle but ultimately David will win the war.”

The Alabama election followed a UAW win in Chattanooga, Tenn., where Volkswagen workers in April voted to join the union.

The UAW has ramped up organizing in the South since securing contract victories last year following a “Stand Up

Strike” targeting Ford, General Motors and Stellantis, the American automobile industry’s “Big Three.”

The Alabama organizing effort has garnered support from progressives and union workers around the world. The UK-based Global Justice Now said “we stand with Mercedes autoworkers who are voting to join UAW to better their lives and help end the so-called ‘Alabama discount.’ It’s time we end the US South and Global South ‘discounts’ that allow corporations to perpetuate a race to the bottom that hurts all workers.”

Meanwhile, Republican leaders in U.S. Southern states have shown “how scared they are that workers organizing with UAW to improve jobs and wages,” as the Economic Policy Institute put it in April, after Govs. Kay Ivey of Alabama, Brian Kemp of Georgia, Tate Reeves of Mississippi, Henry McMaster of South Carolina, Bill Lee of Tennessee, and Greg Abbott of Texas issued a joint statement accusing the union of coming to their states to “threaten our jobs and the values we live by.”

Mercedes has said that it “fully respects our team members’ choice whether to unionize and we look forward to participating in the election process to ensure every team member has a chance to cast their own secret-ballot vote, as well as having access to the information necessary to make an informed choice.” However, both employees and the UAW accused the company of union-busting ahead of the vote.

During remarks to the press after the vote, Fain charged that “this company engaged in egregious illegal behavior” and pointed to ongoing probes by German and US officials into “the intimidation and harassment that they inflicted on their own workers.”

The Alabama facilities are operated by Mercedes-Benz US International, a subsidiary of the German parent company. The UAW said Germany’s Federal Office for Economic Affairs and Export Control has launched an investigation into worker claims.

The Alabama effort is widely seen as a test case for unionizing more auto workers in the South. Before the results were announced, Harley Shaiken, a labor professor at the University of California, Berkeley, told Reuters that “if the union wins, they improve their momentum dramatically for future organizing.”

RUDY’S TAUNT AT ARIZONA PROSECUTORS DIDN’T AGE WELL.

Rudy Giuliani, who had been avoiding process servers since he was indicted April 24 on a felony charge in Arizona for his role in a plot to overturn the 2020 election, taunted the Arizona attorney general with a posting on X (formerly Twitter) at 7:06 p.m. May 17: “If Arizona authorities can’t find me by tomorrow morning: 1. They must dismiss the indictment; 2. They must concede they can’t count votes.”

Four hours later, Giuliani was served with the legal notice of his indictment by two officials from Arizona Attorney General Kris Mayes’ office, outside the Palm Springs, Fla., home of top GOP consultant Caroline Wren, who hosted a birthday party 11 days before Giuliani’s 80th birthday, the *New York Post* reported (5/18).

“The final defendant was served moments ago. @RudyGiuliani nobody is above the law,” Mayes posted on X at 11:20 p.m.

Giuliani, Trump’s former lawyer who had been eluding Arizona authorities for weeks, was the last of 18 pro-Trump defendants served in the indictment returned by a grand jury in April. They’re accused of partaking in a failed bid to award the state’s 11 presidential electoral votes to Trump.

Despite Giuliani’s claim that Arizona only had only one more day to find him before the charge would be dismissed, Richie Taylor, a spokesman for Arizona’s attorney general,

Continued on page 22



FROM HARROP



De La Salle Academy, run by Christian Brothers in New York City, provides quality education for low-income families. Can we grow this model?

America Needs More Schools Like De La Salle Academy

Here we are in Times Square. Manic lights flash across all horizons. Minnie Mouse and Spider-Man are making the rounds. Packed tour buses inch below the scary headlines orbiting the ABC News building.

And it's only 9:30 on a Monday morning.

Getting a Charge Down the River and Back

By ART CULLEN

I'm bleary and road-weary after a pioneering trek in an electric pickup truck to the Gulf of Mexico and back recently.

We made it, no small feat.

We being Tom Lentz of St. Paul, Mike "Oscar" Ostrowski of Milwaukee and me, old college buds from our days so long ago inside the all-male fortress at the University of St. Thomas in St. Paul. We were joined for an evening by the fourth member of our band, Pat Duffy of Chicago, along the shores of the Mississippi at Hannibal, Mo.

It's remarkable that our friendship has endured this long and survived the week, which was trying in a country not quite ready for the EV Ford 150 Lightning.

Everything took three times longer than we anticipated. Chargers are too far apart. The battery range is too short at about 175 miles on a fast-charge, driving 65-70 mph. We reached our New Orleans hotel with 8 miles left, and barely made it to the charger.

Talk about range anxiety! It is real. Fortunately, Dr. Oscar, a psychologist, was aboard reassuring us that everything would be okay. It was, by a whisker. When I was about to cry, Oscar would lay hands on a dysfunctional charging station and it some-

But on West 43rd Street, about a block from the heart of chaos, the school day has started on an island of serenity. The students are city kids, now ages 10 to 13, who excelled in the early grades but might be bored by the pace in the average public school.

De La Salle Academy was founded 40 years ago by Christian Brother Brian Carty. The De La Salle Brothers are a Roman Catholic order that concentrates on education for lower-income families.

But this is not a parochial school. There are no uniforms. "We're not part of the diocese," Brother Brian explained. "We're not the typical Catholic school."

Nor is De La Salle a charter school. It's an independent school in the same category as so-called private schools. But it's not for rich kids. About two-thirds of the students come from families that would be considered low income or low wealth.

What De La Salle has in common with the fanciest private schools is an enviable student-faculty ratio of 9 to 1. About 98% of the graduates attend college.

There are no set income requirements for admission, but when they look at the pool of applicants that are admissible, Angel Gonzalez, the head of school, said, "We always give preference to the child who

how worked.

The stations are too far apart down South. They are hidden behind dumpsters or near the used pickups at auto dealers. One Sunday the charger works at the Dubuque casino. The following Sunday it doesn't. The one at the Burlington casino, the only fast charger in town, hasn't worked in two years.

The Ford navigation system is clunky. It does a brilliant job finding fast-charge stations, but it doesn't know Fort Dodge, Iowa. Sometimes it makes the charger go, other times it won't. So you have to download two or three more apps and toggle between them and Apple Maps to get where you want to go. It was nerve-wracking.

All the fretting achieved the purpose of the trip: to get my mind off another prostate invasion this Friday by the able hands at the Dakota Dunes, S.D., surgical center.

The immediate idea of being stuck in Grenada, Miss., wipes out the more abstract notion of mortality. It can be affirming. When we could not make the charger work in Grenada, the service manager at Kirk Chevrolet jumped in the driver seat and took command. She talked like a sailor and scared the charger into submission. Then she sat with us to hide from an especially demanding and stupid customer until he drove off. There is a God, and she sends angels in all manner.

Other goals of the journey included interviewing Dr. Nancy Rabalais of Louisiana State University, who with her husband has

needs the school more."

The tuition is about \$26,000, about a third what many other independent schools charge. However, the actual cost of educating a student is about \$35,000. That gap is filled by foundations, the board of trustees and other contributors, including the De La Salle community.

"We have current and past parents who are unbelievably generous," said director of development Severn Taylor. "They are also among the constituents that talk most fervently about how this school 'changed our lives.'"

The school is still dealing with the aftershocks of the COVID lockdowns. That's when students missed many of the important developmental milestones for socializing in school.

Gonzalez recalls one student telling him: "You know, one day I went to sleep and I was in the third grade. The next time I went back to school and woke up, I was in the seventh grade." Gonzalez said that might seem like a short time, "but what you learned between third and seventh grade socially is astronomical."

What differentiates this school from even good public schools, Gonzalez says, is its "ethos" — defined as "an experience of a caring community, driven by trusting rela-

tionships among adults and students." The goal is a personalized exploration of the mind and spirit.

"I've gotten lots of candidates from charter school networks who want to come teach here," Gonzalez said, "because they believe 'We need this conversation.' That is such a needed conversation, but public schools won't touch it, because there's a sense of the religious or spiritual." Charter schools are publicly funded.

Street people outside, some mentally ill, some drug addicts, try at times to get through the doors. "It certainly surrounds the school but, thankfully, never gets inside," Gonzalez said. The precinct stands ready to help with the hard cases.

Reproducing De La Salle Academy would be a tall order. Gonzalez envisions consortiums of schools sharing values and best practices. "Just institutionalizing all into one umbrella would, I think, rob them of their magic and their cultures."

The educational needs that schools like De La Salle Academy fill are enormous. There has to be a way to grow this model.

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researched the dead zone in the Gulf of Mexico for decades; and to see son Joe, a street musician in New Orleans. We checked those boxes. Strolled Beale Street in Memphis, birthplace of B.B. King, where they hand beers to pedestrians out windows amid all sorts of funk and blues acts. I have never seen the like. We hit the French Quarter. The gumbo down there is to die for.

On the road, we reviewed past exploits, detailed our ailments, chronicled loss and separation, and worried aloud about what was around the next turn as Oscar gently guided us. Pretty good therapy for the cost of a room at the Comfort Inn.

It was good to see Joe getting established in the Big Easy music scene. He has hooked up with a Cajun band about to go on tour. It was frustrating to hear from Dr. Rabalais how little we have accomplished in lessening the phosphorous and nitrate loads on the Gulf from growing corn, cotton and rice in the river's watershed.

Corn's days as a feedstock for fuel may be numbered. The electric future is here. The Lightning runs like a dreamboat on the freeway. There are just enough chargers. The software is improving as Google is including fast chargers in its maps now. It is coming on. The farther south you drive into oil country, the more resistance to chargers. Storm Lake has more non-Tesla fast chargers within 12 miles than New Orleans does.

"We just don't have the infrastructure down here," said the GM at the BMW deal-

ership in Jackson, Miss. It's not the price that prevents sales, it's the range anxiety.

Not everyone has a clinical psychologist to keep them calm in 96-degree Southern swamp. That's why prices on the Lightning plunged to the point where it made sense for us to buy one for hauling papers to area post offices. It's perfect, with a range just over 200 miles fully charged in decent weather. It would rock for a trip to Des Moines. It's the most comfortable vehicle I have driven. GM is about to roll out a new Equinox with more than 300 miles of range at a net cost of less than \$30,000. That's a game-changer as more chargers sprout all the time. (MidAmerican Energy has the best ones I used.)

I have not tallied fuel costs, but it figures to be 30% to 50% less than gasoline (except in New Orleans, where electricity is way more expensive than petrol). It's a lot cheaper in Iowa because of wind turbines.

My excuse for the trip was to see how electric runs on the road. Well enough. Time is better spent searching for a charge than running down a prostate rabbit hole on the Internet. Oscar said everything would be okay. I think he is right.

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.

Here Comes the 2024 Farm Bill, There Goes Any 2024 Reforms

By ALAN GUEBERT

The slowest dance on Capitol Hill, the writing of a new Farm Bill, gained tempo May 1 when both the House and Senate Ag committees released versions of their bills.

The House bill was a broadly worded, five-page "outline;" the Senate's, a detailed 94-page report. Noting the differences in both heft and direction, veteran Senate Ag boss Debbie Stabenow told reporters that "We have a bill. They have a framework." Ouch.

In fact, both bills are simply a starting point for the committees to cobble together the estimated \$1.5-trillion, five-year law. Despite his brevity, House Ag Committee Chairman Glenn Thompson says his bill is done and has set May 23 for its "mark up," or full committee meeting to push the stalled process forward.

It sounds silly to argue—especially after almost a year's delay—that Thompson is hustling his bill through the Republican-dominated committee but he is.

The House bill contains classic GOP priorities: a \$28-billion cut in SNAP food aid, rule changes to make the Department of Agriculture's (USDA) climate change billions available for conservation projects unrelated to climate change, and a huge boost to reference prices—shorthand to substantially increase federal subsidies—for crop insurance.

The Senate's Farm Bill doesn't feature any cuts to food

assistance, leaves USDA's "Climate Smart" initiatives untouched, and raises crop insurance reference prices a modest few percent.

The differences between the two are no surprise; Thompson and Stabenow have been waltzing around each other's priorities for months. Thompson, however, is at an institutional disadvantage. His party's paper-thin House majority means he must advance a bill attractive to both GOP and Dem moderates to increase its odds of success.

And while Michigander Stabenow must work around a similarly slim Dem majority in the Senate, she has the advantage of experience. Stabenow shepherded the past two Farm Bills through Congress from her Senate perch after House ag leaders dug in on never-going-to-happen changes. They lost.

All of this, of course, presumes some House/Senate deal that marries the competing bills before this year's extension expires Sept. 30.

Lost in loud talk and likely compromise is a question few in Congress—or, in fact, in farm and commodity groups—dare confront: Is this the best legislation to ensure the food and fiber future of America given what the next five years might bring?

What, for example, in these two bills addresses our rapidly evolving climate, foreign challenges to America's role as a leading ag exporter, ethanol's fading market, looming trade wars with China and Mexico, and the likelihood of more political dysfunction at every level of government?

If the past is prologue, the answer is very little, because today's farmers, ranchers, and ag legislators are wedded to 40 years of ethanol production, 30 years of "decoupled" farm programs, 20 years of no conservation cross compli-

ance, and over 10 years of increasing reliance on crop insurance.

Moreover, powerful new interests now promote wildly expensive, highly dubious variants—subsidized carbon pipelines, subsidized sustainable aviation fuel, subsidized solar farms, and even more subsidized crop insurance—as solutions to problems caused by these aging, taxpayer-dependent predecessors.

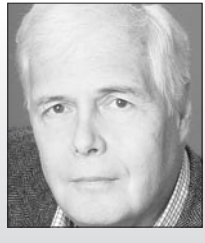
In the meantime, rural America continues its downward slide. By almost any social measure—increased poverty rates, the rising reliance on public sector income support, poor water quality, fewer rural hospitals, the loss of senior care and child care, the lack of food options—rural America is worse off now than in 1990.

Indeed, our increasingly popular, increasingly expensive federal farm programs have delivered far fewer, far bigger farms and an abundance of cheap ag commodities. But these same farm policies have also squeezed the lifeblood out of our small farms and ranches and nearly every rural community.

And nothing in either the House or Senate legislative proposals addresses that.

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

GENE LYONS



Israel is led by a cunning war criminal bent on revenge for the terrorism on Oct. 7. Hamas leaders are heedless of the lives of Palestinians in the middle.

There are No Winners in Israel and Gaza

Am I the only person in America who finds it impossible to support either side in the appalling slaughter in Gaza? Not that my personal opinion counts for anything. Does anybody's? I see people marching in the streets waving flags and chanting slogans, and I wonder whence comes their certitude.

William Butler Yeats' brilliant 1919 poem "The Second Coming" echoes fully a century later.

"The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere

The ceremony of innocence is drowned;
The best lack all conviction, while the worst

Are full of passionate intensity."

Israel is led by a cunning war criminal bent on revenge for the monstrous act of terrorism that began the war on Oct. 7; Hamas leaders are fanatical lunatics heedless of the lives of Palestinians they purport to represent.

Enraged partisans on both sides invoke their gods, each convinced that mass murder is divinely sanctioned.

"Passionate intensity," indeed.

Religious wars, America's Founding Fathers understood, are invariably the worst.

If Israel has a strategy apart from the political survival of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and his far-right coalition government, it is not evident to outside observers. They are trying to solve a problem they refuse to acknowledge with 2,000-pound bombs. The problem being the continued existence of several million essentially stateless Palestinians who have nowhere to go and every right to exist as their ancestors have for centuries on land that Israeli "settlers" claim God has promised to Jews in perpetuity.

By so doing, Israel has forfeited the good will of democratically inclined citizens and governments around the world, while accusations of antisemitic bias made against critics ring increasingly hollow. Bombing and shelling hospitals, schools, civilian neighborhoods and refugee camps, killing many thousands of women and children, and blockading aid convoys to the point of widespread famine: These things seem more the actions of a Russian than an Israeli army.

The murdering bastards of Hamas could hardly have wished for a more potent boost to their propaganda.

Writing in *The New Yorker*, David Remnick summarizes public opinion inside Israel:

"Seven months after October 7th, it is still October 8th, the day after, in the State of Israel. The country remains in mourning, a depressed state of being that alternates among rage at Israel's enemies; rage at its leaders; anxiety about the hostages in Gaza; excruciating doubt about the future of the country; and bewilderment that so much of the world has turned its attention to the horrific, ever-growing number of dead and wounded Palestinians."

Sadly, this kind of moral paralysis is echoed by what outside military observers say is a complete failure by the Netanyahu government to envision a strategy for the day after tomorrow. Even as the Israeli Defense Forces appear to be mounting a full-scale invasion of Rafah in the south of Gaza, for example, they are having to simultaneously retake neighborhoods in the north that they seized, and then abandoned, months ago.

Largely because the Netanyahu government refuses to make plans for the governance of Gaza — they refuse to form an occupation government, or allow anything resembling a Palestinian state — the Israelis appear to have stumbled into a strategic limbo: an ongoing game of Whac-A-Mole, with the civilian population left to wander in the rubble searching for food and water, like extras in a Mad Max film with donkey carts instead of souped-up trucks.

Such rhetoric, however, trivializes the awful reality. What's going on in Gaza is not so much a war as a massacre.

An American army officer recently re-

signed from the Defense Intelligence Agency, posting an open letter online. According to the *Washington Post*, Maj. Harrison Mann explained that his work in support of Israel's invasion of Gaza had burdened his conscience past the breaking point.

"The past months have presented us with the most horrific and heartbreaking images imaginable ... and I have been unable to ignore the connection between those images and my duties here. This caused me incredible shame and guilt.

"This unconditional support also encourages reckless escalation that risks wider war," he warned.

It's a humanitarian catastrophe with madmen and murderers on every side. With sane political solutions ruled out of bounds, one can only hope for moral revulsion like that of Maj. Mann to bring about a ceasefire. Peace can then sometimes grow habitual.

Here in the USA, cranks and holy warriors are getting a lot more attention than they deserve. Writing in her *New York Times* column, Michelle Goldberg quoted a Columbia University professor who spoke of feeling "jubilation and awe" on Oct. 7 and a Georgia Republican congressman who warned Columbia's president that the school was "going to be cursed by God, the God of the Bible and the God over our flag."

Accessories to murder, the two of them.

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.

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Trump's Corporate Tax Cuts Paved the Way for Inflation

The former president made it more profitable for companies to gouge us. When those cuts expire next year, we'll have an opportunity to get our money back.

By LINDSAY OWENS

Next year, when key provisions of President Trump's 2017 tax breaks to the wealthy and corporations expire, we have an opportunity to get our money back.

I'm not just talking about all the foregone tax revenue we've lost because the rich have paid so little since 2017 — though we should get that back, too. I'm talking about the money families have lost to corporate price gouging.

Let me explain.

In 2017, Republicans slashed the corporate tax rate from 35% to 21%, giving massive corporations their biggest tax windfall since Ronald Reagan was president. A few years later, as Americans emerged from a global pandemic, these same corporations drove up prices for families.

While inflation hamstrung workers and families, it didn't make a dent in corporate profits. In fact, as many CEOs boasted themselves, it's been a boon. Companies simply

passed rising costs along to consumers — and then some, bringing in record profits as a result.

All told, corporate profit margins skyrocketed to 70 year-highs. And by the end of 2023, when Americans were beyond fed up, after-tax corporate profits hit an all-time record high of \$2.8 trillion. My organization, Groundwork Collaborative, recently found that corporate profits drove over 50% of inflation in the second and third quarters of last year.

But why would a change in the corporate tax rate unleash the kind of rampant corporate profiteering we saw in the aftermath of the pandemic? Simple: It's a lot more fun to gouge customers when you get to keep more of what you pull in.

Look at Procter & Gamble, which has raised the price of everything from toothpaste to diapers. Last year, the company pulled in more than \$39 billion in profit.

If they had to pay the 35% statutory tax rate, they would have sent nearly \$14 billion to Uncle Sam. Instead, they paid a 21% rate and, using loopholes, got to keep an extra \$10 billion — which helped with their combined \$16.4 billion worth of dividends and stock buybacks for shareholders.

Corporations did well from Trump's corporate tax cuts, with executives getting big raises and shareholders receiving big buybacks. But the real bonus came when inflation hit. Corporations used the cover of supply chain issues and broader inflation to hike prices more than their higher input costs justified — and they didn't have to worry about their tax bill.

Our tax code is exacerbating some of the worst cor-

porate excesses, effectively "subsidizing corporate price gouging," as Sen. Elizabeth Warren (D-MA) described it recently. But it's not only that low tax rates incentivize companies to overcharge. Rock-bottom tax rates also make collusion more profitable, as we saw with Pioneer Oil.

Recently, the Federal Trade Commission barred former Pioneer Oil CEO Scott Sheffield from joining the board of ExxonMobil following their merger, because Sheffield allegedly colluded with OPEC to raise oil prices. As families struggled with higher energy costs, the oil and gas industry banded together to keep prices high, which according to one analyst accounted for 27% of inflation in 2021.

When the reward is higher with lower corporate taxes, executives like Sheffield are more willing to take the risk. Higher corporate taxes are both crucial for accountability and for ensuring that there's far less incentive for executives to squeeze as much as they can from their customers.

Wall Street tycoons and CEOs didn't take the heat of inflation — they fanned its flames and families got burned. It's no wonder people overwhelmingly favor a tax code that's no longer rigged for corporations, especially as they struggle with high prices.

Congress raising the corporate tax rate in 2025 is an opportunity to recoup some of the truly obscene profits corporate America raked in during this period of economic upheaval for American families. It's time Americans got their money back.

Lindsay Owens is the executive director of Groundwork Collaborative. This op-ed was distributed by OtherWords.org.

'Civil War' on Screen: Secessionists' Dream

By JOHN YOUNG

"We're American, OK?"
"OK. What kind of American are you?"

This exchange between a frightened news photographer and an AK-clenching militia man at a rebel checkpoint encapsulates the angst and confusion of the new movie "Civil War."

Diabolically framed so audiences don't know the cause, the film depicts a nation split in regional factions. The central government is in the crosshairs of advancing insurrectionists whose politics we can't discern.

On-air news is wholly disconnected from the moment: a coup in the making. Empty words of assurance from the White House ping off pavement like discharged ammo. No one is in charge here.

"It's only a movie. It's only a movie."

I'm not sure anyone who slides into a theater seat for this horror could slink away thinking, "Couldn't happen here."

Of course it could.

Observe how red-state demagogues brag about defying the federal government and court orders. Yes, you, Greg Abbott.

Observe initiatives like the "Greater Idaho" movement — right-wingers pushing for Eastern Oregon to secede from their "left coast"-dominated state.

Colorado has something similar in rural Weld County, where Republican leaders have pitched secession to Wyoming. Caw. Caw. Neither crow will fly. Both require legislative action and governors' signatures. But it sure sounds good to certain people who live in their respective information bubbles.

One of the sad ironies of the information age is how poorly informed so many Americans are. It explains why a massive chunk of our population thinks Donald Trump isn't lying in his claims about a stolen election.

Whether through cable "news" that is rank propaganda or social media tailored to one's tastes, it is easy and convenient to fence oneself off from reality.

Recently writer Thomas Haley, who lives in France, went to rural Oregon to write about the secessionist movement, emblematic of what one right-wing writer coined a "cold civil war."

The central grievance, said proponents, is a "values gap" — a state government that

undermines traditional values of "faith, family, freedom and self-sufficiency."

All right. Exactly how has the state government in Oregon undermined these things? Haley pressed for explanations.

What popped up often, he writes, was Portland treated as the "boogeyman." Its offense: representing "urban values."

The would-be secessionists kept coming back to what Portland is — a highly diverse place in which Black Lives Matter protests commanded headlines. Katy, bar the door!

Brought up most often were big-picture concerns like immigration and, of course, abortion rights, which Oregon protects by law.

If anyone who thinks the Greater Idaho movement is driven by, say, property taxes, agricultural issues, highway maintenance, school funding — you know, stuff states do — Haley wasn't finding much of that.

What he was finding was stuff that's the focus of distant MAGA barkers and cable propagandists.

It has less to do with plows, cows and wide-open spaces than it does with Sean Hannity's latest itch.

Haley's analysis brings to mind a study that found that the people most alarmed by immigration, "wokeness" and diversity initiatives are those least likely to encounter peo-

ple of color.

No wonder. "Build the wall" plays well where barbed wire rules.

As we approach another election, and as GOP candidates telegraph that should Joe Biden win we'll be in for Big Lie Part Deux and refusal to abide by voters' will, it really seems we are inching toward a breaking point.

Will we be governed by the population centers on the coasts or by the South and its no-population comrades on barren plains?

Seemingly there's a midpoint to be found somewhere, and we're not talking Topeka.

Will we be autocratized by the Prince of Retribution?

Or is there still the hope that bipartisanship and consensus can prevail, a hope embodied by an old-fashioned Joe?

"What kind of American are you?" Scary.

If "Civil War" were even more real, the question would be, "What cable channel do you watch?"

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Cover Story...

Continued from page one

students is a precious resource I always applaud. A privileged group not yet weighed down by jobs and families, they often are—and ought to be—in the risk-taking vanguard of major political movements and changes. Problems occur when youthful enthusiasm is peer-pressured and ill-informed.

Protesting the slaughter in Gaza is an unobstructed moral high road, where angels hover. Supporting Hamas, on the other hand, is a dark track to moral trainwreck. It pains me when well-meaning “liberals” waste their idealism shouting intifada slogans and celebrating terrorist murderers as freedom fighters.

These heroes are the bloodstained butchers who on Oct. 7, 2023, sank to unimaginable depths by filming the rapes and massacres of Israeli civilians. And it's not at all far-fetched to suspect that the whole point of that massacre was to trigger an Israeli counterstrike so violent that it would discredit Israel in the eyes of the world, those many thousands of sacrificed Gazans be damned. On that savage level Hamas has succeeded.

Like most one-size-fits-all ideologies, the anti-colonialist orthodoxy that sustains these campus protests is blind to nuance. No country is more guilty of winning its territory by near-genocide than the USA, which stole most of North America from indigenous tribes only because it could. A fair analogy to the Hamas atrocities on Oct. 7? Remember when the American Indian Movement occupied Wounded Knee in 1973? Imagine that Sioux warriors had raged out of their reservation to murder and rape hundreds of White South Dakotans. My guess is that the American government's retaliation would have eliminated nearly every Native American south of the Canadian border.

Unlike the United States and South Africa, or the Belgian Congo and British India in the 19th century, the situation in Israel is infinitely nuanced, complicated far beyond that simple model of European oppressors and indigenous victims. To listen to some of these student moralists, you would think they'd never studied the basic history of the 20th century, where my generation lived most of our lives. Or even the biblical history that undergirds modern Jews' claim to the land called Palestine or Judaea. I wouldn't insult any reader by insinuating

that he was ignorant of the Holocaust, one of the darkest chapters in the annals of humanity, when a culturally sophisticated “Christian” nation turned into a reeking slaughterhouse governed by madmen. Yet a recent survey found “a worrying lack of basic Holocaust knowledge” among millennial and Gen Z Americans. Eleven percent of them seemed to believe that Jews caused the Holocaust.

What happened to the Jews in Germany — aided by anti-Semite Christians in many other European nations — should set Zionist nationalism distinctly apart from colonialism and White power. Jews have enough problems with Christian fundamentalists and Muslims, without having to defend themselves from the academic Left. But Holocaust deniers — the nastiest bigots of all, haters who believe their own outrageous lies — still thrive on rightwing radio and in internet rats' nests. Even while hundreds, maybe thousands of Auschwitz survivors are still available to be interviewed.

It would be arrogant and almost senile (“Why, in my day ...”) to argue that these students are more naïve than we were in 1968. But the younger you are, the more easily you're seduced by extreme polarities — Black and White, right and wrong, good guys and bad guys. In Israel and Gaza today there are no good guys, at least none in charge. As Thomas Friedman wrote in the *New York Times*, “I am intensely both anti-Hamas and anti-Netanyahu.” Friedman's is the only sane position, and the only sane resolution to the current tragedy is the two-state solution that Friedman endorses and that both Hamas and Netanyahu's reactionary coalition continue to reject.

There's nothing wrong with detesting Benjamin Netanyahu, his government and most of his decisions. There are millions of Israeli citizens who agree with you. He's a shifty, selfish, dishonest politician who has prolonged his unfortunate career by aligning himself with a militant right wing. (Does that remind you of any American politician now in the news? But Netanyahu isn't stupid or incoherently deranged.) He's a fair target, and any decent human being is appalled by the Gaza death toll and the spreading famine, and terrified that it may continue. The extremist fallacy that too many of these student demonstrators have fallen into is a denunciation of “Zionism.”

Cursing Zionism means agreeing with Israel's enemies that the state of Israel has no right to exist. That after three-quarters

of a century of wars, struggles and great successes building a modern democracy, Jews in the Middle East should go back where they came from — where their families were imprisoned and murdered for no crimes except their ethnicity. Does a Gentile sophomore at Duke or Columbia really believe that? Zionism is a movement with a long and tangled history that begins in the 19th century. European Jews were settling in Palestine long before the Nazis and the Holocaust. But the stunning thing about the establishment of the state of Israel — stunning because it's so rare in history — is that it was a geopolitical fiat triggered by international compassion for a minority, one devastated by genocide. World leaders knew it would create a political hot spot, a resentful Arab minority and decades of conflict. When he was first presented with the idea in 1945, Franklin D. Roosevelt agonized that this Jewish nation “could only be established and maintained by force.”

While I question the commitment of the campus protestors of 2024 — not their sincerity but the depth of their research — another group of undergraduates just taught me something important I should have known. I'd carelessly assumed that many secular, assimilated American Jews were neutral or indifferent about Israel and the Zionist cause. But Jewish undergraduates at Columbia set me straight, with a well-conceived and carefully written manifesto that explains why “Zionism” is no foreign abstraction, even to middle-class American students with no direct links to the state of Israel.

“No, Judaism cannot be separated from Israel,” declares the document “In Our Name,” signed by 540 students. “Zionism is, simply put, the manifestation of that belief.”

After being “kicked out” of Russia, Libya, Ethiopia, Yemen, Afghanistan, Poland, Egypt and a long list of other nations, their statement continues, Jews realize that “Israel is the only place in the modern world where Jews can safely take ownership of their own destiny.” In other words, where their own people are truly in charge.

I get it. The history of antisemitism is a grim one, and empathy for its victims still seems to be a challenge for the kind of liberals who wave Palestinian banners. Arab lives matter — though clearly not to Hamas. But we can't blame Jewish students for suspecting that an undercurrent of old-fashioned antisemitism may lurk beneath the

humanitarian ideals of the current protests. The worst of us, the bottom-feeding swamp creatures, are always looking for an excuse to float to the surface and spit their venom. One Columbia student wearing a Star of David reported that she was cursed as “a Zionist murderer.” Other counter-protesters were confronted physically.

I also thought the protesting Duke students who walked out of a commencement address by the Jewish comedian Jerry Seinfeld were acting in poor taste, or worse. Seinfeld's recent political comments, pro-Israel but moderate, indicate that he would have endorsed the sentiments of the Columbia students who drafted “In Our Name.”

The protesters, along with their faculty and media supporters, need to understand that they are playing with fire. If their demonstrations and encampments actually save lives in Gaza, God bless them. But President Biden and Secretary Antony Blinken have been scrambling desperately, in public and in secret, to broker a ceasefire before the whole world turns on Israel.

At this writing they've failed, even with an open threat to cut off arms shipments. Rather than saving lives, it seems more likely that the student demonstrations with their careless chants and rhetoric are opening wounds and creating divisions that won't be easy to heal — in a nation that has never seemed more divided and confused. “This has been the most divisive story I've experienced in my more than three decades in journalism,” lamented *New York Times* executive editor Joseph Kahn. Kahn, whose reporters recently collected Pulitzer Prizes for their coverage, must be as well informed as any American about the crisis in Gaza. I trust him on this one, and share his alarm. How much more division can we tolerate, before the “U” in USA becomes a standing joke?

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

How Public Investment Can Create Jobs — And Ease the Child Care Crunch

Federally funded semiconductor manufacturers will have to help their employees get child care. That could be a model for other industries.

By LEA WOODS and JULIE KASHEN

Many American families are struggling to pay for child care, with the average price for licensed providers now nearly \$11,000 a year. These high prices can be a huge barrier for workers, particularly women, forcing many to cut back on hours or drop out of the workforce entirely.

A new federal program aims to help break down these barriers by requiring corporations receiving government subsidies to submit plans to meet the child care needs of their workforce.

So far, this requirement only applies to companies receiving subsidies of more than \$150 million through the 2022 CHIPS and Science Act. But this initiative could become a model for using the power of the public purse to expand child care options in manufacturing communities.

The CHIPS Act's main objective is to double U.S. production of semiconductor chips by the end of the decade, creating thousands of good jobs for a diverse workforce. To qualify for a significant slice of this historic bill's \$39 billion in subsidies, corporations must submit plans to provide child care services for their manufacturing and construction workers.

The semiconductor manufacturing workforce is projected to grow by 33% over the next decade, but there are not enough qualified workers to fill these new positions.

Companies can address this gap by recruiting, training, and retaining workers who are underrepresented in the sector, including women. The CHIPS child care requirement is a recognition that supportive services are critical to achieving that goal.

Ideally, CHIPS grantees will partner with state and local governments, community-based organizations, and labor unions to develop child care plans that meet local needs and ensure quality wages and working conditions for early educators. Developing community benefit agreements that integrate the companies' workforce commitments with child care strategies and community feedback is one possible approach.

Poorly implemented plans could exacerbate inequities in the child care sector. For instance, if companies don't expand child care supply in communities with semiconductor production facilities, the increased demand will drive up tuition prices and reduce child care availability for local families.

Partnering exclusively with corporate child care providers could also create the risk of expanding private equity firm ownership of such services. This model has a poor track record of undermining children's safety, early educators' wages, and community- and home-based child care providers.

At the Century Foundation, we've been closely monitoring two CHIPS grantees — Intel and Micron — and seeing some hopeful signs.

In Oregon, where Intel is planning to expand one of their facilities, a new law engages community stakeholders and combines state funds with CHIPS grantee contributions to expand child care capacity near semiconductor factories.

Micron's preparations for a new plant in New York have involved working with state and community leaders to grow supply by offering on-site child care and by funding a program to help New Yorkers start their own home-based child care programs.

Micron will also offer workers child care subsidies, which, when paired with its plans to build supply, can make child care more affordable without driving up costs for local families.

If well implemented, the CHIPS program will demonstrate that public investment in both physical and care infrastructure are key to growing our economy. Our ultimate goal remains guaranteed child care for every family. All children deserve the opportunity to be cared for in settings that allow them to thrive, and parents need the peace of mind that their children are safe and nurtured while they're on the job.

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Stormy Dished the Dirty Details that Trump Hid From Voters on '16 Election Eve

By DICK POLMAN

Let's contrast the candidates. This says it all: In Washington on May 7, President Biden delivered a high-minded speech condemning antisemitism and warning us that the veneer of civilization is thin. Meanwhile, in Manhattan, lowlife Donald Trump stewed while the porn star he screwed dished the dirty details of what transpired while his third wife was home with a newborn.

Under oath, Stormy Daniels told the story that Trump was desperate to hide from the voters on '16 election eve – so desperate that he personally reimbursed his lawyer for hushing her up, faking the election-interference payments as “legal expenses.” Her tale of woe was all quite cringy: He did his quickie without a condom, he got spanked with a *Forbes* magazine, he said that Stormy reminded him of his daughter (?!), and Stormy weathered the encounter by, in her words, “staring at the ceiling. I didn't know how I got there.”

Stormy, we get it. We've spent the last eight years staring at the ceiling, wondering how we got here.

Donald Trump, Drenched in Tabloid Sleaze

By JOE CONASON

Back in the antediluvian era of American politics, perpetrating dirty tricks was considered proof of bad character and potentially disqualifying for public office, depending on circumstances.

But as with so many other aspects of public life, the rise of former President Donald Trump heralded a steep decline in political ethics and the way that campaigns are run. And now, after nearly a decade of Trump-style politics, the sleazy conduct exposed in sworn testimony at his New York trial is dismissed with a shrug – especially by Republicans who ask nothing better of their leaders.

Leave aside for a moment the dubious practice of paying off women – an adult movie star and a former *Playboy* model – to ensure their silence about illicit trysts with Melania Trump's husband. (Donald Trump, who promised a spot on his “Celebrity Apprentice” TV show to porn actress Stormy Daniels, seems to have been paying at both

ends.) Evangelical Christians who used to proclaim their indignation about licentious sexuality have discredited themselves thoroughly, which should not surprise anyone who has observed their antics over the past few decades.

What Trump did to silence Daniels and Karen McDougal was unsavory, and his effort to conceal it was probably illegal, but the truly dirty conspiracy involved the smearing of his political opponents.

According to the testimony of David Pecker, his friend and coconspirator who ran the *National Enquirer* tabloid, Trump and his henchman attorney Michael Cohen promoted the publication of scurrilous lies about his rivals on its front page.

At the same moment that Trump bestowed the nickname “Lyn' Ted” on Ted Cruz, his final opponent for the 2016 Republican nomination, he and his crew were overseeing the publication of outrageous lies about the Texas senator. In spring 2016, the *Enquirer* featured an absurd story, complete with a doctored photo, claiming that Cruz's father Rafael, an ordained minister, had been consorting with Lee Harvey Oswald just before Oswald assassinated President John F. Kennedy.

Insane as that accusation was, Trump used it to distract Republican voters from criticism of him by Cruz. On Fox News, he

I won't speculate on whether her testimony will help or hurt the prosecution, whether it will sway the jury one way or another, or whether the arguably inflammatory details might help Trump if he were to appeal a criminal conviction. In my humble opinion, the paper-trail criminal conspiracy – the entire panoply of fakery – seems sufficiently strong, and Stormy's testimony merely demonstrates why the Duke of Dirtbaggery was so fixated on buying her silence. But, all legal issues aside, here's the key question:

Are we really so debased and debauched and benumbed as a nation that we'd actually stoop to re-hiring someone so abysmally sordid?

I'm old enough to remember a time when cheating on your wife with a porn star who reminds you of your daughter would banish you from polite society and any elective office. I'm old enough to remember the 1990s, when conservative Republicans and evangelical Christians marketed the mantra Character Counts and insisted that President Clinton's louche acts rendered him unfit to serve. Back then, the leader of the right-wing Family Research Council decreed that “Character counts – in a people, in the institutions of our society, and in our national leadership.” The leader of an allied group, Focus on the Family, denounced Clinton for triggering a “profound moral crisis.” The director of the Christian Coalition said, “We have to be a nation that expects the highest from our public officials.”

But today these people are craven power junkies, having trashed their purported values for blind tribal loyalty. When asked about Trump's Bible-breaching behavior, they talk about “forgiveness” and “mercy,” and “do-overs” (Fam-

ily Research Council's Tony Perkins: “There's an understanding that we are all fallen”). Trump's grassroots dupes liken him to Jesus. House Speaker Mike Johnson, who parades his Christian devotion, is all in. And Republican congressmen are lowering the bar for Trump; witness Mark Molinaro from upstate New York: “If you want somebody with a good character to be president, you need to look back in history on all the dirtbags that we've elected president.”

Looking ahead, the big unknown is whether these flaming hypocrites will be outvoted by decent Americans who refuse to abide sleaze. Indeed, we were reminded again May 7 that the criminal defendant is not universally popular within Republican ranks; in the Indiana presidential primary, long-departed Nikki Haley drew 22% of the voters – the same anti-Trump sentiment we've seen in virtually all party contests this year. If Trump fails to consolidate his base, he could get an autumn spanking far stronger than Stormy's.

By the way, here's what the criminal defendant said about the COVID pandemic, four years ago in May: “This is going to go away without a vaccine. It's going to go away, and it's – we're not going to see it again, hopefully, after a period of time.”

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Much of the fake news published by the tabloid about Clinton was pitched by Steve Bannon, the Trump adviser who swindled thousands of donors to his “Build the Wall” charity – and only evaded prison thanks to a corrupt pardon. Naturally, Bannon is back and, like Trump, has endured no opprobrium for his amply proven crimes. Instead, he is a powerful influence on the far right and in Republican circles.

Back when Trump and his cronies oversaw the publication and broadcasting of all those falsehoods, he said repeatedly that he had nothing to do with the *Enquirer* and its raging defamations. He seemed to sense there was some shame in that kind of sick deception. But he and his attorneys no longer need to deny any of it, because on the American right, the worst kinds of deception are accepted and even acclaimed, while their perpetrator is idolized.

And still, they will lecture the rest of us about “morality.”

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Republicans of Color Aren't Standing Up to Racism

By ELWOOD WATSON

In early May, right-wing commentator Ann Coulter told former Republican presidential candidate Vivek Ramaswamy to his face she would not have voted for him because he's Indian.

“There is a core national identity that is the identity of the WASP,” Coulter said on Ramaswamy's “Truth” podcast, using an acronym for White Anglo-Saxon Protestant. “And that doesn't mean we can't take anyone else in a Sri Lankan or a Japanese, or an Indian. But the core around which the nation's values are formed is the WASP.”

Interestingly, Ramaswamy appeared unfazed by her insulting remarks and declared they shared an opposition to dual citizenship. He further stated, “that a child of immigrants would have greater loyalty to the country than disgruntled seventh-generation WASPs.” Despite such blatant, vulgar racism, Ramaswamy later praised her on social media, writing, “I disagree with her but respect that she had the guts to speak her mind.”

The truth is Ramaswamy is not alone in this regard. There are more than a few conservatives of color who have engaged in the art of self-debasement.

Back in 2021, South Carolina Senator Tim Scott claimed with a straight face woke

supremacy was as bad as White supremacy. In response, former CNN anchor Don Lemon spoke truth to power, alerting the senator, in no uncertain terms, to the undeniable truth that there is no comparison between the two camps. As the days passed, a few other commentators took Scott to task for his wayward, untoward commentary.

A Black man who hails from humble beginnings, (as he has described his background and upbringing) and the inhabitant of a state that has had an ugly, intensive, brutal and oppressive history of mistreatment of Black people (even by southern state standards), Scott likely knew better than to utter such dishonest foolishness. To add insult to injury, he went to Fox News and tried (unconvincingly) to defend his disingenuous remarks.

More recently, Scott has come under not-so-friendly fire, due to his lap dogging for Donald Trump, telling the former president that “he just loves him.”

Scott is a person of color in a party that has declared political war on people of color. Thus, in order to save face and remain in the good graces of his GOP colleagues, Scott has opted to engage in shameful acts of intellectual dishonesty. His vacuous opportunism and misapplied priorities are sad and shameful.

We can't ignore Nikki Haley, who behaved in a manner similar to that of Vivek Ramaswamy. The former governor and UN ambassador initially tied herself into political pretzels by refusing to denounce the Confederate flag or criticize her former boss. She

insulted many people when she argued that she disagrees with those who deny that the confederate flag represents racism, yet nonetheless respects their point of view.

Seriously, ambassador Haley? How can you simultaneously be for and against racism? Taking such a position is not that much different from when President Trump referred to White supremacists and anti-racist activists as “very fine people.” The latter group is commendable. The first group is anything but.

Trump went after Haley's birth name, Nimarata, in yet another example of the former president employing racially-coded dog whistles to attack his presidential rivals. Trump also falsely stating she is ineligible to become president because her parents were not US citizens when she was born in 1972. Haley initially behaved as if nothing was wrong. It was only afterwards, under extreme criticism from never Trumpers and independent Republicans, that she finally took off the gloves and began swinging.

Haley, who commented that her father had to teach at a historically Black college and university because he was unable to secure employment at a White institution of higher learning, continues to espouse the notion that “America was never a racist nation.” She does this even as Trump continues to levy thinly-veiled racist attacks at her.

Throughout history, there have been many others who have embraced groups and movements that stand in direct opposition to their religious or cultural heritage. It is important to note that such individuals

exist on the political left as well. Opportunism is a bipartisan enterprise.

Some of this can be chalked up to confusion, self-hatred or other psychological maladies. Regardless, such retrograde antics perpetrated by intensely deluded and disingenuous men and women are a sad commentary, and says a lot more about them as opposed to the people or movements they have decided to fervently attack.

Elwood Watson is a professor of history, Black studies, and gender and sexuality studies at East Tennessee State University. His columns are distributed by Cagle Cartoons newspaper syndicate. He is also an author and public speaker.



Solidarity Sends the Bullies Packing

By DAVID McCALL

Management at Amfuel tried to bully Jo Tucker and her 200 co-workers—most of them Black women, a number of them single moms—into accepting dozens of unnecessary concessions in a new contract.

For four years, however, the manufacturing workers in Magnolia, Ark., remained strong and resolute as the company tried to break the union and wear them down.

And then, just as the workers prepared to launch an unfair labor practice strike recently, Amfuel surrendered. Because of their unflinching solidarity, the workers beat back the concessions and won a contract with life-changing raises, additional holidays and other benefit enhancements.

“We didn’t lose anything,” noted Tucker, a negotiating committee member and the financial secretary for United Steelworkers (USW) Local 607L. “That was good.”

Employers frequently try to kill morale, punish workers, or force them into concessionary contracts by dragging their feet at the bargaining table. But as union members at Amfuel and other companies prove time and again, a united front sends the bullies

packing.

“We all hung in there together,” Tucker said of the workers, who make fuel cells for military helicopters and fighter jets. “It wasn’t easy. But we prevailed, and I thank God that we did.”

“It was teamwork,” she added. “Everybody was working together.”

As the workers geared up for bargaining in 2020, Amfuel received an infusion of money from new investors and additional support from the Defense Department and local community leaders. The company embarked on a growth plan, intending to rely ever more heavily on the skilled work force. It even bragged publicly about giving workers a bigger voice on the job.

Yet Amfuel stunned workers with a contract proposal demanding nearly 70 concessions.

Among other untenable proposals, Amfuel wanted to abolish seniority, reduce vacation pay and eliminate the grievance process, which would have made it easier for management to try to eliminate workers for any reason or none at all.

Tucker, who’s worked at the plant for nearly 30 years, feared the company would use the changes to get rid of dozens of her friends and neighbors.

“We knew we could not let them have that,” she said. “We knew that they were trying to break us, and the only thing we had was each other. We just knew to stick together. We really did.”

Amfuel not only dragged out the bargaining process but encouraged workers to leave the USW—a ploy that only drew the union members closer together.

Management simply tried picking on

the wrong group of people.

Tucker and her co-workers share a strong bond forged by many years of working alongside each other—and by the pride that comes from making the bullet-resistant fuel cells that help protect America’s military. That pride swelled a few years ago when the workers visited a local airport to see one of the jets they helped to make.

In addition to camaraderie on the job, workers in the small town often see each other in churches, grocery stores and restaurants. Tucker said she pressed on less for herself than for the bargaining unit’s single moms, some of whom risked having to shoulder new jobs—along with the possibility of longer commutes and overnight shifts—without a strong contract at Amfuel.

“When you have small kids, you can’t just pick up and work out of town,” she explained. “You don’t get to see your kids. That’s hard on a child.”

As the talks wore on, the workers organized a toy drive, picnic, holiday party and other events to help sustain unity. They wore union-issued T-shirts to build morale and filed charges against the company’s unfair labor practices.

Local 607L activists handed out flyers, held regular meetings and took other steps to keep workers engaged.

USW members from other locals in Arkansas as well as from Louisiana and Texas lent support, driving home the message that all of Magnolia had a stake in the workers’ fight for a fair contract.

“It helps everyone,” said Local 607L President Larry Clayton, noting he and his colleagues support local businesses and pay the taxes supporting schools and community

amenities.

Despite the unfair treatment they faced every day, Local 607L members continued performing their work with the utmost skill and professionalism.

“Everybody still showed up and did their job. We worked through the pandemic,” said Clayton, pointing out that employers provoke these kinds of battles to demean workers and deny them their fair share.

“They wanted to rewrite the whole contract to where the company has all the power and the people working on the floor have none,” observed Clayton, who’s worked at Amfuel for nearly four decades. “It would be like not having a union at all.”

Then, as workers prepared to launch the unfair labor practice strike they never wanted, Amfuel finally corrected course. It dropped demands for the concessions, began listening to workers and agreed to a fair contract.

Tucker and Clayton recalled a particularly poignant moment at the contract ratification meeting when a worker with a handful of children explained how the significant raises will enable her to support her family in a way she long wanted. Other members shared similar thoughts.

“I was excited for them,” said Tucker, who hopes the victory inspires other workers to keep fighting for what they deserve.

“Stick together,” she advised. “Stay the course. Even if it sometimes doesn’t feel like it, you are winning.”

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

Former Far-Right Hard-Liner Says Billionaires Are Using School Board Races to Sow Distrust in Public Education

The largesse from billionaires Tim Dunn and brothers Farris and Dan Wilks has made its way into local politics across Texas. Courtney Gore, a Republican school board member in Granbury, says it’s part of their strategy to build support for vouchers.

By JEREMY SCHWARTZ, ProPublica
Co-published with The Texas Tribune

When Courtney Gore ran for a seat on her local school board in 2021, she warned about a movement to indoctrinate children with “leftist” ideology. After 2 1/2 years on the board, Gore said she believes a much different scheme is unfolding: an effort by wealthy conservative donors to undermine public education in Texas and install a voucher system in which public money flows to private and religious schools.

Gore points to West Texas billionaires Tim Dunn and brothers Farris and Dan Wilks, who have contributed to various political action committees that have poured millions into legislative candidates who have promoted vouchers. The men also fund or serve on the boards of a host of public policy and advocacy organizations that have led the fight for vouchers in Texas.

In recent years, the largesse from Dunn and the Wilks brothers has reached local communities across Texas, including Granbury, near Fort Worth, where fights over library books, curriculum and vouchers have dominated the community conversation.

Gore said that she believes school board candidates are being recruited, at times without their full knowledge, in an effort “to cause as much disruption and chaos as possible” and weaken community faith in local school

districts.

In 2021, two local men — former state representative Mike Lang and political consultant Nate Criswell — asked Gore to run for school board. At the time, the three were co-hosts of a web-based talk show that targeted local officials they believed were insufficiently conservative and were straying from GOP platform positions. They took frequent aim at the Granbury school district, which they alleged was allowing explicit sexual content into school libraries and teaching divisive ideas about race.

Gore broke from the group shortly after taking office in January 2022, when she concluded that the materials she had warned about on the campaign trail were not present in Granbury schools. She claims the men and other leaders of the far-right faction in Hood County, home to Granbury, dismissed her findings. They continued to pummel the district over books and curriculum, supported school board candidates who sought to remove a growing number of titles from library shelves, and worked to derail three bond elections that would have funded new and renovated buildings for the overcrowded district.

That’s when Gore said she began to piece together connections that hadn’t been previously apparent to her.

Lang, a Republican who represented Hood County in the state Legislature for four years, received more than \$600,000 in campaign contributions — more than half his total — from direct donations from or PACs funded by the Wilks brothers and Dunn. On the campaign trail, Lang supported providing public money for private schools and, in 2017, voted against a House measure that prohibited funding for school vouchers. He did not respond to requests for comment.

In addition, in January 2022, Criswell’s political consulting company received \$3,000 from Defend Texas Liberty, one of the PACs funded by the Wilks family and Dunn. The PAC donated another \$3,000 to Criswell this year when he unsuccessfully ran for Hood County commissioner.

Criswell declined to answer specific questions but said he has closed his consulting firm, Criswell Strategies, and has “stepped away from the local political scene, aside from occasionally sharing posts on social media.”

According to her campaign finance reports, Gore did not receive any money from the men. But another school board candidate, her then-ally Melanie Graft, received a \$100 in-kind contribution from Defend Texas Liberty for advertising expenses. Graft

did not respond to written questions or requests for comment.

“I was knee-deep in it,” Gore said about the local connections to the billionaires. “I guess I was just too naive. I should have known better.”

Neither Dunn nor a representative of the Wilks family responded to questions. Dunn recently penned an opinion piece in the *Midland Reporter-Telegram* arguing that he was not the leader of the statewide push for vouchers and has never made public statements on the topic.

Nearly two decades ago, however, Dunn argued in favor of a voucher-like program, saying that the Texas Public Policy Foundation, a conservative think tank on whose board he has served for more than 20 years, supported such an idea “as long-time advocates of eliminating the government monopoly in public education.” In March, Texas Gov. Greg Abbott, who is among the state’s fiercest advocates for directing public education funds to private schools, credited the organization’s longtime advocacy with bringing the state to the “threshold” of a voucher-like program.

Dunn is also the founder of Midland Classical Academy, a private school that offers its approximately 600 K-12 students a “Classical Education from a Biblical Worldview,” according to its website. The school believes in interpreting the Bible in its literal sense, which it takes to mean that marriage can only be between a man and a woman and that there are only two genders.

Zachary Maxwell, Lang’s former chief of staff who later worked for Empower Texans, a pro-voucher public policy organization whose associated PAC was largely funded by Dunn and the Wilks brothers, would not speak about his time there, citing a nondisclosure agreement he signed when he left the organization.

Maxwell, however, said he has become disenchanted by Dunn and the Wilks family’s efforts to exert control over the state’s

politics. He said Hood County hard-liners, some of whom have close ties to PACs funded by Dunn and the Wilks brothers, were trying to use Gore and Graft to drive a wedge between rural residents and their school district in an effort to build support for vouchers. The women’s presence on the school board enhanced the legitimacy of the group’s claims about pornography in libraries and Marxist indoctrination, Maxwell said.

“It’s all about destroying the trust with the citizens to the point where they would tolerate something like doing away with public schools,” he said in an interview.

Over the past two years, Abbott has teamed up with the Texas Public Policy Foundation, embarking on a tour of Texas towns to promote vouchers. Following the narrow defeat of voucher legislation in November in the Texas House of Representatives, the Republican governor campaigned to unseat lawmakers in his party who opposed such legislation. He successfully ousted five of them.

One of the Republicans who lost in the primary was Glenn Rogers, whose rural district sits just north of Hood County and whom Abbott endorsed in 2020. This time around, Abbott gave \$200,000 in campaign support to Rogers’ pro-voucher opponent. Dunn and the Wilks brothers donated another \$100,000.

Rogers, who represented Hood County until 2021, when lawmakers changed the boundaries of his district, said he believes privatizing public education is at the core of Dunn and the Wilks brothers’ political efforts in Hood County and across the state.

“Whether it’s at the school board level or it’s what’s happening in the Texas Legislature right now, that’s their end goal,” he said.

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MARY SANCHEZ



The Biden presidential campaign is targeting Latino men in bilingual political ads, but a Latina mother might be a better choice to adjust attitudes.

Biden Campaign – Ask a Latina What We Think of Trump

The Biden presidential campaign is shelling out more than \$1 million in bilingual political ads in May alone to rap the knuckles of Latino machismo.

Too bad the ad campaign sidesteps who wears the pants – so to speak – in Latino culture.

A Latina might have more sway. An abuela, a grandmother with a sweet disposition and a sharp sense of wit and timing, would have been a better choice to adjust a few male attitudes.

Or maybe a mother figure, someone with the memory of what her son was like swaddled and still pooping in diapers. She could speak with influence to her now adult son.

In all seriousness, men do hold the power to influence (whether they realize it or not) the behavior of other men. And that's what the Biden campaign is hopeful to tap in an attempt to lure more Latino votes in the presidential election.

There are 4 million more Latino votes to be had than the last presidential election, with 36.2 million eligible Latino voters.

But it's Latinas who govern much of family life. They are the matriarchs who are rarely as subservient as people outside of the family unit, and those who offer quick takes on the culture, might assume.

Biden's ad campaign is called "Tough" or "fuerte" in Spanish.

Its focus is former President Donald Trump's sexist views of women, which unfortunately for the women around him, have been abundantly displayed through the years.

Need a refresher?

Well, you could tune in to the current New York criminal trial where Trump was chastised by the judge for cursing and grumbling as adult-film actress Stormy Daniels testified.

Trump is accused of paying off Daniels to stay quiet about their alleged sexual affair in an attempt to protect his 2016 bid for the White House.

Her testimony puts the "alleged" part to rest, at least from her vantage point.

And then there's the Access Hollywood tape where Trump used a crude name for female genitals, claiming that when you are famous, women gladly let men like him do whatever they want to them.

There's any number of other examples – no need to draw up the laundry list now.

In the ad, Joe Biden's message that real men aren't like Trump is delivered by a US Marine, a man who did multiple tours in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Facing the camera, Cesar Carreon says, "I'm a marine. I know what tough is. And a guy like Donald Trump that attacks women, and brags about it, that's not tough."

Carreon adds: "I'm with Joe Biden. Because he'll give my daughters their freedom back."

Yes, the bilingual ads are intended to signal Biden's promise to restore federal protections for abortion.

But the advertisement doesn't mention abortion. Nor does it refer to reproductive rights, access, maternal healthcare, or any of the words that might clue a viewer to the Supreme Court's 2022 decision to overturn *Roe v. Wade*.

The administration apparently intended the script to be more subtle.

It's possible it tried to steer clear of many Latinos' faith in Catholicism, which does not condone abortion; to the contrary, it considers it a moral evil.

The hope is that Latinos who might be attracted to the pseudo tough-guy veneer of Trump will see the light and want to step away from supporting him.

And in doing so, the ad suggests, they will show that they love their daughters and want what's best for them. Such a message is a stretch at best.

They should have featured a Latina.

Because it's more likely that a woman could tell a man, Latino or not, a few things about how everything that Trump brags about, disgusts women.

First, realize that machismo is not nec-

essarily a negative trait. In its healthier forms, it doesn't seek to degrade women. Rather, it's merely a code of conduct that depicts the man as protector, but not because a woman is viewed as weak. He'd offer her his best out of respect and love.

When it's twisted or becomes an overblown sense of self, that's where the aggressive, hyper-sexualized version of masculinity takes over. This version involves a misogynistic dominance in a way that degrades even other men who are seen as not up to par. Machismo's counter – its symbiotic twin for females – is Marianismo.

It's lesser known but studied, and does help accentuate how important women are in Latino culture, especially within family life.

Again, this characteristic pulls from strict gender codes intended for heterosexual Latinas. And it too, can become unhealthy, when taken to extremes.

It's a long way to November and there's likely much more planned in the Biden campaign to influence Latino voters.

It shouldn't take advertisements.

Anyone willing to open their eyes and look somewhat objectively should be able to see that Trump is no role model at all, certainly no hero.

But ask a Latina if an extra voice is called for to convince voters. She'll deliver a resounding message about the inappropriateness of Trump. And she'll do it with grit and grace.

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Biden's New Tariffs on Chinese EVs

His policies on a broad range of issues are superb. Why don't they translate into electoral appeal?

By ROBERT KUTTNER

Joe Biden May 14 announced that he will increase U.S. tariffs on Chinese electric vehicles from 27.5% to 102.5%. He's not doing this as an election-year stunt. The increase is the culmination of an extensive investigation of China's illegal subsidies and dumping, conducted under Section 301 of the Trade Act. The tariffs will extend to EV batteries. He also announced tariffs on solar cells, steel, aluminum and medical equipment.

That investigation was begun in 2018, under Trump. But though Trump demonized China, the big difference between Trump's China policy and Biden's is that Biden has connected China policy to domestic industrial policy in a way that Trump never did.

Biden's multifaceted China policy has a coherence that Trump never managed. Trump's was hobbled by endless infighting between his China hawks (Steve Bannon, Stan Pottinger, Peter Navarro, Robert Lighthizer) and his self-interested Wall Street globalists (Jared Kushner and the Goldman alums Steve Mnuchin and Gary Cohn). Trump himself was ambivalent because he admired and envied China's leader Xi Jinping, who played Trump's vanity like a violin.

Biden has recognized the strategic competition between the US and China in a way that no previous administration ever has, and he has connected all the dots—advancing US technology, reviving supply chains, creating domestic jobs, and resisting China's military threats, spying, and financial investments in the West.

Twelve years ago, Chinese EVs had 0.1% of global sales. Today, led by BYD, they have 60%, and their extensive subsidies and targeted pricing allow them to underprice any Western competitor. BYD's Dolphin Mini costs \$21,000 in Mexico. The cheapest US equivalent is the Nissan Leaf at \$29,000 or the Chevrolet Bolt at \$27,000. In China, however, the Dolphin Mini costs just 69,800 yuan (\$9,640), far less than a Tesla.

US tariffs will not affect Chinese sales in third countries. The EU is also considering tariffs, and the Biden administration is pro-

moting Western policy coordination.

At the same time, Biden has done well at sorting out areas where the US and China can collaborate. The week before Biden's tariff announcement, John Podesta, who took over as White House climate ambassador from now-retired John Kerry, met with his Chinese counterpart, Liu Zhenmin, and announced a joint US-China initiative to accelerate reduction of dependence on coal-fired plants and increased deployment of solar.

ON ISSUE AFTER ISSUE, RANGING FROM INFLATION, jobs, and technology, to challenging corporate abuses of consumers, most recently from the airlines, Biden's policies are admirable. But it's not at all clear that Biden can turn these achievements into electoral strength.

Why not? The problem is Biden himself. And sometimes Biden's handlers make it worse.

Consider Biden's CNN interview May 8 with Erin Burnett. I agreed with everything he said. And I was dismayed by the way he said it.

His delivery was frail and reedy. He kept stumbling and groping for words. Worse, the White House made the boneheaded decision that the most momentous US-Israel policy change in decades would be dropped in as an aside, in the second half of the inter-

This Graduation Season, Debt Relief Still Feels Out of Reach for Young Borrowers

The Biden administration is moving to cancel debt for borrowers who've been in repayment for decades. What about those paying steep college costs today?

By CANDACE MILNER

College is expensive – and for most Americans, higher education is still largely unaffordable.

The cost of college continues to rise at rates that salaries and income aren't keeping up with. This is especially true for low-income and working-class students who must depend on alternative ways to fund their education like grants, scholarships, and

– most notoriously – loans.

Students and their parents depend on loans to access college and the economic mobility that comes with it. According to an Urban Institute Study, 70% of students who get a bachelor's degree incur student loan debt by graduation.

Students whose families already have less wealth, including students of color, are especially impacted. And Black women, who struggle to overcome wage gaps at every education level, are more burdened by student loan debt than any other demographic.

First-generation students have a harder time repaying student loans because they have more debt and fewer safety nets in place after college. Additionally, the parents in many low- and middle-income families take out loans to cover the education of their children, creating intergenerational student debt burdens.

During his campaign, President Biden promised to bring Americans relief through widespread student debt cancellation.

He recently announced a new plan aimed at making good on this promise by

tackling runaway interest for borrowers who owe more than they originally borrowed, canceling loans for borrowers who've been in repayment for two or more decades, automating relief for existing forgiveness programs, and canceling loans for borrowers who were scammed by fraudulent institutions.

Most recently, the administration canceled \$6 billion in student loan debt for borrowers who attended and were misled by a former for-profit college group, The Art Institutes.

But while Biden's plans bring hope for borrowers, many young borrowers aren't seeing enough relief.

More than half of student loan debt in the US is held by people who belong to the Millennial and Gen. Z generations. Under Biden's proposed rule, these younger borrowers – who haven't yet been in repayment for 20 years and who don't qualify for current Public Service Loan Forgiveness or Income-Driven Repayment Plans – can't access debt relief.

Biden has signaled that his administration understands this and that he will re-

lease a plan to provide relief to borrowers experiencing hardship. This plan will target borrowers at high risk of defaulting on their student loans and families with expenses that make it harder to pay back loans, like medical debt or child care.

As young borrowers wait patiently for the hardship rule to be finalized and to learn exactly what will and will not be included in it, one thing remains clear: Needing student loans to pay for education is a hardship. Borrowers shouldn't be forced to decide between paying back mountains of student loan debt and reaching other financial milestones like buying a home, saving for retirement, or growing their family.

As we applaud the important strides Biden is making to ensure Americans are no longer stifled by student loan debt, we must remember that the true goal is to cancel all student loans and to ensure younger borrowers get relief until we reach that ultimate goal.

Candace Milner is the racial equity policy associate for Public Citizen. This op-ed was distributed by OtherWords.org.

Trump is Willing to Trade Our Children's Future for a Billion Dollars

The willingness to destroy our collective home in exchange for riches is one of the most extreme examples of greed run amok ...

By THOM HARTMANN

"Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed..."
— Jesus (Luke 12:15)

"My whole life I've been greedy, greedy, greedy. I've grabbed all the money I could get. I'm so greedy." — Donald Trump

The *Washington Post* revealed May 9 that Donald Trump told a group of fossil fuel executives that if they'd give him a billion-dollar bribe, he'd use it to become president and then eliminate all of President Biden's environmental regulations and prevent any new ones from coming into law.

The industry barons had been grumbling that they'd already spent more than \$400 million lobbying the Biden administration over the past year to little effect. They really shouldn't have a basis to complain: just the three largest oil companies operating in America made \$85.65 billion dollars in profits last year, which they could split up among shareholders and senior executives.

Nonetheless, Trump's brazen appeal for them to grease his palm seemed to shock even these hardened planet-killers.

This comes the same week that *The Guardian* broke the story that most of the world's top climate scientists surveyed — all of them among the 843 authors of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change's most recent report — believe the planet is going to crash through the 1.5° Celsius threshold they'd previously defined as a disaster scenario. Most are now expecting us to hit 2.5° or even 3° Celsius, levels that could make much of the planet uninhabitable for humans. And it's going to happen a hell of a lot sooner than anybody had anticipated just a decade ago.

It's gotten so bad that some climate scientist's are questioning the wisdom of their own families having children.

In other words, Donald Trump and his Republican friends are explicitly willing to trade our and our children's future for a billion dollars. And they couldn't have offered this deal to the industry if five corrupt Republicans on the Supreme Court hadn't legalized political bribery of both politicians and judges (like themselves and Aileen Cannon) when they overturned the good government laws Congress passed in the wake of the Nixon bribery scandals in the 1970s.

It may have been an unnecessary effort on Trump's part.

The Saudis and Russians — who both desperately want Trump back in the White House — cut oil production over the past two months by 1.4 million barrels a day with the apparent goal of driving US gasoline prices up past \$6 a gallon in time for the election this fall.

Remember the GOP hysteria around gas prices hitting \$5 a gallon in October and November of 2022 just in time for the midterm elections, with Fox "News" hosts hyping stickers being put on gas pumps across the country bearing a picture of Biden pointing to the price with an "I did that" slogan? It almost singlehandedly gave us GOP control of the House of Representatives and was the result of a similar Saudi and Russian production cut.

Now, it looks like we ain't seen nothing yet.

When he was president, Trump allowed the Saudis to buy the largest gasoline refinery in America (at Port Arthur, Texas); between their oil supply cuts and the possibility they could reduce that refinery's output this fall (no doubt because of "maintenance issues") gas could easily puncture the \$7 a gallon ceiling by November.

Analysts found that throughout the midterm election year 2022, there was a nearly one-to-one inverse correlation between the price of gasoline, Americans' perception of the state of the economy, and approval ratings for the Biden administration. As the *Washington Post* pointed out that year, there was an estimated 91% inverse correlation between the price of gas and the popularity of Democrats when they're in power: as gas prices go up, Democrats' approval ratings (and electability) measurably and predictably go down.

The willingness to destroy our collective home in exchange for riches is one of the most tragic and extreme examples of greed run amok. Which shouldn't surprise us: for the past century, the unofficial slogan of the GOP has been "Greed is Good!" as memorialized in the 1987 movie "Wall

Street."

Will Rogers used to tell the story that when he was a kid the way he learned which visitors to his parents ranch were Republicans was that they were the ones his dad told him to keep an eye on so they didn't steal anything. Decades may have passed, but the GOP hasn't changed a bit.

Their standard-bearer this year is the living incarnation of that slogan. As Trump told a cheering audience when he was first running for president:

"I like money. I'm very greedy. I'm a greedy person. I shouldn't tell you that, I'm a greedy — I've always been greedy. I love money, right?"

The good news is that there is, increasingly, pushback from the Biden administration and Democrats in the states.

Five Blue states are now looking at ways to hold fossil fuel moguls and their companies accountable for the damage climate change-fueled extreme weather has inflicted on their people. Vermont is leading the way, with legislation that passed their House in May and is now headed to the Vermont Senate, almost certainly carrying a large enough majority to overcome a veto by the state's Republican governor.

The bill would set up a \$2 billion fund to pay for weather damage, funded by a tax of sorts on the fossil fuel industry. New York, California, Massachusetts, and Maryland are all looking at similar legislation this year.

But as long as the Supreme Court's corrupt 5-4 *Citizens United* decision stands and Republican politicians and judges are eager to take bribes from the industry, these efforts will be purely remedial, the equivalent of putting Band-Aids on cancerous lesions.

These tragic realities highlight the extraordinary stakes of this year's election, which will not only determine the future survival of American democracy but also the destiny of most all life on Earth. The GOP's embrace of greed isn't just a moral issue any more: it's now threatening us all.

Double-check your voter registration and reach out to wake up everybody you know. Given how rapidly extreme weather is amplifying, causing death and destruction across America (and the world), your own family's survival may depend on it.

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. See the online version, with links.

Despairing? Here's a Bold, Populist, Popular and Progressive Domestic Agenda for 2025 and Beyond

How the Congressional Progressive Caucus is driving the center of the Democratic Party in a new direction.

By KATRINA VANDEN HEUVEL

What are the stakes in the elections of 2024? The mantra for Democrats is already well defined: Democracy is on the ballot; abortion is on the ballot; climate is on the ballot.

All true, but if the Congressional Progressive Caucus, led by Representative Pramila Jayapal, has its way, it will be about far more. The CPC has released its Progressive Proposition Agenda for 2025, detailing a bold, populist, and popular agenda that its members will take across the country.

If the CPC has its way, inequality is on the ballot. Living wages are on the ballot. Affordable healthcare, childcare, housing, education, and retirement are on the ballot. As are clean government, fair taxes and basic justice.

On healthcare, the CPC agenda calls for expanding Medicaid to cover more low-income families, and empowering government not only to negotiate lower prices for all drugs but also to directly manufacture generic drugs like insulin, providing patients with dramatic savings. It also makes dental, vision, and hearing coverage part of Medicare, while lowering the eligibility age.

On housing, the CPC calls for bold efforts to address the housing crisis, including a national housing trust fund, incentives to turn abandoned commercial properties into residential units, and \$100 billion in direct

assistance for working-class families seeking to purchase their first home.

On education, it calls for universal pre-K and kindergarten, and tuition-free college and vocational training. It demands support for true universal childcare, capping out-of-pocket costs at 7% of household income, a vital change at a time when childcare expenses for young families often exceed the cost of rent or a mortgage.

It would raise Social Security benefits paid for by fair taxes on the wealthy. It calls for a \$17 minimum wage, indexed to inflation. It promises a 12-week paid family and medical leave policy. It would hike penalties for corporate abuses of workers like wage theft, child labor, and workplace safety violations. It endorses the PRO Act to give workers a fair shot at organizing at the workplace.

The CPC platform also details reforms vital to our nation's security. It lays out the next steps in addressing the climate crisis. It calls for reforms vital to democracy—including instituting same-day voter registration, ending partisan gerrymandering, and curbing the role of Big Money in our politics. It would eliminate the filibuster in the Senate, ban congressional stock ownership and trading, and strengthen judicial ethics, while boldly demanding expansion of the number of Supreme Court justices.

It also lays out a populist agenda to counter the choke hold of wealth and entrenched interests on our political economy—expanded anti-trust measures, higher taxes on stock buybacks, a minimum tax for the rich, and a crackdown on private equity and hedge fund rapaciousness, particularly in healthcare and housing.

Cynics, of course, will dismiss the agenda as simply election year promises. But it's worth remembering that the CPC has earned the right to far greater credibility. After the election of 2020, with Bernie Sanders' insurgent candidacy making the case, Democratic majorities in the House and Senate, and an emboldened 100-member Congressional Progressive Caucus having the moxie to act collectively, the CPC helped drive through the House the boldest domestic reforms since the 1960s. Too much of it—particularly the democracy re-

forms—was blocked in the Senate by Republican-led filibusters, but the potential for change, and the power of the CPC to set the agenda, was clear.

The CPC Proposition focuses on domestic reforms, omitting any mention of our ruinous foreign policy, from the horror of Gaza to our increasingly unsustainable effort to police the globe.

Yet CPC members—as *New York Times* editorial board member Mara Gay recently noted—have openly challenged Biden's policy on Gaza and have driven "the center of the Democratic Party in a new political direction...one sharply critical of the Israeli government, and willing to use American leverage to curb Israel's military plans."

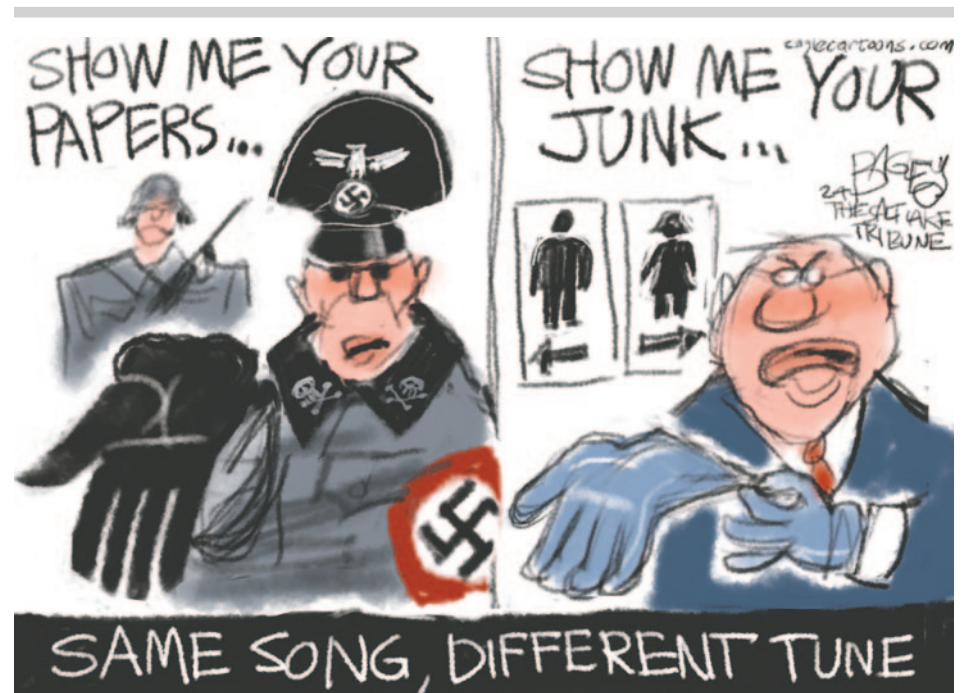
The CPC agenda also omits signature progressive domestic reforms, such as Medicare for All or a job guarantee, even though Pramila Jayapal and other CPC members champion both.

This pragmatism reflects the CPC's moving from being a forum for dissenters to one wielding political power. Under Jayapal, the caucus has been both a voice for visionary change and an effective force for expanding the possible. It has shown skill in

knowing when to challenge the limits and when to unite to get things done. In this, the CPC stands in stark contrast to the wing nuts of the Republican Freedom Caucus. As the CPC Agenda notes, major reforms will require ending the antidemocratic filibuster in the Senate. What the CPC can promise is, with a Democratic majority, it will drive this agenda through a House.

In 2024, the stakes are far greater than saving the Republic from Trump and his reactionary agenda. If Democrats take back the House, expand their majority in the Senate and keep the White House, reforms that can make a fundamental difference in the lives of all, especially poor and working people, are possible. In 1944, amid a war abroad, Franklin Roosevelt called for an economic bill of rights as central to the post-war recovery. With the Proposition Agenda, the CPC offers bold steps towards fulfilling that goal. And the CPC's growing power adds credibility to that promise.

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



Weight Loss Drugs Go Hand-in-Hand with Junk Food Industry

By SONALI KOLHATKAR

Manufacturers of the new weight-loss drugs that have taken the nation by storm are salivating at the prospect of how best to extract profits from people. What Americans eat, how they diet and exercise, what nutritional supplements they take, the sugar content of their sodas, the high fructose corn syrup in their processed foods, and the price of their diabetes medication have long been objects of endless gambling on Wall Street. Now, with drugs like Mounjaro, Wegovy, and Ozempic in the mix, new vistas of corporate exploitation have opened up. Companies are eager to figure out how best to milk people who might be losing their taste for the plentiful calories that food producers got them hooked on in the first place.

It's not a conspiracy theory that food addiction is a tool of corporate profiteering. Consider that tobacco companies, upon being regulated out of the business of addictive smoking, turned their sights onto addictive eating. The *Washington Post's* health columnist, Anahad O'Connor wrote, "In America, the steepest increase in the prevalence of hyper-palatable foods occurred be-

tween 1988 and 2001—the era when Philip Morris and R.J. Reynolds owned the world's leading food companies." Further, "the foods that they sold were far more likely to be hyper-palatable than similar foods not owned by tobacco companies."

Many of these ultra-processed foods are specially marketed to children, which in turn can change their brain chemistry to desire those foods for life. According to a paper published in *Science Daily*, "The current obesity epidemic is due, in part, to hormonal responses to changes in food quality: in particular, high-glycemic load foods, which fundamentally change metabolism." Today we would be appalled at the idea of marketing tobacco to children, but the same companies pushed addictive foods onto kids, and even though Big Tobacco is no longer in the business of food, its practices remain widespread.

The harmful impacts of unhealthy foods also fall disproportionately along racial lines, with aggressive marketing aimed at communities of color. Black children, in particular, are subjected to significantly greater advertising of high-calorie addictive foods than their White peers.

As obesity rates have risen in the US, there is an all-too-familiar blame game that individualizes the harm being caused by a capitalist system that thrives off of addiction. Doctors warn people struggling to manage their weight that they must simply restrict their intake of calories while expending more calories through rigorous exercise. High-profile reality shows such as "The Biggest Loser" have cemented the narrative that obesity is the result of individuals not

being able to manage their urges to eat. And American pop culture's obsession with increasingly unattainable thinness generates shame spirals among individuals and further fuels the idea that people are fat simply because they are too weak to control themselves. Meanwhile, there are few, if any, government regulations on unhealthy foods in the US.

There's a similar analogy to be found in personal finance. American culture is steeped in the myth of a meritocracy where people struggling to make ends meet are blamed for simply not being good managers of money and where well-meaning budgeting guides are offered without the broader context of rising inequality, suppressed wages, bloated student debt, and inflation.

The causes of both, obesity and wealth inequality, are systemic, while the solutions being offered are individualized, often spawning lucrative industries of their own.

Alongside the aggressive marketing of hyper-palatable foods is a massively profitable weight-loss industry that preys upon individual shame to the tune of more than \$60 billion a year. In fact, some of the same companies pushing high-calorie foods are in the business of weight loss.

With the advent of the new revolutionary weight-loss drugs, watching the industry reconfigure itself is fascinating. According to the *Wall Street Journal*, "Since drugs such as Mounjaro, Wegovy, and Ozempic became sensations last year, Wall Street has rushed to work out just how disruptive the drugs, called GLP-1s, might be." By "disruptive," the journal is referring to a discouraging trend in food industry profits. If weight-loss drugs

curb appetite, who will buy enough Krispy Kreme donuts to keep the sugar-peddling company in business? That's a big worry for corporate CEOs and shareholders.

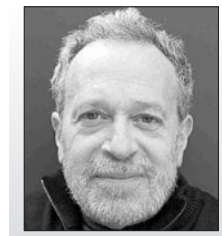
Another story in the *Journal* lamented the impact of these drugs on the weight-loss industry "which long pushed calorie-counting and willpower," and are now "grappling with the surging popularity of new drugs." If weight-loss drugs curb appetite without expensive gym memberships, supplements, and programs like WeightWatchers, will the traditional weight-loss industry go out of business?

Today, the manufacturers of weight-loss drugs are clear winners in the changing landscape of food consumption and weight, charging tens of thousands of dollars for a year's supply, and ensuring that only the wealthy have access to the thinness that our culture celebrates. Not only do the high price tags keep these drugs out of the hands of low-income people struggling to manage their weight, but also out of the hands of diabetics whom the drugs were originally meant for.

The capitalist maxim of higher demand fueling higher prices is very much at work here. Ozempic for example, could have a price tag of only \$57 a year and its manufacturer Novo Nordisk would still reap a profit. Instead, it is being sold in the US for a whopping \$11,600 a year simply because the company can charge an arm and a leg, ensuring that the drugs remain in the hands of the wealthy while tidying up a nice profit for Novo Nordisk's shareholders.

Eventually, however, the prices will *Continued on page 15*

ROBERT REICH



We're not on the verge of a second Civil War, but we are separating into 'red' and 'blue' states. And if Trump is reelected, he'll hasten the separation.

America's Second Civil War? It Has Already Begun

Despite the popularity of the recent movie "Civil War," we're not on the verge of a second one. But we are separating into so-called "red" and "blue." And if Trump is reelected president, he'll hasten the separation.

Since the Supreme Court's decision to reverse *Roe v. Wade* left the issue of abortion to the states, one out of three women of childbearing age now lives in a state that makes it nearly impossible to get an abortion.

And while red states are making it harder than ever to get abortions, they're making it easier than ever to buy guns.

Red states are also banning diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) initiatives in education. Florida's Board of Education recently prohibited public colleges from using state and federal funds for DEI. Texas Governor Greg Abbott has signed a law to require that all state-funded colleges and universities close their DEI offices.

Red states are suppressing votes. In Florida and Texas, teams of "election police" have been created to crack down on the rare crime of voter fraud, another fall-out from Trump's big lie.

They're banning the teaching of America's history of racism. They're requiring transgender students to use bathrooms and join sports teams that reflect their sex at birth.

They're making it harder to protest. More difficult to qualify for unemployment benefits and other forms of public assistance. Harder than ever to form labor unions.

They're even passing "bounty" laws—enforced not by governments but by re-

wards to private citizens for filing lawsuits — on issues ranging from classroom speech to abortion to vaccination.

Blue states are moving in the opposite direction. Several, including Colorado and Vermont, are codifying a right to abortion. Some are helping cover abortion expenses for out-of-staters.

When Idaho proposed a ban on abortion that empowers relatives to sue anyone who helps terminate a pregnancy after six weeks, nearby Oregon approved \$15 million to help cover the abortion expenses of patients from other states.

Maryland and Washington have expanded access and legal protections to out-of-state abortion patients. California has expanded access to abortion and protected abortion providers from out-of-state legal action.

After the governor of Texas ordered state agencies to investigate parents for child abuse if they provide certain medical treatments to their transgender children, California enacted a law making the state a refuge for transgender youths and their families.

Blue states are also coordinating more of their policies. During the pandemic, blue states joined together on policies that red states rejected — such as purchasing agreements for personal protective equipment, strategies for reopening businesses as COVID-19 subsided, even on travel from other states with high levels of COVID-19.

But as blue and red states separate, what will happen to the poor in red states, disproportionately people of color?

"States' rights" has always been a cover for racial discrimination and segregation. The poor — both white and people of color — are already especially burdened by anti-abortion legislation because they can't afford travel to a blue state to get an abortion.

They're also hurt by the failure of red states to expand Medicaid eligibility under the Affordable Care Act, by red state de facto segregation in public schools, and by red state measures to suppress votes.

One answer is for Democratic administrations and congresses in Washington to prioritize the needs of the red state poor and make extra efforts to protect the civil and political rights of people of color in red states. Yet the failure of the Senate to muster enough votes to pass the Freedom to Vote Act, let alone revive the Voting Rights Act, suggests how difficult this will be.

Blue states could spend additional resources on the needs of red state residents, such as Oregon is now doing for people from outside Oregon who seek abortions.

And prohibit state funds from being spent in any state that bans abortions or discriminates on the basis of race, ethnicity, or gender.

California already bars anyone on a state payroll (including yours truly, who teaches at Berkeley) from getting reimbursed for travel to states that discriminate against LGBTQ+ people.

Where will all this end?

If Trump is elected this November, the separation will become even sharper. When he was president last time, Trump acted as if he was president only of the people who vote for him — overwhelmingly from red states — and not as the president of all of America.

Recall that during his presidency, he supported legislation that hurt voters in blue states — such as his tax law that stopped deductions of state and local taxes from federal income taxes.

More than 4 in 10 voters believe that a second civil war is likely within the next five years, according to a Rasmussen Reports poll conducted April 21-23.

Red zip codes are getting redder and blue zip codes, bluer. Of the nation's total 3,143 counties, the number of super land-slide counties — where a presidential candidate won at least 80% of the vote — jumped from 6% in 2004 to 22% in 2020.

Surveys show Americans find it increasingly important to live around people

who share their political values. Animosity toward those in the opposing party is higher than at any time in living memory. Forty-two percent of registered voters believe Americans in the other party are "downright evil."

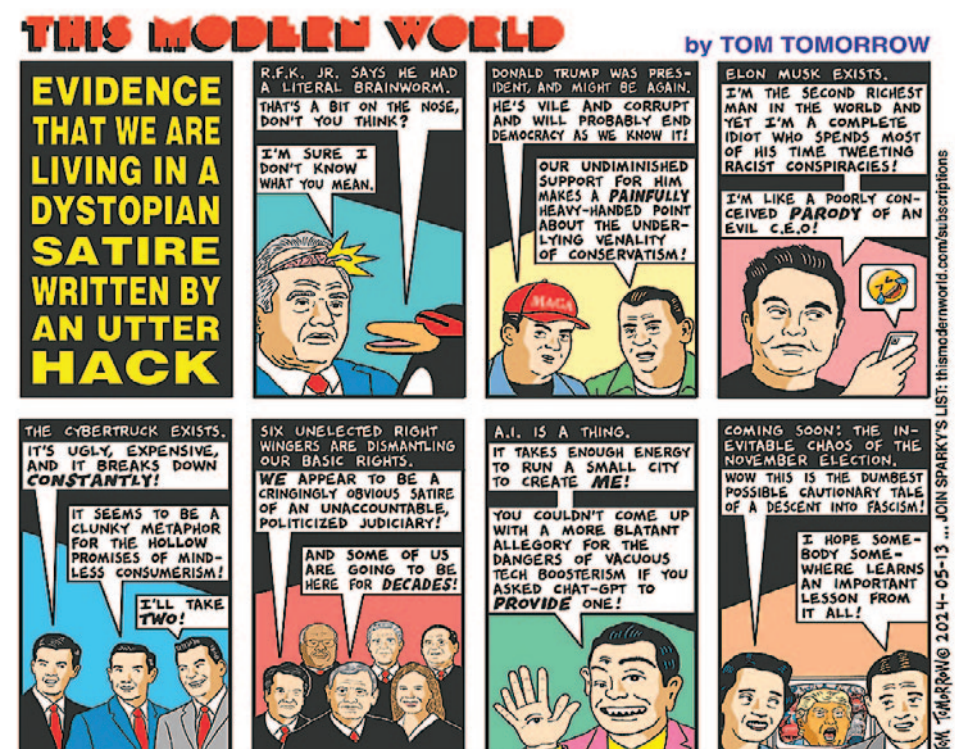
Almost 40% would be upset at the prospect of their child marrying someone from the opposite party. Even before the 2020 election, when asked if violence would be justified if the other party won the election, 18.3% of Democrats and 13.8% of Republicans responded in the affirmative.

We are becoming two Americas — one largely urban, racially and ethnically diverse, and young. The other, largely rural or exurban, White and older.

But rather than civil war, I see a gradual, continuous separation — analogous to unhappily married people who don't want to go through the trauma of a formal divorce.

America will still be America. But it is fast becoming two versions of America. The open question is the same as faced by couples who separate: Will the two remain civil toward each other?

Robert Reich, former US 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/>



JESSE JACKSON



Trump claims his 'dictator for a day' remark was 'said in fun,' but he has big plans for securing the border, freeing insurrectionists and encouraging more drilling

Trump's 'Day One' Promises

Republican presidential candidate Donald Trump said he would be “dictator for a day,” because “I want to close the border and I want to drill, drill, drill.” Later, he claimed his dictator comment was “said in fun,” but he has reaffirmed the pledges on the border and on drilling.

Trump makes a lot of promises about what he will do on “Day One.” Whether he actually gets them done on Day One, it’s clear these are the things that he sees as the first order of business if he’s elected.

When he met with oil executives in Mar-a-Lago in early May, Trump told them that, in return for \$1 billion to his campaign

(and legal) funds, he would immediately fulfill their desire to reverse dozens of Biden’s environmental rules. He promised to end Biden’s freeze on new Liquefied Natural Gas exports, and “you’ll get it on Day One.” Liquefied Natural Gas is the equivalent of a climate neutron bomb. He also promised to auction off more leases for oil drilling in the Gulf of Mexico and to lift restrictions on drilling in the Alaskan Arctic, saying, “you’ve been waiting on a permit for five years, you’ll get it on Day One.”

Trump pledged to scrap rules requiring auto companies to reduce the emissions from tailpipes, and to block offshore wind on Day One. Trump considers catastrophic climate change to be a “hoax,” so his promises on “drill, baby, drill” aren’t in jest, even without the billion-dollar bribe.

Trump has promised to “free” the Jan. 6 insurrectionists on his first day back in office, saying he considers those who attacked Capitol police and sacked the Capitol building to disrupt the certification of the 2020 election to be “patriots.” He also promises to put the Department of Justice under the heel of the White House, and no doubt will pardon himself from the charges he now faces, as well as for the \$100 million he may owe the IRS due to tax fraud.

Trump promised the National Rifle Association that he would “rip up” Biden’s executive order directing the federal government to seek ways to regulate the

spread of guns in the U.S. and to “throw it out on Day One.”

He promised on Day One to cut federal funding for any school teaching what he considers “inappropriate racial, sexual or political content” — a charge that has resulted in the banning of books, the reversal of civil rights protections and the assault on gay and transgender children. He also promised to not let “one penny” go to any school that has a vaccine or mask mandate. The health of children in school will take a back seat to the right’s new political correctness.

Trump’s promise to “close the border” on Day One is accompanied with the promise to launch “the largest domestic deportation operation in American history.” He pledges to mobilize the National Guard to identify and deport about 10 million people, building detention camps if needed.

Trump has also promised to slap 10% tariffs on all imports to the U.S. and up to 100% on all imports from China, promises that will dramatically raise prices and slow growth.

He also pledges in his first year to extend his tax cuts that largely benefit the rich and corporations, and to roll back Biden’s regulations protecting the air we breathe, the water we drink, the safety of workplaces, and the rights of consumers.

If this doesn’t make sense for the country, it may make sense for selling a candidate. As Trump demonstrated in his meeting

with oil executives, carrying out their agenda may accelerate climate catastrophe but it will generate big bucks for his campaign. The promise to the NRA on guns will lead to more children getting shot but it will lock in support from the gun lobby. The assault on immigrants will create massive social upheaval, but it appeals to the country’s fears. The offensive against civil rights, abortion, and gay and transgender rights excites the leaders of the right-wing evangelical churches.

Is it possible to win an election by assembling a coalition built on promises that will be ruinous for the country? Trump won office in 2016 even though he lost the popular vote by 3 million votes. He has been leading in many polls this time. He promises now to serve the oil industry, the gun lobby, the big corporations while preying on fears of the other — whether immigrant or minority — to capture enough votes to win. Whether that cynical strategy can work again remains to be seen. What is clear is that Trump’s promises if fulfilled “from Day One” would leave America more divided, more unequal and less secure.

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.

I Run a Food Pantry, But It’s Not Enough. We Need Funding for SNAP.

I’m proud to help my neighbors. But food donations are no substitute for government nutrition programs like SNAP, which is now under threat.

By CARLA VENTURA

I run a food pantry. I’m proud of the work we do. But if lawmakers passed a liveable minimum wage or invested more in programs like SNAP, people wouldn’t need to rely on pantries like mine.

Pantries are a critical piece of the anti-hunger puzzle, but they’re filler pieces. Government nutrition programs — with the infrastructure and funding to get the job done — should be the centerpiece.

I grew up on food stamps, called the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, or SNAP. My mother worked hard, but her wages were too low to meet our basic needs. Sometimes we felt embarrassed pulling out the stamps at the register — I worried kids would talk about me at school.

But the aid was a blessing. It helped keep us from

hunger. Even still, food stamps weren’t designed to last the whole month. Most months, we had to travel long distances — often outside our county — to find food pantries so we could get by.

SNAP is the nation’s most effective anti-hunger program, feeding nearly a quarter of all US children. The program reduces hunger by about 30%, improves long-term educational, health, and economic outcomes for children, and helps address systemic racial disparities in poverty.

SNAP is the first line of defense in a down economy. In fact, food insecurity fell to a record low of 10.2% in 2021 — in the middle of the pandemic — due to the pandemic-era boost in SNAP benefits. But now that those benefits have expired, nearly 13% of us experience food insecurity.

For many Americans, wages are simply too low. To meet basic needs in South Carolina, where I live, two adults with two children must earn over \$21 per hour. But our state minimum wage is just \$7.25.

A person would have to work 106 hours a week at that wage to afford a modest two-bedroom apartment here. Actually, the minimum wage isn’t enough to cover the average rent for a two-bedroom apartment anywhere in the country.

Over 44 million Americans rely on SNAP to combat hunger. Yet some members of Congress are proposing cutting the program by a whopping \$30 billion over the coming decade. South Carolina alone, which is among the top 10 states with the greatest food insecurity, would suffer \$400 million in cuts.

That would be devastating for families like mine.

I’m a single mother with three kids. At age three, one

of my sons was diagnosed with autism, and I couldn’t find affordable daycare that could accommodate his needs. Every week, I had to leave work at a moment’s notice to help him or rush him home. I couldn’t sustain employment. I needed help during that challenging time, and SNAP provided it.

I now run a food pantry, Food for All, where I’ve seen that I’m far from alone.

I listen to the stories of people who come here and share my own to ease their feelings of embarrassment. I breathe a sigh of relief with them when they tell me, “Now I can afford my medication,” “Now I can make rent,” or “Now I don’t have to choose between feeding my child and getting her new shoes.”

But other times, I have to watch those who’ve waited in long lines for an hour be turned away because the food has run out. I can’t possibly get enough food donations to meet the enormous need.

But I won’t give up. None of us can.

That’s why I continue to fight for robust funding — and against the proposed slashing — of SNAP. People shouldn’t have to rely on food pantries to feed themselves or their families.

We know what works. We saw how hunger decreased during the pandemic when it had been forecast to skyrocket because we invested in the well-being of families. We must do that again.

Carla Ventura is a mother, founder of the nonprofit Food for All, and an Expert on Poverty with RESULTS from Columbia, South Carolina. This op-ed was distributed by OtherWords.org.

‘Bluelining’ Leaves Climate Vulnerable Communities Without Home Insurance

Insurers are pulling out of areas prone to climate risk — even as they insure the fossil fuel companies contributing to that risk. These communities deserve better.

By JESSICA GARCIA

In an era of climate disasters, Americans in vulnerable regions will need to rely more than ever on their home insurance. But as floods, wildfires, and severe storms become more common, a troubling practice known as “bluelining” threatens to leave many communities unable to afford insurance — or obtain it at any price.

Bluelining is an insidious practice with similarities to redlining — the notorious government-sanctioned practice of financial institutions denying mortgages and credit to Black and brown communities, which were often marked by red lines on map.

These days, financial institutions are now drawing “blue lines” around many of these same communities, restricting services like insurance based on environmental risks. Even worse, many of those same institutions are bankrolling those risks by funding and insuring the fossil fuel industry.

Originally, bluelining referred to blue-water flood risks, but it now includes other climate-related disasters like wildfires, hurricanes, and severe thunderstorms, all of which are driving private-sector decisions. (Severe thunderstorms, in fact, were responsible for about 61% of insured natural catastrophe losses in 2023.)

In the case of property insurance, we’re already seeing insurers pull out of entire states like California and Florida. The financial impacts of these decisions are considerable for everyone they affect — and often fall hardest on those in low-income and historically disadvantaged communities.

A Redfin study from 2021 illustrated that areas previously affected by redlining are now also those prone to flooding and higher temperatures, a problem compounded by poor infrastructure that fails to mitigate these risks. This overlap is not a coincidence but a further consequence of systemic discrimination and disinvestment.

This financial problem exists no matter where you live. In 2024, the national average home insurance cost rose about 23% above the cost of similar coverage last year.

Homeowners across more and more states are left grappling with soaring premiums or no insurance options at all. And the lack of federal oversight means there is little uniformity or coordination in addressing these retreats.

This situation will demand a radical re-think of how we approach investing in our communities based on climate risks. For one thing, financial institutions must pivot from funding fossil fuel expansion to investing in renewable energy, natural climate solutions, and climate resilience, including infrastructure upgrades.

What about communities in especially vulnerable areas?

One strategy is community-driven relocation and managed retreat. By relocating communities to low-risk areas, we not only safeguard them against immediate physical dangers but also against ensuing financial hardships. Additionally, preventing development in known high-risk areas can significantly decrease financial instability and economic losses from future disasters.

As part of this strategic shift, financial policies must be realigned. We need regulations that compel financial institutions to manage and mitigate financial risk to the system and to consumers. We also need them to invest in affordable housing development that is energy-efficient, climate-resilient, and located in areas less susceptible to climate change in the mid- to long-term.

Meanwhile, green infrastructure and stricter energy efficiency and other resilience-related building codes can serve as bulwarks against extreme temperatures and weather events.

The challenge of bluelining offers us an opportunity to forge a path towards a more resilient and equitable society. We owe it to the future generations to do more than just adapt to climate change. We also need to confront and overhaul the systems that harm our climate. The communities most exposed to climate change deserve no less.

Jessica Garcia is a senior policy analyst for climate finance at Americans for Financial Reform Education Fund. For more on bluelining, see Jessica’s two-part blog series at OurFinancialSecurity.org. This op-ed was distributed by OtherWords.org.



Victories for Middle-Income America

Everybody recognizes Uncle Sam as the champion of the poor. All those alphabet programs, all those subsidies, all those tax-dollars going to help people — struggling, people deserving, people maybe not deserving, people here illegally, people abusing the system ... Depending on political vantage, a voter will describe the recipients of Uncle Sam's largesse and vote accordingly. Citizens who want to stanch the flow of tax dollars to help the poor will vote for hard-hearted, fiscally-conservative solons. Softer-hearted, more generous citizens will vote for like-minded solons.

It is time to recognize that Uncle Sam, and his state minions, also buoy the vast middle class.

Here are some below-the-fold examples of Uncle Sam's hand in our health.

First, Uncle Sam — Medicare — pays far less — up to 50% less — for hospital stays than private insurers. The facile assumption is that a bureaucratic government cannot negotiate good deals, compared to the geniuses in the private sec-

tor. The reality is different. As for the impact, those extra dollars paid to hospitals end up in the premiums of employees. The elderly and disabled Americans who opt for "original Medicare" are getting a better deal, for the most part, than their younger private-sector counterparts.

As for Obama Care (a.k.a. the Affordable Care Act), it includes provisions designed to protect enrollees: the 80-20 rule requires insurers to spend at least 80% to reimburse medical expenditures (leaving 20% for administration and profits); the 95% rule requires employers to offer affordable health insurance to 95% of their full-time employees and their children, the Essential Benefits include maternity and emergency care, and the safe harbor affordability (now set at 8.39% of a household's income, for the least expensive option) seeks to make premiums affordable. Without those rules, what kind of policies would private insurers craft? Do we want to find out?

On to the FDA. The Food and Drug Administration is charged with investigating devices and complaints. Those complaints generally begin when an unhappy customer/patient complains to the manufacturer, who is supposed to send those claims to the FDA. Regardless of how egregious, or trivial, the manufacturer deems the complaints, the manufacturer must send them on. A recent example: Dentists promoted the Anterior Growth Guidance Appliance (AGGA) to expand an adult's jaw, without surgery. Supposedly the AGGA relieved sleep apnea. No peer-reviewed research backed the claim, and to date 20 patients who complained

of harm received a settlement. From a reported 10,000 users, 20 complaints seem trivial; and the company didn't admit liability.

The complaints never reached the FDA. But at last the FDA has reacted, will investigate. At this point it is easy to fault the FDA's weak oversight; but without the FDA there would be no oversight. Indeed, without the FDA, there would be no oversight of breast implants, pacemakers, defibrillators, ventilators, cochlear implants, prosthetics. The list goes on. Recent recalls include heating pads: (Blue Electric Heating Pads, with 286 customer complaints and 31 reported injuries), as well as some of the nasal-swab COVID tests.

The United States Department of Agriculture tries to oversee the safety of food. Recently suspicions of E-coli prompted the recall of walnuts and ground beef. A host of food products have come under the federal radar, including cashews, cherry granola, cream cheese. Log on to recalls.gov for an up-to-date list. Most foods pass muster, but we should be grateful for the oversight that warns us of contaminated food, forces stores to take them off the shelves.

So in this politically charged season of campaigns, when voters decry government as inept, expensive and cumbersome, remember the ways that Uncle Sam props up the health of the middle class.

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

The Decline of Tabloids and Everything Else

By SAM URETSKY

*My object all sublime, I shall achieve in time
To make the punishment fit the crime (the punishment fit the crime)*

*And make each prisoner pent, unwilling represent,
a source of innocent merriment (of innocent merriment)*

*The advertising quack who wearies with tales
of countless cures,*

*His teeth I've enacted shall all be extracted by
terrified amateurs*

W.S. Gilbert (The Mikado)

As Donald Trump came to trial in New York, the government's first witness was David Pecker, the former publisher of the *National Enquirer*. Pecker discussed the nature of the supermarket tabloids, such as the *National Enquirer* and the *Star*, and made the point that the only page that matters is the front page. The more notable the celebrity on the front page, the

better the sales would be (see Archive.org, which has a collection of front pages from the *Enquirer*) While the *Enquirer* still exists as a print edition, its web site features "EXCLUSIVE DETAILS: Heather Locklear Caught Popping Pills! Friends Fear For Troubled Rehab Grad!" The British Royal Family gets a lot of space too.

Actually, the inner pages matter too, if not in selling papers, then at least in selling advertising space. Into the late 20th century, the supermarket tabloids were a rich source of advertisements, largely for weight loss remedies.

In the early part of the century the small local newspapers carried ads for tuberculosis cures and even cancer cures. In the early 20th century, Americans were inundated with ineffective and dangerous drugs, and adulterated and deceptively packaged foods. Worse, consumers had no way of knowing what was actually in the products they bought.

A series titled "The Great American Fraud" by Samuel Hopkins Adams in *Collier's Weekly* from 1905 to 1906 was particularly influential in exposing the dangers of unregulated patent medicines and food additives. The passage of the 1906 Pure Food and Drugs Act marked a monumental shift in

the use of government powers to enhance consumer protection by requiring that foods and drugs bear truthful labeling statements and meet certain standards for purity and strength.

The 1906 law required truthful statements about the ingredients of these products, but didn't require proof of safety and efficacy. Still, it was a start. Today the tabloids advertise wrinkle remover creams, gold colored coins celebrating our nation's presidents, and whole body pillows.

But the local newspapers, which one could rely in large part on patent remedy ads, were closing, or at best discontinuing print editions in favor of a web site. Since 2005, the US has lost nearly 2,900 newspapers. The nation is on pace to lose one-third of all its newspapers by the end of next year. There are about 6,000 newspapers remaining, the vast majority of which are weeklies.

With the decline of supermarket tabloids, the nostrum vendors also moved to the internet, mostly by email. Many of the emails are probably phishing, defined as "... a sneaky attempt by criminals to steal your personal information. It's like online fishing, where they cast a lure (a fake email, text, or message) to trick you into giving away valuable data."

According to HHS, an estimated 30,000 health practitioners in the United States are currently authorizing medical marijuana for their patients. The department also acknowledged that "the vast majority of individuals who use marijuana are doing so in a manner that does not lead to dangerous outcomes to themselves or others."

The government's stunning reversal validates the experiences of tens of millions of Americans. But it still falls well short of the changes necessary to bring federal marijuana policy into the 21st century. Specifically, the proposed change fails to harmonize federal marijuana policy with the cannabis laws of most US states, particularly the 24 states that have legalized its use and sale to adults.

These jurisdictions regulate marijuana in a manner far more akin to alcohol — a substance omitted from the Controlled Substances Act — than a prescription drug. As a result, the state-licensed adult-use cannabis industry — and those who patronize it — will continue to operate in legal limbo, without any clear guidance from the federal government.

Nevertheless, as a first step forward,

There are many offers of remedies for male sexual inadequacy, but other emails promise to "cure" diabetes or tinnitus (ringing in the ears). Toenail fungus or even COPD (Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease). There are promises to eliminate backache, and knee pain, or any other sort of pain. They offer "OTC Morphine, NOW LEGAL." (It's not.)

And so, the man who made a living promoting spurious wrinkle removers, weight loss remedies with no drugs and no dieting, and the man who offered \$399 "never surrender" sneakers and a \$59.99 "God Bless the USA" Bible were in court breaking up their partnership. They probably deserved each other.

Sen Amy Klobuchar (D-Minn.) said of the ex-president, "He can be out there hawking it all he wants. But to me, it's just one more moment of hypocrisy, and I hope people step back and look at some of the things he's said and done in his life ... and look at what the teachings of the Bible are and make a decision about who they're going to support or not."

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The Beginning of the End of Cannabis Prohibition

The federal government is moving toward 'rescheduling' cannabis to recognize its medicinal use. That's not far enough — but it's a major step forward.

By PAUL ARMENTANO

For the first time in its history, the Justice Department is calling for a change in the federal legal status of cannabis — which is currently classified as one of America's most dangerous drugs.

The Attorney General's office recently confirmed that it's circulating a proposal to reclassify marijuana from Schedule I to Schedule III under the federal Controlled Substances Act. The move, which affirms a prior recommendation by the Department of Health and Human Services and the

FDA, marks an about-face for bureaucracies that have traditionally maintained a "flat earth" perspective for all things cannabis.

Under federal guidelines, Schedule I substances possess "no currently accepted medical use in the United States" and "lack accepted safety for use under medical supervision." By contrast, Schedule III substances, like ketamine and anabolic steroids, are recognized as having well-established medical use and an acceptable safety profile for patients.

The federal government's decision to finally recognize cannabis as a legitimate therapeutic agent is historic.

For decades, federal officials maligned patients and doctors who spoke out about the benefits of cannabis. One former federal drug czar even accused physicians who supported medical marijuana of practicing "Cheech & Chong medicine."

For years, the government actively campaigned against statewide medical cannabis legalization initiatives — and even went so far as to try and strip physicians of their medical licenses for daring to discuss cannabis therapy with the sick and dying.

Not anymore.

are going to have to use these medications ... for as long as the body wants to have obesity." What he didn't say out loud was that there will be obesity for as long as food manufacturers market and sell junk foods.

Ultimately, our individual appetites and waistlines are pawns in the highly lucrative game of profit extraction that private companies and industries play. It is in the interest of drug manufacturers that Americans

remain hooked on hyper-palatable high-calorie foods so that a market exists for their weight-loss drugs. The ultra-processed food industry is becoming symbiotic with the weight-loss drug industry. The former ensures we eat poorly and the latter is there to feed off our shame.

Sonali Kolhatkar is the founder, host and executive producer of "Rising Up With Sonali," a

this policy change dramatically shifts the political debate surrounding cannabis.

Specifically, it delegitimizes many of the tropes historically exploited by opponents of marijuana policy reform. Claims that cannabis poses unique harms to health, or that it's not useful for treating chronic pain and other ailments, have now been rejected by the very federal agencies that formerly perpetuated them. Going forward, these specious allegations should be absent from any serious conversations surrounding cannabis and how to best regulate its use.

Of course, the longstanding politicization of cannabis won't go away overnight. For decades, marijuana's critics have derided both the plant and its consumers. Some will no doubt continue to try and do so despite the federal government's decision to change course. But their claims will increasingly fall upon deaf ears.

After nearly a century of cannabis criminalization, prohibition is coming to an end.

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come down once the elite market for the drugs saturates. And drug manufacturers are already busy ensuring their future market share by pushing doctors to prescribe the drugs widely. One obesity expert named Dr. Lee Kaplan, who received \$1.4 million from Novo Nordisk, told his fellow physicians, "We

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 article appeared at CityWatchLA.com.

WAYNE O'LEARY

Lyndon Baines Biden

The more things change, the saying goes, the more they remain the same. When the subject is American foreign policy, that old truism is often quite accurate; its truthfulness is on display in the Middle East at this very moment.

As was the case a half-century ago in Vietnam (Has it really been that long?), the US is once more bogged down in a foreign war with no end in sight. It's not literally bogged down, of course, since no American troops are "in country" (though our navy is offshore), but bogged down policywise nevertheless, and the effect is the same.

Like Vietnam, America's involvement in Israel's Gaza war has placed us in the position of supporting one side in what is essentially an internal civil conflict. Like Vietnam, our stance is unpopular around the world; except for Britain, our Western allies are mostly against us. Like Vietnam, we're complicit in the deaths of thousands of innocent civilians our client state has slaughtered with American-supplied weapons. (The latest figures as of May 1, courtesy of the PBS *NewsHour*, are 34,500 mostly noncombatant deaths in Gaza, of whom an estimated 10,000 are women and 13,000 are children.)

Like Vietnam, we're propping up a corrupt, dictatorial hard-right government in the name of freedom and democracy. Like Vietnam, the rationale for American intervention is global big-power politics; Soviet and Chinese Communism was the real enemy then, Iranian Islamism today. And, like Vietnam, the effort is adding to an overstressed Treasury. About \$15 billion of the recently enacted foreign-aid package signed by President Biden is for military assistance to Israel, so it can continue its offensive war of revenge against Hamas by obliterating Gaza.

Only a third of the latest Israeli arms consignment is truly for defense; this portion, according to the *New York Times*, includes \$5 billion to replenish the country's American-supplied high-tech shields against airborne attack (Iron Dome, David's Sling and Iron Beam), which destroy incoming missiles, drones and rockets. By comparison, barely \$1

billion has been budgeted for Gazan humanitarian aid, even with famine looming.

In this country, meanwhile, we have other reminders of Vietnam uncomfortably pressing in upon us. College and university campuses are in revolt again, as they were in the late 1960s and early 1970s, with familiar pejoratives being tossed around by supporters of the Gaza adventure and knee-jerk opponents of student activism. The phrase "outside agitator" is popular once more to discredit and vilify protesting demonstrators; the implication is they're not really concerned students at all, but merely troublemakers bent on random destruction. Are there a few professional anarchists present? Of course, but as in the '60s, they're a small, unrepresentative minority.

For me, personally, the current campus unrest has revived memories of 1969 and the Moratorium to End the War in Vietnam. Then, I shared a stage at one of the University of Maine's branch campuses with the late actor and political activist Gary Merrill ("Twelve O'Clock High"), husband of Bette Davis and then a resident of Maine. I read some prepared remarks opposing the war, and, as I remember, Merrill added a selection of antiwar poems. We were just a couple of troublemaking outside agitators.

One of the routine charges made against student participants in today's pro-Palestinian demonstrations is that of inciting violence. The same was said of antiwar protesters during Vietnam, with little justification. There were some undeniable incidents of property damage and a few physical altercations, mostly involving fringe radicals, but most of the violence was perpetrated by the authorities — Mayor Daley's "police riot" at the 1968 Democratic convention, for instance. By contrast, the famous antiwar Moratorium march on the nation's capital the following year drew 250,000 totally peaceful attendees.

The pro-Palestinian occupations have been similar: a few broken windows, some littering and overturned furniture, and the like. Except for occasional strong-arm tactics by law enforcement, most "violence" has been verbal: chanting, shouting, some pushing and shoving between contending groups.

But the official reaction has been close to hysterical. President Biden himself has been apparently unsettled by instances of "trespassing" and occupation of campus buildings. The worst example of violence, in fact, was an attack on the pro-Palestinian encampment at UCLA by self-described supporters of Israel, who physically assaulted occupying stu-

dents, an incident downplayed by what seems to be a biased, largely pro-Israel mainstream media.

The Biden response to all this has been sadly predictable. He's a member of my generation, the Vietnam generation, but uniquely among his politically oriented peers he never participated in any antiwar activities, being repulsed by them, as he admitted in his memoir "Promises to Keep" (2007), preferring instead to stay on the straight-and-narrow career path to law school.

The president's dismissal of his contemporaries' youthful idealism has carried over into his opinion of today's protesters, whom he views with cavalier disregard. Apparently, standing on a street corner with a sign is alright, as long as no one is inconvenienced or pays attention, but step across a Bidenesque red line and there will be consequences.

One glaring homefront difference between Vietnam and Gaza — so different it literally defines the existing situation — is the charge of antisemitism directed at pro-Palestinian demonstrators because they harshly criticize Israel, which the president views as unacceptable. He's internalized what the *Times* calls the US State Department definition of the word antisemitic (endorsed by various countries and some Jewish organizations) — that speaking ill of the State of Israel is in and of itself antisemitic, exposing those who do so to sanctions.

This illogical conflation of anti-Zionism (opposition to Israel's regional expansionist policies) and antisemitism (opposition to Jews as an ethnicity), which most liberal Jews themselves disavow, theoretically makes all actions against Israeli government policy, such as boycotts, morally out of bounds. This would include a main demand of student protesters: divestment of university endowment investments in companies profiting from business dealings with Israel.

Nevertheless, Joe Biden, the self-proclaimed Zionist, evidently accepts the argument. So do cynical pro-Netanyahu Republicans in Congress. So, too, many "woke" academic administrators seeking to punish campus demonstrators for anti-Zionist commentary (as opposed to antisemitic hate speech) that might disturb the sensibilities of Jewish students.

They should all know better. The Republicans, who never cared much about Israel until its current right-wing government took office, probably do.

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The Toughest Job Today's Richest Ever Face?

Trying to justify their spectacularly huge good fortune

By SAM PIZZIGATI

Once upon a time, back in the middle of the 20th century, the smallest theater on Broadway could have comfortably accommodated a get-together of all the New Yorkers worth at least \$100 million. Not anymore. Broadway's landmark Helen Hayes Theater holds a mere 597 seats. The number of "centi-millionaires" who currently call the City of New York home: 744.

New York currently hosts, researchers at the London-based Henley & Partners have just reported, more centi-millionaires than any other city on Earth. And if hosting centi-millionaires ever became an Olympic sport, the Henley stats show, the USA would be bringing home gold, silver, and bronze.

The San Francisco Bay Area — now teeming with 675 centi-millionaires — rates as the world's second-most-popular home to fortunes worth over \$100 million. Los Angeles sits third with 496.

Our world's most stout defenders of grand fortunes, for their part, find these stats a mite inconvenient.

Why this unease? The presence of all these super rich in New York, the Bay Area, and Los Angeles undercuts a key claim of our don't-tax-the-rich set. That claim: If confronted with any substantial tax rate, people of major means will simply pack up and relocate in places that better appreciate how selflessly noble deep pockets can be.

In other words, claim friends of grand fortune, lawmakers inclined to significantly tax the rich are playing a foolish game they cannot possibly win. But the rich who live in New York, San Francisco, and Los Angeles all face state and local taxes considerably higher than the rich who live in most all other major metropolitan areas. Yet these rich haven't yet picked up and moved else-

where.

Norway has become just the latest political jurisdiction to go through a don't-dare-tax-the-rich debate. Norway's current Labor Party-backed government has proposed expanding an existing "exit tax" on the nation's rich who choose to emigrate. These rich, if this change goes through, will start owing taxes on any substantial capital gains they haven't yet realized before their exit.

This move has horrified cheerleaders for Norway's deepest pockets. The Norwegian Alliance for Startup and Tech, a high-tech lobby group, says this added tax liability is going to make it "a lot harder" for Norway to attract talent and capital.

Norway's super-rich, the Alliance believes, "will flee to Switzerland" to avoid the new exit levy.

Mark Thomas, a British business consultant and business school prof, would beg to differ. The author of "The Complete CEO" and "99%," Thomas in May dealt the standard case for not taxing the rich a convincing counter.

Yes, Thomas acknowledges, some rich have indeed exited their home societies in search of greener lower-tax pastures. The holder of Britain's biggest private fortune, the billionaire Jim Radcliffe, did move to tax-haven Monaco to avoid the equivalent of over \$5 billion in taxes. But no parade of Britain's rich has followed in Radcliffe's path. Year in and year out, London continues to rate as one of the world's best places to live for people of means. Monaco doesn't appear in the top 100.

"If you care about quality of life," notes Thomas, swapping London for Monaco "makes no sense."

What about the argument that nations with taxes high enough to drive their rich away will lose out on the investments these rich would be making if they stayed home? If these nations "print" more money to make up for those lost investments, this argument continues, they'll simply unleash horrible inflation.

Governments, of course, print money all the time. But they can't, Thomas notes, "print" construction workers or doctors and nurses. If we want to devote more resources to better housing and health care, "we must free up real resources from less vital tasks" — like the luxuries the rich so crave. Those

nonessential luxuries consume the resources "needed to deliver things that are essential for society."

"We should not be afraid of any exodus" of the rich, Thomas concludes. "We should simply shrug" at that prospect.

"Penalizing" the rich with high tax rates, the rich people-friendly counter, will only end up leaving economies sputtering and everyone in them worse off. High taxes, they insist, mean low economic growth. But America's best economic years over the last century, Thomas points out, have come when the United States was taxing the nation's highest income brackets at rates over 80%.

"If anything," Thomas adds, "the evidence suggests that tax cuts hurt the economy — because they prevent the government from investing in the future and helping those who need it most."

Fans of grand fortune have always struggled to refute that evidence. In the end, sooner or later, they find themselves parroting some version of the oldest rationale for letting the riches of the rich just be. Our richest, this rationale goes, deserve their good fortune. Their brilliance entitles them to it.

One certifiably brilliant billionaire, James Simons, just happened to kick the bucket earlier this month at age 86. This

award-winning mathematician helped forge breakthrough in fields ranging from autism to the origins of the universe. He also just happened to launch the hedge fund that would become "one of the most profitable investment firms in history."

But Simons had little patience for those who ascribed his mega-billion fortune to his brilliance.

"One can predict the course of a comet more easily than one can predict the course of Citigroup's stock," he noted at one point. At another: "In this business it's easy to confuse luck with brains."

"Luck is largely responsible for my reputation for genius," Simons summed up at still another moment. "I don't walk into the office in the morning and say, 'Am I smart today?' I walk in and wonder, 'Am I lucky today?'"

Simons, as perceptive as he could be, never quite understood that entire societies can actually change their luck. They can work to become more equal.

Sam Pizzigati, an Institute for Policy Studies associate fellow, co-edits Inequality.org, where this appeared. 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."

A World Under Spiritual Construction

By ROBERT C. KOEHLER

There's something happening here ...

Consider, for instance, the recent announcement by Union Theological Seminary, which is affiliated with Columbia University, that it is divesting from "companies profiting from war in Palestine/Israel" — and, not only that, fully supports the student encampments (at Columbia and all across the country) and condemns the arrests and police violence wreaking havoc on the peaceful, culturally diverse protests.

Indeed, the seminary released a statement that scrambles the quiet certainty of those in power — i.e., that money matters more than anything else: "Over the decades, we have developed what are called 'socially responsible investment screens' to express our values and not financially support damaging and immoral investments."

Values over profit? Over the years, the seminary has pulled its investments away from such industries as weapons manufacturers, for-profit prisons, and fossil fuels. But not only that ... apparently it understands, and values, education itself — a remarkable phenomenon indeed.

Seminary president Serene Jones, in an interview with *Democracy Now!*, pointed out that the school has opened up its campus "to all the surrounding campuses when stu-

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Tens of Thousands of Israelis Demonstrate against Netanyahu, Demand Hostage Exchange Deal, New Elections

By JUAN COLE

ANN ARBOR – The Israeli newspaper *Arab 48* reports that tens of thousands of Israelis rallied May 4 against the government of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu in Tel Aviv and other cities, including Jerusalem, Beersheba and Haifa.

The protesters were responding in part to dueling news releases about the possibility of a breakthrough in indirect negotiations between Israel and Hamas in Cairo. Al Jazeera reports that a Qatari team was working on technical details of a proposal, which is usually a sign of movement in the negotiations. President Biden sent CIA Director William Burns to Egypt in case there were positive developments. The Hamas delegation in Cairo said that some progress has been made. UK sources said that a proposal was put forward “that would halt Israel’s war on Gaza for 40 days and exchange captives for Palestinian prisoners.” Hamas spokesman Osama Hamdan told Al Jazeera, “It’s clear that we are moving forward. There are some good points.” But Hamas wants a pledge that Israel would not invade Rafah, which Netanyahu rejects. The Israeli government has not returned negotiators to Cairo. Netanyahu’s rejectionism is infuriating the fam-

ilies of the hostages.

Hamas holds about 100 Israeli hostages, along with the bodies of 30 more who have died while captive. Israel routinely arrests Palestinians arbitrarily and holds them without charge, so there are in effect thousands of Palestinian hostages in Israeli custody. To be fair, some of the prisoners Hamas wants released were convicted of acts of terrorism.

Families of Israeli hostages joined the Tel Aviv protesters, blasting Netanyahu for its refusal to do a deal with Hamas. They said that Hamas had agreed to the deal but that Netanyahu was once again trying to undermine the talks.

Some demonstrators demanded new elections, while others insisted on a hostage exchange deal. Thousands gathered in Tel Aviv at the Kaplan-Begin intersection, which has been designated by the municipality “Democracy Square.” They called for immediate new elections even as the street was cut off by the police. Another demonstration was held for the families of the hostages and of Israelis detained in Tel Aviv. They said that “Hamas has indicated its agreement on a deal, but Netanyahu is once again trying to undermine the sole chance to save them, hiding behind ‘a high political source.’” They were referring to reports that the anonymous source in the Israeli government throwing cold water on the possibility of a breakthrough in negotiations with reporters is actually just Netanyahu himself.

The hostage families added, “the Israeli people want the hostages returned alive and agree with paying the price, but Netanyahu prefers his political alliance with [extremists] Ben-Gvir and Smotrich.” They said, “If the price for the return of the hostages is stopping the war, the it must be stopped immediately.”

Many hostage families are afraid that an invasion of Rafah will kill the hostages.

The leader of the opposition, Yair Lapid, attended the

demonstration in Tel Aviv and said, “There is nothing called victory without a deal and the return of the hostages. Instead of all the stupid messages released by ‘a political source,’ Netanyahu must send a negotiating team ... to Cairo and say to them that they must not return without a deal and the return of the hostages.”

He added, “There is no other mission, or anything else to do. Yesh Atid made promises and will implement them and we will be a complete safety net for the completion of this deal.” “Yesh Atid” or “There is a Future” is the centrist political party that Lapid leads.

Hundreds of people demonstrated outside the prime minister’s residence in Caesarea, demanding elections. Others rallied at the Karkur intersection on route 65 for a hostage exchange deal.

More thousands of protesters came out in Jerusalem, Beersheba, Netanya, Ra’anana and elsewhere to demand a hostage exchange deal.

At the same time, the Religious Zionism and Jewish Power leaders demanded an immediate Israeli invasion of Rafah, according to Arab 48. Minister of National Security Itamar Ben-Gvir and Minister of Finance Bezalel Smotrich supported Netanyahu and his decision not to send negotiators to Cairo. They emphasized that Israel’s priority must be to continue the war and to invade the region of Rafah in Gaza rather than a deal that might lead to the release of the Israelis held by Hamas.

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

Hijacked — the Work Ethic

By KEN WINKES

It’s no surprise that “Hijacked: How Neoliberalism Turned the Work Ethic against Workers and How Workers Can Take It Back,” Elizabeth Anderson’s history of progressive and conservative ideas about work and workers has distinctly political, religious, and moral dimensions.

After all, what we have come to know as the Protestant work ethic originated with Martin Luther and his Protestant successors. Christian sects that arose during the Reformation shared one common belief. They believed that salvation was a gift of God’s grace granted to everyone individually, not through the intermediary of an organized church. In other words, though Anderson, a professor of philosophy and women’s studies at the University of Michigan, doesn’t say it this way, the Reformation was a political as well as a religious movement that elevated the primacy of the individual over the interests of hierarchical organizations like church and state. Since their contract was now directly with God, workers were freed to work for their own benefit, and by moral extension, for the good of mankind.

If “Hijacked” were history alone, it

might have been titled “From Luther to Neoliberalism,” but Anderson’s chosen title better makes her point. And its subtitle, “How Neoliberalism turned the work ethic against workers and how workers can take it back” leaves no doubt of it.

Over time, workers have sometimes benefitted from the notions people held about work and workers. When progressive thinkers were in the fore, workers gained dignity and status, but in the ebb and flow of history, conservative notions were sometimes ascendant. We live in one of those times, Anderson says, and in our Neo-liberal world, workers are again getting a bad deal.

How bad, most of us know. In the United States, unlike other countries where workers are valued, we do not have universal health care. Our working poor live at the bottom of the wage scale, often paid too little to subsist. The power of unions has diminished over the last 50 years, and the gig economy, which renders workers independent contractors, further weakens labor’s bargaining position. Venture capital, which controls an ever-increasing share of the economy, kills jobs and when its tentacles reach into healthcare, it kills people. When capital is in charge, workers suffer.

Why does all this history matter? In our western culture it matters because we’re told that since Adam ate that cursed apple, people have had to live “by the sweat of their brow.” Whether we do it on our own or at

the behest of others, we devote the larger part of our waking hours to work, work which can either contribute to our sense of accomplishment or make us feel that we’re wasting a good part of our lives.

Fulfilling or not, work always holds meaning for us, and Dr. Anderson tells us why we should care. John Locke, Adam Smith and Thomas Paine believed that work and workers were naturally dignified and should be valued by society. Others, like Burke and Malthus, assumed that workers deserved their low state because they were naturally lazy and impecunious. Such apologists for the aristocracy even said that having to work at all was shameful.

If these ideas about class distinctions sound familiar, they should. Nineteenth century reforms associated with the writings of John Stuart Mill, Marx, and the European Socialists enhanced the status of workers in the western world. In the United States worker-oriented reforms gathered steam during the Great Depression, but late in the last century, as we know, workers again lost ground to the interests of capital.

Professor Anderson concludes her book with suggestions to reverse the present trend, worker ownership and strengthened unions among them. But it won’t be easy. Big money has a strong gravitational pull, and its influence is hard to overcome.

As I read “Hijacked,” Adam Smith’s frequently misunderstood line about the “In-

visible Hand” often came to mind. Over the years, capitalists have taken that phrase to mean unregulated markets automatically distribute resources fairly. Of course, they do not.

“Hijacked” is not beach reading. Its pages are densely packed with fact, moral theory, and thoughtful argument. It’s crunchy and provides a lot to chew on. But the history, theory and arguments are not mere abstractions. The values we place on work and workers have practical implications far outside the pages of Professor Anderson’s fine book.

How do I know? I checked the numbers. Data from the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development makes those implications clear. Workers in the United States work more hours with less reward than in any other developed country. In countries poorer than our own, workers must work even more for even less.

If we want work to be fair and fulfilling, Adam Smith’s Invisible Hand won’t do it for us. It’s up to us.

“Hijacked: How Neoliberalism Turned the Work Ethic against Workers and How Workers Can Take It Back,” by Elizabeth Anderson (Cambridge University Press, 2023, 384 pp.)

Ken Winkes is a retired teacher and high school principal living in Conway, Wash.

Koehler...

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dents were being expelled, events weren’t allowed to happen. ... Our doors are wide open, which is what a university should be in times like this.”

She also said: “We support students learning what it means to find their voices, to speak out for justice and freedom.”

Those are the words that stunned me the most. This is what education is, for God’s sake! It’s not just a matter of attending lectures, taking notes, absorbing data. It means finding your voice – finding your deepest values and expressing them in real life, putting them forward not as abstractions but as principles to live by. Entering the world as a grown woman, a grown man, means more than simply finding your place. It means challenging that world as you enter it and, by God, creating it – creating the future.

I certainly don’t mean this simplistically. I speak as an aging boomer, who entered adulthood as the civil rights movement was shaking and shattering the national norms, and as the Vietnam war was bursting into our consciousness. What an injured and deeply flawed world! Something was wrong. Growing up meant finding our voices and

addressing – challenging – this flawed world.

In October 1967, for instance, I boarded a bus, along with many of my friends, and participated in the first antiwar march on the Pentagon, which included pushing the edges of social and legal propriety. We did more than listen to speeches. We determined to occupy the Pentagon, thousands of us walking across the grass, coming face to face with the soldiers guarding it. At one point, out of the blue, it seemed, a contingent of soldiers came rushing toward us; I wound up getting clobbered in the head with a rifle butt. I was knocked down but wasn’t hurt and stayed with the protest for several more hours, eventually leaving the Pentagon sit-in shortly before the arrests started happening.

My friends and I made it back to our school – Western Michigan University, in Kalamazoo – with a sense that our lives were no longer the same. We immediately took matters into our own hands. We dropped out.

I wound up delaying my eventual graduation by a number of years, and no, I didn’t “change the world” in some idealistically imagined way, but I have no doubt whatsoever that this period of my life – full of protests, drugs, a few arrests, a lot of mis-

takes – was at the core of my college learning experience. At the same time as all this was going on, I was also finding myself as a writer and, eventually, a journalist. I value the support – indeed, the mentorship – of a significant number of professors at Western. Continually creating the world isn’t simply a matter of us vs. them: young vs. old. It’s a multigenerational effort.

All of which brings me back to the present moment, and the words of Serene Jones, who has not abandoned – or grown cynical about – the values emanating from the student encampments across the country. Much of the mainstream coverage of the protests simply defines the phenomenon in us-vs.-them terms. The protests are “pro-Palestine,” seeming to imply there are two equal (equally brutal) sides in this war, and being pro-Palestine means being anti-Israel, which can easily morph into anti-Semitic. But the protests aren’t simply pro-Palestine; they’re pro-humanity (and anti-genocide).

And the participants are culturally and religiously, but not spiritually, diverse. As Jones writes at Religion News Service:

“First and foremost, these encampments are filled with students from different religious traditions – Jews, Muslims, Christians, Buddhists, unaffiliated as well as spiritual but not religious students. They are

finding solace and courage among themselves. ...

“It is simply who these protesters are: a community bound by a greater common cause to stop the mass killing of besieged Palestinians.”

Jones’s essay is called “What we have to learn from students leading the charge for justice” – which is itself compelling. The university system – the financial system, the political system – has something to learn from the protesters? Love thy enemy or whatever?

The world these protesters are entering is a world hardened by cynicism. In such a world, a.k.a., the real world, “love” and other values are appropriate to be uttered in a religious setting with pews and fancy windows, but they’re hardly relevant in the day-to-day world of win-and-lose, gain-and-loss. That’s why the cops are barging in, beating and arresting the protesters and tearing down the encampments.

But Jones is daring to tell us that this is not the real world – simply the current one, which is still under construction.

Robert Koehler (koehlercv@gmail.com), syndicated by PeaceVoice, is a Chicago journalist and author of “Courage Grows Strong at the Wound.”

A Rose Helps Quiet the Noise Inside

By JAMIE STIEHM

My father, Richard, 91, was missing his departed friends and folk, so I suggested planting a memory garden.

Close to his heart was Leon Rosenberg, his friend from Randall School to the University of Wisconsin and medical school. They knew each other from ages 10 to 89, when Leon died. They were born weeks apart: my father on Jan. 22, 1933, Leon on March 3.

"A rose for the Rose," Richard said, recalling his friend's nickname. So roses went into the ground first: peach, yellow and pink. In California sunlight, pastels look perfectly at home.

These two grew up as boys from Madison who later went east and west to become distinguished in their fields. Leon, the West High valedictorian, became dean of Yale Medical School and later chief science officer at Bristol Myers Squibb.

My father, a pediatric immunologist at

the University of California, Los Angeles, shared classes (even a cadaver up in the science building) and a basketball league with his pal, the son of immigrants. Once Leon took half an hour, deep in conversation with the record clerk, before buying "Pictures at an Exhibition."

Richard's mother, Marie, a widowed nurse, predicted Leon would go far. She was right. I heard many stories about this mythical friend who urged my father to join him at Columbia-Presbyterian Medical Center as medical residents.

The brilliant blue eyes, the disarming smile, the way with words that expressed exactly what he meant: I came to share what my father loved about Leon. He showed up by surprise to my father's 80th birthday party, and they embraced, Richard shedding his WASP reserve.

A sheer joy to witness.

My father and I wept on the phone when he told me Leon was close to dying. He had a chance to tell him how much his friendship meant. I represented our family at Leon's funeral in Princeton in July 2022.

It hit me hard: a friend like that, with a mountain of shared memories, including his daughter's wedding and my birthday party in Washington, is gone and never coming back.

A memory garden makes loss more bearable.

Richard added ideas and other names to the plaque he envisioned. The white wall would hold a dedication and pictures: his wedding, beloved Aunt Aden and namesake uncle — a legendary Midwestern athlete and football coach.

Catching a wave of inspiration, I placed cosmos around the roses for the wide universe where our loved ones' spirits may dwell. They are not dainty but smaller than the roses and make the roses look more showy. Cosmos lend a floating feeling to a garden.

The garden greeted Richard when he came home from breaking his hip and getting a replacement. The surgeon said it was an honor to operate on him. All told, he was in the hospital and rehabilitation center for two weeks. I went back home to Washington.

Would the garden I planted for my father give him solace? Hopefully. But it did something else, unexpectedly. It gave me peace of mind.

If you're feeling fraught, if the seamy trial of former President Donald Trump is wearing you down, if you witness road rage, if the 2024 election and wars in Ukraine and Gaza cause you — and me — high anxiety, we are not alone.

Campus protests of Israel's bombardment of Gaza may reflect a general churn and angst.

A new book reviewed in the *New York Times*, Clayton Page Aldern's "The Weight of Nature," connects our collective state of mind to climate change. Stated simply, rising heat doesn't only cause drought, wildfires and other extreme weather events.

In this transformation, hotter climes affect human moods and behavior, leading to more depression, anger and violence. A trend of strangers punching women on the streets of New York City fits this pattern.

Aldern gives evidence that sea creatures also act differently as oceans and lakes warm and glaciers melt.

In a striking passage, Nataniel Rich's review states, "Dolphins appear to be getting Alzheimer's disease. Mountaintop removal makes Appalachians depressed. ... Climate change isn't only here, writes Aldern. It is inside us." A slow burn of our brains — really?

Clearing room for roses and remembrance flowers helps.

As wise French philosopher Voltaire once wrote amid social uproar, "We must cultivate our garden."

Jamie Stiehm is a former assignment editor at CBS News in London, reporter at The Hill, metro reporter at the Baltimore Sun and public policy scholar at the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars. She is author of a new play, "Across the River," on Aaron Burr. See JamieStiehm.com.

Shades of 1932 Deutschland

By BARRY FRIEDMAN

The oldest bar in Germany is Prater Biergarten. It opened in Berlin in 1837, which means it was around in 1914 when Germany invaded Belgium, and in 1939 when German tanks rolled into Poland. Outside the main building, there are large chestnut trees in a garden that holds more than 600. Before, during, and after those wars, people came, drank heavily, danced, listened to folk music, and watched the occasional boxing tournament. Like at any bar or pub here in America, such gatherings are loud, raucous affairs where everything from politics to culture to sports is discussed. And through it all, for the past 187 years, the bar stayed open ... mostly. "Berlin's Prater closed," its website reads, "when Adolf Hitler declared all-out war."

In April 1932, the National Socialists had just gained 230 seats. While they weren't a majority, they had won more seats in the Reichstag than any other party. There were predictions of violence, but the election went off without a hitch — more than 83% of qualified voters cast ballots. The presidential election was scheduled for the end of July. It was springtime and summer in Germany, so the days between those two elections were long, the tables at Prater Biergarten were full, and the garden was awash in conversation and beer and energy. I imagine this was the place you would have heard

something resembling "Tomorrow Belongs to Me," from "Cabaret," from some young Nazi or even a lone waiter so overcome with love for the new Germany that he'd break into song. There were those who supported Hitler, those fed up with the direction of Germany and furious about its humiliation after World War I, and those, no doubt, with no interest in politics, just there for a beer, and were convinced none of the presidential candidates — Paul von Hindenburg, Adolf Hitler and Ernst Thälmann — would make a Deutsche Mark's worth of difference in their lives. I imagine, too, others were there — those not at all certain Germany's institutions would hold if Hitler was elected and convinced that if the German people did not spit him out from the body politic, it would be Germany's last election.

Let's call one of them Oliver.

"Ollie," I can hear his friends say, "what are you worried about? We have laws, courts. Besides, Jews are everywhere. What's Hitler going to do, round them all up and send them away somewhere? He is a small man, a megalomaniac, a failure as an artist. If he gets in, he'll never be allowed to do what he says he wants to do. We have safeguards. You're overreacting. But if he wins, he wins. What's the worst that can happen? He'll make us feel good about being Germans again. Is that so bad? He'll trash Versailles. Good! Von Hindenburg is too old. We'll be fine."

"Are you verrückt? This country is losing its mind," Oliver would counter. "Do you remember the Beer Hall Putsch less than 10 years ago? That was a dress rehearsal. His outrages and excesses are now normal, ac-

cepted. He speaks to the cynical darkness in this country. He said, 'I'll be the brains of Germany.' Who says things like that?"

"He's a politician. They all think and say things like that."

"You're missing the point!" I can hear Oliver scream.

"He'll have to build coalitions to govern. Stop worrying. And he probably didn't say it anyway. The press makes stuff up."

"This is not going to end well," Oliver says.

"So what are you going to do if he wins?"

"Leave."

"C'mon," another friend at the table would say. "Even if you're right — and you're not — by leaving, they win. And you're not Jewish. They're not even coming for you. Most importantly, you are the kind of person we need here. If the worst happens, and it won't, I am staying and fighting. They are not throwing me out of my country, putting me in a camp. Ich liebe Deutschland."

I can imagine Oliver going home after that evening and punching a wall, or crying, or packing. Back at Prater, there was more drinking, more dancing, more wondering what had gotten into Oliver.

In 1933, even though von Hindenburg would ultimately defeat Hitler in the presidential election — and defeat him handily — Hindenburg named him chancellor, thinking Hitler could be controlled and mollified.

In 1934, Hindenburg died.

You know what happened next.

Albert Einstein, when he left Germany for the California Institute of Technology, said to Elsa, his second wife, "Take a good

look around. You will never see it again."

Scientists like Hans Bethe, John von Neumann, Leo Szilard, James Franck, Edward Teller, Rudolf Peierls and Klaus Fuchs got out as well. Between 1933 and 1940, approximately 38,000 Jews left for France, Belgium, the Netherlands, Denmark, Czechoslovakia, and Switzerland, thinking they'd be safe. In the Holocaust Encyclopedia, there is this line about the scientists and the "Olivers" in Germany: "Jews who were politically active were especially likely to emigrate."

By 1941, nobody was allowed to leave.

There is a tyrant in our midst. For some people, the tyrant is easy to see. Others don't see him at all. Some people say the tyrant is a strong man who will make us great again. Others say he's vicious and dangerous. Since no one can really be sure who's right, isn't it smart to be as strong as the tyrant? If there is a tyrant.

Hitler wasn't Hitler until he was der Führer.

*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" will be released in July. 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.

Prison Costs Busting California's Budget?

By SETH SANDRONSKY

California is facing a budget deficit, the gap between income and expenditures, of up to \$73 billion. Prison spending is part of this budget, which the state is constitutionally required to balance, unlike Uncle Sam, which can and does use deficit spending.

Meanwhile, there are 93,000 state prisoners in California. The cost to imprison one person is roughly \$132,000 per year, far above the annual price of a student to receive a higher education. The 2006 California prisoner population was 165,000, or 56% of the current total.

Should the state budget reflect this math of a reduced prison population? Yes, according to Californians United for a Responsible Budget (CURB).

Given the current budget deficit, and a

chance to save over \$1.5 billion per year via closure of more state prisons, Democratic Gov. Gavin Newsom is proposing to close 46 housing blocks at 13 state prisons. In other words, he proposes to save \$80 million, or 0.0055% of the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation's \$14.5 billion budget and overall bed capacity.

What is wrong with his math? We turn to Amber-Rose Howard, the executive director of CURB. "If the administration can't select a prison to close," she said in a statement, "we are prepared to advocate for closure at specific prisons across the state. Closing entire prisons, starting with a prison like the California Rehabilitation Center in Norco (CRC), is a sensible step towards significant cost savings."

To this end, CURB began a petition to close CRC in Riverside County in Southern California. That is not all. The criminal justice group wants five more prisons closed, and a commitment to shutter a minimum of four more state prisons in the future.

"This petition will represent the collective voice of thousands of Californians who

believe in a more just and fiscally responsible approach to public safety," said Viju Mathew, a lead organizer with CURB member organization Critical Resistance, in a statement. "We are calling on Gov. Newsom to change course and really step into leadership on prison closure."

Will the governor heed the call of prison closures to reflect the nearly 50% decline of state prisoners since 2006? Much is uncertain.

Philosophers have only interpreted the world, an old German of some note observed at the dawn of industrial capitalism. The point, he continues, is to change the world. That brings things to the economics and politics of the prison closure struggle.

CURB is a grassroots group. It lacks deep pockets. Interests with deep pockets can and do donate to politicians to gain their backing of friendly policies. Author and journalist Greg Palast terms this system "The best democracy that money can buy."

The state prison guard union, the California Correctional Peace Officers Association (CCPOA), has deep pockets and political juice. Consider this.

The CCPOA "successfully negotiated \$1 billion in raises and bonuses from Newsom for their members last year," according to CURB. "CCPOA is one of Newsom's biggest and most reliable donors."

What does all this mean? A David and Goliath battle is taking shape over the future of prison spending in California. Many living human beings, from prisoners to their families, and the workers and communities whose lives connect with Golden State prisons, face an uncertain future as the politics of the incarceration budget play out.

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Ultraprocessed Deadly Corporate Food Demands Action

About 45 years ago, at a social gathering, I asked an executive of a Minneapolis-based large food processing company if he fed heavily sugared cereals to his children. He smiled as he shook his head. Smart person. His and other major companies producing what is now called Ultraprocessed Foods (UPFs) had scientists and labs. They knew that ever higher doses of sugars, fats, and salts were being poured into nutritionally stripped foods and deceptively promoted to youngsters on kiddie television. They profitably ignored the serious damage they were causing!

These companies' marketers succeeded in getting these children, as my mother would say, to turn their tongues against their brains. The children were also shown how to nag their parents into buying junk food and drink. In fact, Madison Avenue advertising firms would give high ratings for ads "with a high nag factor."

It was about 1980 when obesity rates started rising at alarming rates. Now about 30% of adults are obese, another 35% are overweight. Recently, a Goldman Sachs study estimated that by 2028 up to 70 million Americans will be taking the new weight-loss drugs, whose longer-term effects are yet to be known. Their apparent present success in suppressing extra food intake is already worrying the fast-food chains like McDonald's that thrive on selling huge cheeseburgers.

It was also about 1980 when the Cen-

ter for Science in the Public Interest (CSPI) staff and its leader, Dr. Michael Jacobson, were appearing in the mass media and on major national talk shows. They graphically showed the public the large amounts of fat, sugar, and salt that were in the hot dogs, potato chips, and soft drinks they consumed. Millions of Americans started changing their food purchases toward multi-grained breads and more fresh fruits and vegetables. Many people became vegetarians. But most consumers remained wedded to misleadingly promoted and greatly diluted UPFs, short on nutrition and long on harm to their health.

During recent decades there has been an increase in peer-reviewed scientific studies showing that certain foods you can easily buy in the markets can increase your life expectancy while others reduce your longevity. Long-time medical and science reporter/author Jean Carper boiled down these findings into a highly usable new little book titled, "100 Life or Death Foods: A Scientific Guide to Which Foods Prolong Life or Kill You Prematurely." (See my recent column "New Book: Choosing Regular Food to Extend Longevity," April 12, 2024).

On May 8, 2024 – the *New York Times* defined Ultraprocessed Foods (UPFs) as "using industrial methods and ingredients you wouldn't typically find in grocery stores – like high-fructose corn syrup, hydrogenated oils and concentrated proteins

rhetorical bluff. OK, let's assume the protesters are all a bunch of spoiled, snot-nosed punks who wouldn't know suffering if it bit them on the you-know-what. So what? That doesn't make it OK to drop 2,000-pound bombs on civilian buildings.

Pro-Zionists portray demonstrators at the encampments as dupes of "outside agitators" funded, in some cases, by billionaire Democrat George Soros. (So ironic that the Right's obsession with Soros originated as an expression of classic antisemitic tropes about this rich Jew and his supposed web of intrigue and conspiracy.) Some protest organizers, the pro-genocide brigade brays, even get paid a salary!

Again, the proper response is: so what? Who the protesters are, where they came from and who pays them – which, of course, is absurd, since 99.999% of them get paid not one bit – none of these distractions address the question of whether the U.S. should ignore homeless people sleeping on its own streets in order to send billions of dollars of bombs and missiles to Benjamin Netanyahu in order to murder more innocent people.

One might also mention the racist origins of the phrase "outside agitator," used to great effect by racists during the civil rights struggle. The three Freedom Riders (two of them Jews) murdered by the Ku Klux Klan in 1964 were northerners, outsiders, agitators – and their cause was right. If a 28-year-old or 48-year-old marches with young adults for peace in Gaza, they're older – but no less right.

The fascists ask: Why won't they show their faces? If they're proud of themselves, why don't the students who cover their faces with keffiyehs and/or COVID-19 masks expose themselves?

Uh, because they don't want to be doxxed or face expulsion? Where is it written that protesters are required to make things easier for those who seek to oppress them? While we're at it, should supporters of Gaza strip naked and submit DNA samples? Do yard work for Zionists? Perform sexual favors?

Then there's the rightist complaint that some of those in the encampment are too comfortable, sacking out in donated tents and noshing on donated pizza. Again, so friggin' what? Conservative Public Action Conference attendees don't seem to miss many meals. Fox News hosts sleep comfortably enough. Please show us, o ye noble haters of

like soy isolate. They often contain additives like flavorings, colorings or emulsifiers to make them appear more attractive and palatable. Think sodas and energy drinks, chips, candies, flavored yogurts, margarine, chicken nuggets, hot dogs, sausages, lunch meats, boxed macaroni and cheese, infant formulas and most packaged breads, plant milks, meat substitutes and breakfast cereals."

The *Times* continued: "In a large review of studies that was published in 2024, scientists reported that consuming UPFs was associated with 32 health problems, with the most convincing evidence for heart disease-related deaths, Type 2 diabetes and common mental health issues like anxiety and depression." Caution, not all UPFs are associated with these problems.

UPFs make up two-thirds of the calories consumed by children and teenagers in the United States. Still, the giant food companies are getting away with little regulation, especially for their heaviest advertising that pushes their profitable ultraprocessed foods. Have you ever seen TV ads for fresh carrots, radishes, celery, lentils, spinach, kale and asparagus? Unlikely. The mass merchandising ads go for foods, described by a report in the journal *BMJ*, as "designed by manufacturers to achieve a certain 'bliss point,' which causes us to crave and overeat them. They also tend to be low in nutrients, such as fiber, vitamins and minerals."

We are behind other governments in our official dietary guidelines. Canada and Mexico recommend avoiding or limiting UPFs while the US guidelines make no mention of them. Such is the dominance of giant agribusiness corporations over the indented U.S. Department of Agriculture and the mostly bought members of the Senate and House Agriculture Committees.

This corporate interference also ex-

cludes Palestine and lovers of ethnic cleansing, where it says in the Rules of Protest that being comfortable is cheating. Why exactly is it impure to accept tasty foodstuffs as you're awaiting arrest? What does this have to do with the big food-related issue: that Israel is intentionally starving Gazans to death?

Don't forget the asshole gambit. Any group of people has its resident asshole; the Right finds him and implies he represents the whole movement. This time, it's the Columbia student who posted that "Zionists don't deserve to live." Look! say the Zionists. They really *are* all antisemites! Except this asshole isn't antisemitic, he's anti-Zionist. The Left should refuse to be embarrassed. They should defend him. Right-wingers stand by their own, and so should we.

More seriously but no less stupid is the accusation, delivered with ferocious illogic, that student demonstrators in favor of Gaza are antisemitic. Not *actually* antisemitic but antisemitic by *inference*. Amid the zillions of words in news stories, congressional testimony and apologetic statements issued by craven college officials, you will find many references to antisemitism as a concept but no actual antisemitic statements like, say, "kill the Jews." What you will find, delivered at high volume and through a curtain of crocodile tears, are syllogisms such as the one that states that the phrase "from the river to the sea, Palestine will be free" is antisemitic just because.

Hold my hand as I walk you through it. "From the river to the sea, Palestine will be free," they argue loudly, means the eradication of the State of Israel, which in turn means the murder and/or expulsion of all Israelis, which is thus genocidal and antise-

mitic.

tends to constantly putting such UPFs into school lunch programs.

Absent taking over the 535 members of corporate Congress by 250 million eligible voters, we are left with parents and their children availing themselves of publications, such as CSPI's Nutrition Action newsletter, to become smart buyers and consumers of safer, healthier, nutritious food. If you can, add a home garden to your food supply.

Some of these simple recipes, often called a Mediterranean diet, are in my "Ralph Nader and Family Cookbook," (2020) with an introduction on how my mother educated us very early on to want to eat nutritious foods prepared to be delicious as well. She baked her own bread, cooked "from scratch" and avoided processed foods with unknown ingredients, such as hot dogs.

Our snacks were fresh fruits and vegetables, including chickpeas, munched while walking to school. For a sweet taste, we were treated to honey and maple syrup. We were taught not to whine because it wasn't smart and didn't get us anywhere.

Parents are protectors of their children. They have to be especially on guard to protect their children from pervasive direct mass marketing, using influencers, peer groups, and abduction of their youngsters into the Internet Gulag. The earlier in their child's life that parents do their job, the easier it will be. Children so liberated can become active allies of Mom and Dad, showcasing their special knowledge. (See, "You Are Your Own Best Teacher! Sparking the Curiosity, Imagination, and Intellect of Tweens" by Dr. Claire Nader).

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

TED RALL

Pro-Palestinians Should Fight Back Against Right-Wing Bullies

There are more Democrats than Republicans, more liberals than conservatives, more progressives than MAGAs. But you'd never know that from looking at our politics. From abortion to the minimum wage to war, the Right wins the important arguments.

How do they do it? Verbal abuse. Right-wing bullies name-call, they hector, they doxx, they blacklist, they lie. Most of all, they yell. No one's louder than a conservative barking a talking point. They're REALLY loud when said talking point makes no sense.

The current discussion about the student protests at American college and university campuses over the U.S.-Israel war against Gaza is a perfect illustration of their tactics.

They also showcase how the Left can expose right-wing bullies as intellectually dishonest, ridiculous and unworthy of serious consideration about important issues. I know because I deal with these clowns every day. The first thing to notice is that supporters of Israel have given up trying to justify the Netanyahu government's brutal blockade and assault of Gaza, which has killed tens of thousands of innocent Palestinians since Oct. 7, flattened the territory and left hundreds of thousands more starving to death. They can't justify it.

So they deflect.

Supporters of Israel's war against the people of Gaza characterize protesting college students as privileged brats wasting their parents' money. Never mind that two-thirds of them pay their own way, a third borrow student loans, and many earn scholarships, hold jobs and/or don't have parents willing and able to pay.

Critics of Israel should call supporters'



Bobcats Need Protection, Not Killing for Their Pelts

By TED WILLIAMS

Unlike the rest of modern wildlife management, killing bobcats is unregulated, driven not by science but by fur prices. We're stuck in the 19th Century when market hunters, for example, shot boatloads of waterfowl with 10-foot-long, 100-pound "punt guns."

Now, there's a campaign in Colorado—via a November 2024 ballot initiative—to ban hunting and trapping of bobcats, Canada lynx and mountain lions, though lynx are already listed by the state as endangered and supposedly protected.

As a lifelong hunter and angler, I'm told by a group called the Sportsmen's Alliance that it's my duty to defend bobcat trapping and hunting against such "antis" as those pushing the ballot initiative.

But a true sportsmen's alliance of ethical hunters—Teddy Roosevelt, George Bird Grinnell, William Hornaday, Congressman John Lacey, and other Boone and Crockett Club members—got most market hunting banned in 1918.

It persists today as commercial trapping

and hunting of bobcats. Ethical hunters eat what they kill. Bobcat trappers and hunters discard the meat and sell pelts, mostly for export to China and Russia.

Yet the Sportsmen's Alliance warns me that, after bobcat trapping gets banned, "hunting ... and even fishing are the next traditions in the antis' crosshairs."

I don't buy it. I've heard this mantra since the 1970s, including from my then-colleagues at the Massachusetts Division of Fisheries and Wildlife who, like me, were fed and clothed by fishing, trapping and hunting license dollars.

This from veteran bobcat researcher Dr. Mark Ellbroch of the native cat conservation group Panthera: "Colorado treats bobcats pretty much like they're treated throughout the West" (except for California where killing is banned without a special permit.)

"There are hardly any regulations in any state. No bag limits, no data on how many are out there. The hunting community gets super excited about what it calls the 'North American Model of Conservation,' and one of the tenets is you don't kill for profit or trade," Ellbroch continued. "Trapping violates that model in every way. Bobcat trapping is the extreme—selling fur for luxury items. It's sickening."

From December through February, Colorado bobcat hunters and trappers may

kill as many bobcats as they please. And hunters are permitted to pursue bobcats with hounds, an inhumane practice for both cats and hounds.

Bobcat traps are also unselective, catching other species such as Canada lynx, raptors, otters, foxes, martens, badgers, opossums and skunks. "Lynx, a close relative to bobcats, are naturally attracted to bait set for bobcats and are harmed, injured or killed when caught in traps," said Colorado veterinarian Christine Capaldo.

Colorado Parks and Wildlife attempts to rebut such reports with: "No lynx in Colorado has ever been reported as accidentally trapped by bobcat fur harvesters." Of course not. What bobcat trapper would jeopardize permissive regulations by filing such a report?

So, in addition to an estimated 2,000 bobcats, how many non-target animals are killed by the roughly 4,000 bobcat traps annually set in Colorado? No one has a clue.

Colorado requires "humane" live traps. But they're scarcely more humane than legholds and less humane than quick-kill conibear traps.

During winter, bobcats keep warm by finding shelter. In live traps they're immobilized and exposed to cold, rain, snow and wind. Traps must be checked every 24 hours, but there's virtually no enforcement, so live-trapped bobcats sometimes suffer for

days. When traps do get checked bobcats get bludgeoned or strangled.

Before European contact, bobcats prospered throughout what are now the contiguous states. Caucasian immigrants quickly set about rectifying this with an all-out war on the species, behavior that flabbergasted the Indigenous and for which their only explanation was that the pale faces were insane. By the early 20th century, bounties and government control had extirpated bobcats from much of the US.

Now bobcats are slowly recovering in every contiguous state save Delaware. That's an excellent reason not to kill them.

Bobcats belong to all Americans, the vast majority of whom prefer them alive. But they're managed for the very few people who kill them for profit. And from a strictly financial perspective, live bobcats are more valuable than dead ones.

A study published in 2017 in the journal *Biodiversity and Conservation*, based on money spent by wildlife photographers, set the value of a single live bobcat at \$308,000. Today the average bobcat pelt fetches \$100.

Ted Williams is a contributor to Writers on the Range, writersontherange.org, an independent nonprofit dedicated to spurring conversation about the West. He writes about fish and wildlife for national publications.

Ozzy Osbourne Belongs in the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame

By ROB PATTERSON

I'm not much of a fan of the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame, to put it mildly (a rant likely to come in a future column). But the induction of Ozzy Osbourne into it utterly delights me.

This might surprise regular readers, as he's stylistically parsecs removed from the music I tend to like and champion. Some of you might also find it odd that the reason why is that I worked doing publicity for Ozzy. And enjoyed doing it and him immensely.

It was late 1983 when I was hired on as the East Coast Office for the LA-based music PR shop Jensen Communications. Among their clients was Ozzy, who firm honcho Michael Jensen had already hooked me up with to interview twice.

I first met Osbourne as he opened the door to the Arden condo at the Helmsley Palace in midtown Manhattan, a palatial space with two-story windows along two sides of the huge open main room (owned

his wife/manager Sharon's music mogul father). Ozzy was dressed in medical scrubs that I assumed were from his recent stint in rehab for alcohol and drugs.

He was immediately warm and welcoming. As we headed to a couch and chairs, his gait was unsteady and both his arms were shaking. I assumed from the DTs. As he struggled to take a cigarette from its pack and went to light it, tremors shook his arms and hands. It felt painful to watch. Yet he succeeded in doing it time and time again throughout our hour together as if it was totally normal.

What won me over was his honesty and sense of humor about everything, even his huge foibles. One tale he told was how started drinking one day in London, "and came out of my blackout three days later in Germany, and had no idea how the f*** I got there," he said, chuckling at it all. By the end of the hour, I was thoroughly charmed. He was anything but the minion of Satan some believed him to be.

The first show I covered as his publicist on his tour backing his Bark at the Moon album was at Philadelphia's Spectrum arena. Afterwards, there was a knock on my hotel room door. I opened it, and there was Osbourne, who managed to slip away from his bodyguard. ("The reason Ozzy has a bodyguard is to protect himself from from his body," Jensen once noted.)

"Got anything to drink?" he asked, as he

shuffled towards the minibar.

"Ozzy. Get away from the minibar!" He stopped, not giving me any star of the show attitude, insisting that he could do whatever he wanted. Instead, he shrugged and plopped into a chair. We chatted for a bit and then he wandered off to another room in search of booze.

During the months I worked on the tour, I regularly dealt with Sharon, who's become a media personality as well. She was firm, but fair, with, like Ozzy — of whom she was very protective — a nice sense of humor and irony. Sharon has proven herself to be something of a marketing genius with the Ozzfest tours and festivals. And, of course, the hit family reality TV show, "The Osbournes."

I like to quip that I was an occasional secondary walk-on star on "The Osbournes: The Prequel." People of all ages and stripes are almost always impressed when I mention that I worked with the Blizzard of Oz, His fame has gone far beyond the rock world, in which he has sold some 100 million albums and won five Grammy Awards.

The Ozzy I knew, and in my interactions, was a sweet, rather clever bloke, eminently lovable, super friendly and unpretentiously honest about himself. Superstardom hadn't seemed to change him one bit.

His life story, to me, epitomizes the redemption rock'n'roll offers. If it hadn't been for the music, he might well have spent decades working in a slaughterhouse, as he

did before his singing career started with Black Sabbath, the band that later canned him. Hence I love the typically Ozzy comment on his HOF induction: "Not bad for a guy who was fired from his last band."

Populist Picks

ROCK MUSIC ALBUMS: *Tone Wrecker*, *Play Loud* and *Boom Boom Boom* by The Blue Bonnets — Speaking of the R&R HOF, member Kathy Valentine of The Go-Go's has a new all-woman band whose four-to-the-floor rock'n'roll abounds with verve, spunk, sleek grooves and hooks galore. Valentine and Austin hotshot Eve Monsees knit their guitars together like Keith Richards and Ronnie Wood behind singer/bassist Dominique Davalos to take listeners on a soaring musical magic carpet ride. If you like to rock out, all three LPs are roof-raising delights. Girl power indeed.

ROCK MUSIC ALBUM: *Fu##in' Up* by Neil Young & Crazy Horse — Young and the Horse are my top go-to band when I need raggedly glorious rocking. They're joined by guitarist Micah Nelson (Willie's son) on a 2023 live disc that bursts with a shower of bursts and sparks.

Rob Patterson is a music and entertainment writer in Austin, Texas. Email ropatterson054@gmail.com.

SATIRE/Rosie Sorenson

Noem Sweet Noem

Well, well, well. The no-longer-future Vice President for Donald Trump, Kristi Noem, admitted in her new book to having committed a deed so abhorrent that even Republicans have shunned her. Most agree that her dream job has slipped through her trigger fingers.

She described killing her dog Cricket for crimes that under normal circumstances would have earned Cricket a ticket to Canine Boot Camp. She thought that by telling us Cricket's tragic story that she would be viewed as someone who could make tough decisions. Sad.

She also insulted Kim Jun Un by telling us in her tell-all that she had met him at the DMZ, calling him a "little tyrant." (Note to Kristi: Kim is a big fat tyrant.)

Not wise to mess with Leader Kim.

"I never met her," Kim hollered when he learned of her claim. "Why would I meet with a third-rate political dog-killer? Who does she think she is? Donald Trump? Makes South Dakota look like a cheap-ass trailer park. Someone should gift her with an all-expense-paid vacation to the gravel pit of her choice."

After making a fool of herself in television interviews by refusing to admit she lied about meeting Kim, she changed topics by chiding President Biden for not being tough enough to shoot his beloved German Shepherd, Commander, who had a bit of a bent for biting.

Soon after hearing Noem castigate his Daddy, President Biden's beloved biting boy disappeared from his foster home in Silver Springs.

Commander was reportedly spotted in South Dakota by a drunken old man stumbling around on one of the country roads, but his claim was easily dismissed by the Sheriff after a breathalyzer test.

Commander, aptly named for his take-charge attitude, slunk into the yard of the Noem house, and lured away her new Pointer, Pete, by tempting him with a dead squirrel.

Commander dropped the squirrel and whispered, "Look, Dude. You know you're on the shot list, right? It's just a matter of time before you hear the cock of the pistol and then bam, you're dead. Your Mom's a crazy psycho bitch from hell, sorry to speak ill of her, but she killed Cricket and an innocent goat—can you be far behind?"

"No, No, No. That can't be true." Pete backed away.

"Didn't you hear her on CNN say that 'If Pete doesn't shape up soon, we might have to give him the Cricket Cure?'"

"But I've been a good boy, I swear," cried Pete, shaking violently.

"Look. Nothing can slake your mom's thirst for blood. You need to come with me," said Commander, turning away.

He and Pete trotted behind Noem to the edge of the gravel pit and watched her put the Tundra in Neutral. She set the emergency brake and hopped out, shotgun in one hand and very squirmy rabbit in the other.

"Ah, not Bunny!" cried Pete. "I love that Bunny."

Noem was preparing to toss Bunny into the air as if it were a clay pigeon to shoot. As she was loading her shotgun, Commander climbed inside the Tundra, released the emergency brake and jumped out. He and Pete circled around to the back and nudged the truck toward Noem.

"Oh, nooooo!" Kristi screamed. "I didn't mean it. I swear I was not going to shoo—"

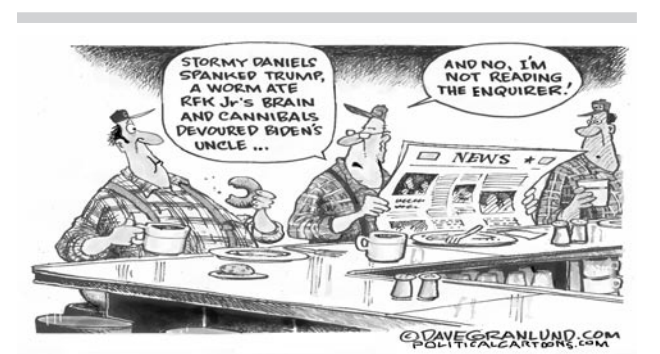
Bam! The truck slammed into Kristi, barreling her over the rim of the gravel pit, tossing her next to the carcasses of her other so-called pets. Bunny scampered up the hill toward Pete.

"That ought to put the fear of God into anyone who wants to follow in your mom's footsteps, or rather her gun shots," said Commander. Pete peeked over the rim of the gravel pit, shuddering, tears in his eyes. He scuffed Bunny and moved him away.

"That's OK, Pete. You and Bunny can come live with me in Silver Springs—nice, cushy home. They will never shoot you no matter how bad you mess up!"

"They must be Democrats."

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



TCM's 'Woodstock of Classic Movies' Presents Vintage Films & Stars Galore

Enhancing the Festival's heady ambiance is the great motion picture bonhomie among the film fans attending this movie-palooza, which also includes parties in Club TCM at the Hollywood Roosevelt Hotel.

The TCM Classic Film Festival, which turned 15 this year, annually presents primo pictures from yesterday along with panels and talents linked to those movies at venues in Hollywood. TCM's 2024 film fete included personal appearances by John Travolta, Steven Spielberg, Mel Brooks, Tim Robbins and even highlighted Jodie Foster "cementing" her place in Tinseltown history with a hand and footprint ceremony in the hallowed courtyard of what previously was Grauman's Chinese Theater (now TCL Chinese Theatre Max, where *Silence of the Lambs*, *Pulp Fiction*, *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*, *The Shawshank Redemption* and Hitchcock's *North By Northwest* were screened during the Festival). Enhancing the Festival's heady ambiance is the great motion picture bonhomie among the film fans attending this movie-palooza, which also includes parties in Club TCM at the Hollywood Roosevelt Hotel.

Panel discussions are also held at Club TCM, and on April 20 I was on the horns of an existential dilemma. At 2:30 p.m., the "Reflections of the Thin Blue Line: The Police in Movies" panel was scheduled at Club TCM to analyze the portrayal of police onscreen. Panelists included actor/director Mario Van Peebles, former NYPD officer/private investigator Herman Weisberg and Dr. Phillip Atiba Solomon, Professor of African American Studies and Psychology at Yale University, co-founder of the Center for Policing Equity.

However, almost at the same time, Donald Bogle, the world's top authority on the African American screen image and author of 1973's groundbreaking "Toms, Coons, Mulattos, Mammies & Bucks" and many other books, was to present 1938's "The Mad Miss Manton," co-starring Henry Fonda, Barbara Stanwyck and Hattie McDaniel at the newly restored Egyptian Theatre. Bogle always imparts fascinating wisdom about how Black characters are represented onscreen, so which event should I attend?

What's a film historian/critic to do?

Hearing the esteemed Bogle share his incisive insights into the celluloid stereotypes and misrepresentations of African Americans is always an annual highlight at the TCM

Classic Film Festival, which bestowed its prestigious Robert Osborne Award last year on this author and scholar. So, like a movie Moses, I went way down to Egypt's land — or at least to the Egyptian Theatre, my favorite cinema on Earth, which I hadn't returned to since it reopened following a major refurbishing, and the mindboggling Bogle didn't disappoint.

After being introduced by Festival Director Genevieve McGillicuddy, Bogle discussed *The Mad Miss Manton*, explaining that during "the 1930s screwball comedies were a staple genre of Hollywood films" that often featured "mismatched leads. They did away with conventional storylines and were surprising and always delighted." Screwball comedies emerged during the Depression and often crossed class lines, depicting a world out of kilter as the capitalist system collapsed. *The Mad Miss Manton* has one of the best cute meets since Harry met Sally: When the bourgeois Melsa Manton (Barbara Stanwyck) first encounters the proletarian Peter Ames (Henry Fonda), Melsa slaps him across the face — and Peter slaps her right back! This being a screwball comedy, that can mean only one thing: [Plot Spoiler Alert:] Melsa and Peter will get hitched!

But Bogle's primary focus of attention was Hattie McDaniel, who portrayed Melsa's maid, Hilda. The preeminent film historian told the Egyptian's packed (and mostly Caucasian) audience about the background of the first African American to win an Oscar, for playing Mammy in the 1939 blockbuster "Gone with the Wind." McDaniel was "criticized for roles she did not write. Hattie rips those stereotypes apart. She was born to give orders, not to take them."

Bogle went on to reveal something quite remarkable: "Hattie had zingers. The Breen Office [a motion picture industry self-censorship body that enforced the protocols of a rigid "Production Code"] objected to dialogue that made Hattie too familiar with Whites she worked for. Some of the dialogue was cut."

Early in "The Mad Miss Manton," while Melsa throws a party at her swanky Manhattan pad for her debutante gal pals (think Truman Capote's "Swans," only younger), when the doorbell rings. After a partygoer informs Hilda of this, she snaps: "I hear it. I ain't deaf. Sometimes I wish I was." If this is an example of a McDaniel quip that wasn't deleted, one can only imagine what Breen's censors forced to be left on the cutting room floor. Offscreen Hattie was famous for saying, "I may play a maid, but it's better than being a maid." Servant roles may have been the only ones available to her in racist, apartheid America — but it doesn't mean that Hattie and her characters liked it.

B.T.W., the dialogue throughout *The Mad Miss Manton* is full of topical, lefty references, to "revolution," "communism," "class," the Roosevelt administration's "W.P.A." New Deal jobs project, "class conscious," and the like. I did some cinematic sleuthing and discovered that one of the three screenwriters credited for "Manton" was Philip G. Epstein, co-writer of the 1942 anti-fascist classic "Casablanca" and of Frank Capra's "Popular Front Why We Fight" documentaries, including 1943's Oscar-nommed "The Battle of Russia." Epstein, who was part of the star-studded Committee for the First Amendment that opposed the Hollywood Blacklist in 1947, was presumably the main source for the left-leaning jargon — and Hattie's acid-tongued rejoinders to her White "superiors" — in Manton's jaunty dialogue. During Hollywood's much-vaunted Golden Age, when non-stereo-

typical Black characters appeared onscreen, a leftist scribe and/or director is usually found in the credits.

Speaking of class consciousness and African American roles, on April 21, the filmfest's final day, I enjoyed 1976's "The Bingo Long Traveling All-Stars & Motor Kings" at the Chinese Multiplex #1. I hadn't seen this comedy drama about Negro League era baseball players since it was released, and the experience of seeing it again was heightened by a live appearance by the actor who played the title character. Billy Dee Williams was interviewed by a gushing Ben Mankiewicz before the screening, and the thesp known for his suave style and good looks revealed himself to be an idiosyncratic, introspective thinker.

In "Bingo Long," Williams co-stars with the awesome James Earl Jones and a hilarious Richard Pryor as athletes so tired of their exploitation by owners that they decide to "seize the means of production," as they put it. The players form their own baseball team and the eponymous Traveling All-Stars and Motor Kings organize themselves along socialist lines. It is collectively owned by all of the teammates, including the batboy, with the slogan: "Equal pay for equal play." Jones' character quotes and reads a book by W.E.B. Du Bois (who, towards the end of his life, joined the Communist Party USA and relocated to newly independent Ghana). One of the really interesting things about "Bingo Long" is its class struggle component: The owners the players battle are Black, and economics is at the core of their oppression and fight for liberation, not race.

Another notable thing is that unlike most Hollywood movies about revolt that end badly for rebels, with their submission to authority, defeat and even death, "Bingo Long"'s rebellious athletes are champs, not chumps. In the movie, their collective triumph leads to breaking professional sports' color barrier. This joyous film was directed by John Badham a year before he helmed "Saturday Night Fever."

Long before he played Prince Faisal in 1962's "Lawrence of Arabia" and Obi-Wan Kenobi in the "Star Wars" franchise, the London-born Alec Guinness — who wasn't an Arab or space alien — starred in the veddy British Ealing Studios comedies, including 1951's droll "The Lavender Hill Mob."

I ended my cinematic sojourn by returning to the Egyptian for a hysterically funny Buster Keaton double bill, featuring 1921's "The Goat" and the centennial presentation of Keaton's comedic masterpiece, 1924's "Sherlock Jr.," introduced by TCM host of "Silent Sunday Nights" Jacqueline Stewart, Director/President of the Academy Museum of Motion Pictures. The endlessly inventive film pioneer's sight gags, slapstick and innovative montages continue to delight and enrapture audiences 100 years later. The Mont Alto Motion Picture Orchestra enhanced the experience, by accompanying Buster's silent movies with live music.

I suppose "Sherlock Jr." — wherein a projectionist dreams he's an ace detective — closed out the TCM Classic Film Festival because Keaton's comedy fit in with the fest's central theme "Most Wanted: Crime and Justice in Film."

For more info: <https://filmfestival.tcm.com/>

Ed Rampell is a film historian and critic based in Los Angeles. Rampell is the author of "Progressive Hollywood, A People's Film History of the United States" and he co-authored "The Hawaii Movie and Television Book," now in its third edition. This first appeared at hollywoodprogressive.com.

Harrison Butker is a Jerk, a Bigot, and a True Representative of the NFL

In a brief commencement speech, the Kansas City kicker managed to be racist, sexist and homophobic. The NFL response is revealing.

by DAVE ZIRIN

Colin Kaepernick was blackballed from the NFL for protesting police killings and racial inequity. The NFL's quibblings that defended the de facto banning of Kaepernick said, as part of their arsenal of arguments, that the quarterback violated the most important rule of sports: making the games political. They said kneeling during the anthem was a "distraction" from the game itself. But it was never "politics" that Kaepernick's foes in the owners' boxes, league offices, and right-wing media sewers had a problem with. It was the ideas that he represented. In a sport where 70% of the players are Black, the league wanted to make clear that anti-racism had no place in the NFL.

This hypocrisy of what ideas are allowed and what are not is on sharp display in the story of Kansas City Chiefs placekicker Harrison Butker: If you are asking "who?," you are

not alone. Normally, the words of an NFL place kicker are about as sought after as a salad at McDonalds. Yet Butker has angered a subset of fans this week by being — not to put too fine a point on it — a bigoted jackass. It's hardly the most important story on the sports/political landscape, but it is revealing.

At a commencement speech last weekend at Benedictine College, a Catholic liberal arts school in Atchison, Kansas, Butker managed, in just a few minutes, to be homophobic, anti-abortion (saying that Joe Biden was responsible for "the murder of innocent babies"), and racist, railing against the "tyranny of diversity, equity, and inclusion." He cried out against "things like abortion, IVF, surrogacy, euthanasia, as well as a growing support for degenerate cultural values and media," which supposedly "all stem from the pervasiveness of disorder."

Targeting the men in the audience, Butker told them to "be unapologetic in your masculinity," and to "fight against the cultural emasculation of men."

Yet the part of this graduation speech that has garnered the most negative publicity is when he spoke of the "diabolical lies" that say to women they should work outside the home. "Some of you may go on to lead successful careers in the world," he brayed. "But I would venture to guess that the majority of you are most excited about your marriage and the children you will bring into this world."

Then Butker choked up when speaking about his wife Isabelle's thwarted ambitions and his own thrill that she had chosen to be a "homemaker." He said that she would be "the first to say that her life truly started when she began living her vocation

as a wife and as a mother."

Butker topped it off by incoherently quoting his teammate Travis Kelce's girlfriend, Taylor Swift. The irony of his reciting the lyrics one of the Earth's most successful women was not lost on Swifties, who have savaged him in the aftermath of his blatherings. Less publicized, however, is that Butker's own mother, Elizabeth Butker, has been a medical physicist at Emory University's department of radiation oncology since 1988.

But we should not forget about the hypocrisy on display from not only Butker but the league as well. The NFL's response was weaker than a \$12 stadium beer, saying, "Harrison Butker gave a speech in his personal capacity. His views are not those of the NFL as an organization. The NFL is steadfast in our commitment to inclusion, which only makes our league stronger."

This statement was made by Jonathan Beane, the chief diversity officer of the league, a position that Butker does not think should exist. Herein lies a microcosm of our present day politics. Butker believes "diversity" to be demonic; his language is violent and eliminationist. The response by the person who is sup-

posed to defend diversity is to say, "Golly, he's just speaking for himself." The hard-right wing, of which Butker is a part, is ready for war, and the other side wants peace and the flow of money to continue uninterrupted even at the expense of their own existence.

Yes, the NFL wants female fans, and yes, they want fans of color, and yes, going soft on Butker risks that. But above all else, NFL executives exist to appease the whims of billionaires in the owners' boxes most of whom — judging by their bankrolling of Donald Trump — agree with Butker. The destruction of Black bodies for White consumption and profit is an ugly business. Normally, the NFL wants to keep the underlying ideology of its owners under wraps. The biggest problem with Butker is that he vomited it up for everyone to see.

Dave Zirin is the sports editor at The Nation. He is the author of 11 books on the politics of sports, including "The Kaepernick Effect: Taking a Knee, Changing the World." He is also the coproducer and writer of the documentary "Behind the Shield: The Power and Politics of the NFL." Email edgeofsports@gmail.com



AMY GOODMAN



As many as 900,000 Palestinians were driven from their homes after the state of Israel was declared, starting the protracted conflict.

The Palestinian Nakba, from 1948 to Today

Palestinians and allies marked the 76th anniversary of the Nakba, May 15th — the day after the state of Israel was formally declared. “Nakba” is Arabic for “catastrophe,” and is used to describe the murder, dispossession and forced displacement Palestinians suffered in the years up to and including 1948. As many as 900,000 Palestinians were driven from their homes. Thousands were killed, massacred by Israeli militias like the Irgun and the Stern Gang or while fleeing on foot with no food or water, and some while engaged in armed resistance. What has followed since 1948 has been one of the most violent, costly and protracted conflicts in the modern era.

Israel’s assault on Gaza has been termed a genocide by an increasing number of United Nations member states and international legal experts. Egypt joined South Africa’s genocide case against Israel at the International Court of Justice in The Hague, where an emergency hearing was called this week, following Israel’s ground invasion of Rafah. In Gaza, the official death toll is now over 35,000 Palestinians. Israel’s siege is also responsible for widening famine in Gaza.

“What we are seeing now, what unfolds in front of our eyes, is a genocidal situation, by which people are targeted, whether they are children, babies, in hospital or in schools. This is a massive operation of killing, of ethnic cleansing, of depopulation,” renowned Israeli historian Ilan Pappé, who as an Israeli soldier fought in the 1973 war, said on the Democracy Now! news hour. “The Nakba has never really ended for the Palestinians, so it’s a new horrific chapter in the ongoing Nakba that the Palestinians are suffering.”

Professor Pappé was just detained when he flew into Detroit, and described on Facebook two hours of FBI questioning before being released. He said they asked, “Am I a Hamas supporter? Do I regard the Israeli actions in Gaza a genocide? What is the solution to the ‘conflict’ (seriously, this is what they asked!) Who are my Arab and Muslim friends in America?”

This week, on Nakba Day, Professor Abdel Razzaq Takriti, a Palestinian historian and endowed Arab studies chair at Rice University, said on Democracy Now!

“The Nakba is continuing. We have to

understand that this is a colonial continuum. This is a structural process. It is not an event. And what we’re seeing now in Gaza is very much connected to what happened in 1948.”

Professor Takriti assigned historical blame on the United Nations, the United States, and Britain:

“You had a very aggressive settler-colonial movement develop in Palestine under British rule. It was armed under British rule. It was trained under British rule.”

Professor Takriti continued, “The Israeli project is very much intertwined with American foreign policy towards the Palestinian people. They don’t see us as human beings. They want to destroy us. But they know that they have to present it in self-defense terms so that it’s palatable to the broader public... this is just a racist, criminal project that is leading and causing immense pain and suffering.”

South Africa’s genocide case against Israel at the International Court of Justice is seeking to do just that. On May 16, human rights attorney Adila Hassim spoke at the ICJ emergency hearing, her voice betraying emotion as she recited grim statistics:

“Children have suffered particularly severely. More than 14,000 have been killed. 1000s more have been injured or lost family members. While an estimated 17,000 Children are unaccompanied or separated. Make no mistake. These conditions are a direct result of Israel’s military onslaught on the besieged enclave with full knowledge of the destructive consequences of this hu-

manitarian crisis. In these circumstances, the thwarting of humanitarian aid cannot be seen as anything but the deliberate snuffing out of Palestinian lives, starvation to the point of famine, obstructing aid in the face of famine, and killing of at least 200 aid workers.”

Hassim concluded, “Israel must be stopped.”

Ironically, Israeli nationalists, many who deny that the Nakba occurred at all, are now calling for a second one. “Right now, one goal: Nakba! A Nakba that will overshadow the Nakba of 48,” wrote Knesset member Ariel Kellner. On May 14, at an Israeli Independence Day march, far-right National Security Minister Itamar Ben-Gvir addressed thousands, saying, “First, we must return to Gaza now! We are coming home to the Holy Land! And second, we must encourage emigration. Encourage the voluntary emigration of the residents of Gaza!”

Israel’s mass slaughter in Gaza must end immediately. Ultimately, the Israeli occupation of Palestine, and US support for the occupation, also must end. It’s not good for Israel or its national security. It’s devastating for Palestinians. It’s illegal and immoral.

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.”

Graduates Need To Know That Life Is Bigger Than Your GPA

By BONNIE JEAN FELDKAMP

“Your success in high school does not determine your success in life.” My high school English teacher Chuck Keller told me this, and it was exactly what teenage me needed to hear. Chuck was right, and I’m here to pass on this little nugget to young adults today.

It’s graduation season, and society has a way of making kids think that their future rides on every grade they’ve ever gotten in

high school. They worry that their success is built upon every scholarship or academic award they’ve ever received. In a select few degree programs that might be true, but for the vast majority of us, it’s just not. A meritocracy saddles students with imposter syndrome and unnecessary shame over what is quite possibly the most tumultuous four years of their lives.

The fact is no one cares anymore that I failed algebra or that I went to summer school. No one cares that I was once ineligible to compete in state competition with the marching band because I was failing biology.

My boss cares only about the skills required to do the job.

I did not fit in the traditional path of many of my peers, and that’s OK. I learned what I know now from editors who believed in me. I am the result of informal apprenticeships and the desire to learn. I learned most

when given the space to explore what mattered to me, while having the opportunity to fail and to try again. Maybe my dad is right when he says I learned most things the hard way. But without a grade or evaluation attached to it, I was much better able to integrate my experiences into my skill set and it has brought success and pride to my everyday life in meaningful ways. Even without a college degree.

Life is so much bigger than one’s GPA, and there are a myriad of paths, all of which are valid. Life is full of relationships and learning and pursuing individual interests that give each of us that feeling of fulfillment. Life doesn’t need to be a constant hustle. It doesn’t need to be quantified or validated by anyone but oneself. Each of us gets to decide what it means to live our purpose.

That is the message I want our young people to hear as they collect their diplo-

mas and enter into this world. Put down your phone. The comparisons we subject ourselves to in the highlight reels on Instagram is not where joy lives. Joy and meaning are found in one’s purpose. Focus on that and you will succeed.

If you’re attending a graduation service or party to celebrate a graduate, give that young person in your life the opportunity to explore and discover life for themselves with your confidence, love and support.

Bonnie Jean Feldkamp is a wife, mother and opinion editor at the Louisville Courier-Journal. She is the media director of the National Society of Newspaper Columnists. Find her on social media @WriterBonnie, or email her at Bonnie@WriterBonnie.com. Check out her weekly YouTube videos at https://www.youtube.com/bonniejeanfeldkamp.

Dispatches ...

Continued from page 5

said there was no deadline to serve the notice, the *New York Times* reported.

Besides Arizona, the states of Michigan, Nevada and Georgia are also charging electors for falsely casting votes for Trump.

VOTERS CREDIT BIDEN AND TRUMP EQUALLY ON INFRASTRUCTURE. ONLY ONE GOT IT DONE.

Donald Trump’s administration became infamous for routinely declaring it was “Infrastructure Week,” only to make exactly zero progress on his pledge to “put millions of our people to work” rebuilding highways, bridges, tunnels, airports, schools, and hospitals. In political circles, mentioning “Infrastructure Week” not only drew surefire laughs, it also became synonymous with Trump’s pervasive governing incompetence. In the end, Trump and his allies never even got around to unveiling a bill on the matter, Kerry Eleveld noted at Daily Kos (5/9).

Yet while Trump campaigned on a \$1 trillion infrastructure plan in 2016, Joe Biden was the president who got it done, ensuring a once-in-a-generation investment into upgrading the country’s ailing transit systems.

But new polling conducted by Morning Consult for *Politico* shows voters credit Biden and Trump almost equally for advancing infrastructure projects—and the jobs that flow from them.

While 40% of voters say Biden “has done more to promote infrastructure improvements and job creation,” 37% say the same of Trump. On the bright side, nearly three-quarters of Democrats say Biden has done more—it’s important for Democratic voters to have some concept of their president’s accomplishments.

But among independents, Trump gets

slightly more credit than Biden, at 34% to 32%.

The poll speaks to a persistent conundrum for Biden’s White House: how to make sure voters are aware of the historic amount of legislation the president has helped usher through a deeply polarized Congress, with the thinnest of margins.

The notion that Trump, who became the butt of Beltway infrastructure jokes, is now viewed as having advanced the policy nearly as much as Biden is gobsmacking.

President Biden is now consistently drawing more contrasts on the issue between himself and Trump.

“You may recall that my predecessor promised ‘Infrastructure Week’ every single week for four years,” Biden told attendees at an event in May in Wilmington, N.C. “He didn’t build a damn thing — nothing,” Biden said to laughter and applause.

“At the same time,” Biden continued, “he and his MAGA allies in Congress were happy to give the very super rich a \$2 trillion tax cut in his administration — \$2 trillion — that benefitted the super wealthy and the biggest corporations while exploding the federal debt.”

Biden traveled to another battleground state on May 8 to tout a multibillion-dollar investment by Microsoft at the very site in Racine, Wis., where Trump once promised Foxconn would pour \$10 trillion into building a new manufacturing complex, creating 13,000 new jobs.

“Are you kidding me?” Biden said, noting that Trump and GOP Sen. Ron Johnson wielded golden shovels at the event. “Look what happened. They dug a hole with those golden shovels, and then they fell into it,” he quipped.

Foxconn, Biden added, “turned out to be just that, a con.”

“Folks, during the previous administration, my predecessor made promises which

he broke more than kept and left a lot of people behind in communities like Racine,” Biden said. “On my watch, we make promises and we keep promises.”

REPUBLICANS ARE MAKING IT HARDER AND MORE HAZARDOUS TO REGISTER NEW VOTERS.

While new voters or voters who have recently moved to a new location can register at any time, there are usually big drives to get people registered ahead of each election. Both parties make an outreach to new voters, but with Democrats holding a 28-point margin among the youngest group of voters, it’s understandable that registration drives tend to be slightly more exciting on the left than on the right, Mark Sumner noted at Daily Kos (5/19).

However, as NPR reports, in this election cycle groups trying to register those new voters are facing a frightening set of obstacles. If Republicans can’t find new voters, they want to make sure no one can.

Since the 2020 election, at least six states have passed legislation cracking down on voter registration drives. Many groups view the laws—enacted by Republicans in Florida, Idaho, Kansas, Missouri, Montana and Tennessee—as an existential threat to their work, and several have shut down operations rather than risk financial penalties or prison time.

To justify these new rules, Republicans have been spreading unfounded claims about Democrats attempting to register undocumented immigrants. Claims about noncitizen voting have reached the US House in the form of unfounded fears spread by Speaker Mike Johnson, and they’ve been blasted around social media with the help of Elon Musk.

Backed by these ridiculous, racist and self-serving claims, Republicans have drafted new limits on voter registration that are truly

draconian. In Kansas, if a potential voter mistakes someone offering to register them to vote for an election official, that person can be charged with a felony.

“If you’re [convicted of] a felony, you lose your right to vote. So you could lose your right to vote for registering voters,” Davis Hammet of the group Loud Light said.

In Florida, legislators bumped the maximum fine for making a mistake during voter registration from \$1,000 to \$50,000. Then they bumped it again to \$250,000, while imposing additional restrictions on how organizations can register voters. It was enough to force even long-established groups like the League of Women Voters of Florida to hang up their clipboards.

“More new voters means more new Democrats. Republicans know that. So they’re throwing up all the obstacles they can and justifying them with a smokescreen of fear.

“All of which makes 2024 more difficult. And more important,” Sumner concluded.

POLL SHOWS BIDEN AND TRUMP SUPPORTERS ARE SHARPLY DIVIDED BY THE MEDIA THEY CONSUME.

An NBC News poll in April found Biden is the clear choice of voters who consume newspapers and national network news, while Trump does best among voters who don’t follow political news at all, Ben Kamisar reported at NBC News (4/29).

The poll looked at various forms of traditional media (newspapers, national network news and cable news), as well as digital media (social media, digital websites and YouTube-Google). Among registered voters, 54% described themselves as primarily traditional news consumers, while 40% described themselves as primarily digital media consumers.

Biden holds an 11-point lead among tra-

Continued on next page

Trump is Guilty Beyond a Reasonable Doubt of Being a Cad

By DANA MILBANK

Melania Trump has not once shown up for her husband's hush money trial. But she is a constant presence there.

When Donald Trump's former lawyer and fixer, Michael Cohen, took the stand on May 13, he testified that in 2016 he asked the then-Republican presidential nominee how Melania Trump would react to the story bubbling up about her husband having sex with adult-film actress Stormy Daniels.

"Don't worry," Trump replied, in Cohen's testimony, expressing confidence that he could quickly find a new partner. Cohen said, "He goes, 'How long do you think I'll be on the market for? Not long.'"

Cohen added: "He wasn't thinking about Melania. This was all about the campaign."

Cohen's account was strikingly consistent with Daniels's the previous week. She testified that when she asked Trump during their 2006 rendezvous about Melania, "He said, 'Oh, don't worry about that. We ... actually don't even sleep in the same room.'"

And Cohen's impression was nearly identical to that of longtime Trump friend David Pecker, whose *National Enquirer* bought and killed sexual allegations against Trump and published lies about his political opponents. Once Trump launched his presi-

dential campaign, "I didn't hear or discuss that ... he was concerned [about] what would Melania say," Pecker testified. "It was, basically, what would ... the impact be to the campaign or election."

Prosecutor Joshua Steinglass asked if Trump ever said anything "that indicated that he was concerned about what Melania Trump ... would think about these affairs?"

"No," Pecker replied.

Former Trump campaign official Hope Hicks testified that, after the *Wall Street Journal* broke the Daniels story a few days before the election, Trump "was concerned how it would be viewed by his wife" - but his solution was "he wanted me to make sure that the newspapers weren't delivered to their residence that morning."

The jury was still a week or more from deliberating on the charges against Trump for falsifying business records. But the evidence so far has already proved, beyond a reasonable doubt, that Trump is a cad in the first degree.

When the Daniels story was breaking, he didn't express remorse. In Cohen's testimony, Trump said: "Women will hate me. Guys may think it's cool, but this is going to be a disaster for the campaign."

Cohen testified that when he asked Trump about Karen McDougal, the *Playboy* model who also said she had a sexual affair with Trump during his marriage to Melania, Trump replied, "She's really beautiful." And when Cohen asked him if he had a sexual encounter with Daniels, he didn't answer, but "he said she was a beautiful woman."

Trump's defense team clearly perceives that his treatment of his wife is an issue in the trial, for his lawyers used their cross-examination of Hicks to elicit her impression that "President Trump really values Mrs. Trump's opinion." Under cross-examination by Trump lawyers, former White House aide Madeleine Westerhout said Trump "had a

photograph of his wife" in the Oval Office and the spouses would sometimes wave to each other across the White House complex.

"He had a close and lovely relationship with his wife?" Trump's lawyer asked.

"Yes," the former aide testified.

One can only imagine how lovely it must be now, as Melania Trump's name is dragged into his trial day after day. Two weeks ago, Keith Davidson, McDougal's lawyer, testified about texts from the *National Enquirer* in which he was asked, "Did [Trump] cheat on Melania?" and "Do you know if the affair was during his marriage to Melania?"

Melania was even blamed for Trump's excuse after the 2016 surfacing of the "Access Hollywood" tape, with his boasting about grabbing women's genitals. "The spin that he wanted put on it was that this is locker room talk, something that Melania had recommended, or at least he told me that that's what Melania had thought it was," Cohen testified.

Reading through Cohen's testimony produces a strong desire to take a shower. He recounted how he helped Trump stiff vendors to the failed Trump University, how he threatened reporters on Trump's behalf, and how he lied and bullied "to accomplish the task, to make him happy." Cohen previewed the "fantastic" (in Trump's view) lies that Pecker's team published to attack Trump's opponents. And he helped arrange for phony entities and invoices used to pay off women alleging sexual trysts with Trump. Thirty thousand dollars went to pay a Trump Tower doorman who was circulating a story that Trump had a love child, \$150,000 went to McDougal and \$130,000 to Daniels.

Cohen's testimony was woven throughout with seamy details. Trump, Cohen testified, told him at the start of the presidential campaign to "just be prepared. There's going

to be a lot of women coming forward." He read from an email encapsulating the Trump campaign's strategy for the "Access Hollywood" scandal: "deny, deny, deny." He testified that Trump, when asked about his first meeting with Daniels at a golf event, boasted that women preferred him over his golf partner that day, former Pittsburgh Steelers quarterback Ben Roethlisberger.

Cohen read from an email involving Pecker's company, American Media Inc., discussing its deletion of an old online article titled "Donald Trump, Playboy Man," about "how exacting the real-estate blowhard standards are regarding women."

Things were similarly degrading outside the courthouse on May 13. A pair of Republican senators, who had come to watch the trial, did what Trump isn't allowed to because of a gag order: attack the judge's family and the jurors. J.D. Vance (Ohio) claimed that Justice Juan Merchan's daughter, a political consultant, "is making millions of dollars running against Donald Trump, raising money for Donald Trump's political opponents." Tommy Tuberville (Ala.) referred to the jurors as "supposedly American citizens."

It was all so gross — and Cohen, in his account, takes the blame for starting the nation down this path. "In 2011, I had come across, while reading the paper, a poll that stated 6% of all the people who had taken the poll thought Mr. Trump should be president of the United States," Cohen testified May 13. "I took that article, and I brought it to Mr. Trump. ... He said, 'It's interesting. We should look into it.'"

As they say, the rest — that is, the orgy of sleaze that has dominated the political culture for the past decade — is history.

Dana Milbank is a political columnist for the Washington Post, where this appeared. Follow him on Twitter @Milbank. Email dana.milbank@washpost.com

I'm the Worm That Ate Part of RFK Jr.'s Brain, And I'm Asking For Your Vote

I am brave enough to say: I am a parasite, and I don't understand what is best for the country!

By ALEXANDRA PETRI

Good afternoon, fellow Americans, from the interior of Robert F. Kennedy Jr.'s brain. I am a parasitic worm. You might be wondering how I got here, or perhaps not! Most people who learned that a piece of Robert F. Kennedy Jr.'s brain was missing because a worm ate it responded with what I would characterize as "disappointment but not exactly surprise."

Maybe you heard about me from the *New York Times*. Or possibly you got the news directly from the Kennedy campaign

announcing that the worm that ate part of the candidate's brain and then died in there would not affect his ability to serve as president. You know what they say: no such thing as bad publicity! Indeed, RFK Jr. has gone so far as to offer to eat five more brain worms. This is not the first time one of his statements have given me pause.

When I first arrived here, I was so excited to discover all the knowledge that the human brain must hold. But when I looked around, all I saw were conspiracy theories and mercury poisoning. Candidly, if you had said, "What do you recommend the holder of this brain do next?" I would not have said, "Run for president." I would have said, "Get somebody else to do that. This person should go sit down."

That is why, today, I have an announcement to make. I am eliminating the middle man and running for president myself. Yes, I am the worm that ate part of RFK Jr.'s brain, and I'm asking for your vote. I am the only candidate brave enough to say: I am a parasitic worm, and I don't understand what is best for the country.

To those who ask, "Why should I vote for you? You are a worm somewhere around one-third of an inch in length with a knob-like attachment at one end called a scolex

that sometimes is mistakenly referred to as its head!" I say: That is more medical transparency than you are going to get from any of the other candidates! I bet they have not even disclosed whether they have body cavities. (I don't! I'm an acoelomate!)

To those who reply, "We don't actually know that! That's just what the symptoms are consistent with! We haven't done a complete examination of the exact type of worm that died in Robert F. Kennedy Jr.'s brain after eating part of it," I say: That is fair, and I am worm enough to grant it to you. Thank you, and I hope to receive your vote in November. Please just write in "Robert F. Kennedy Jr.'s WORM, NOT THE MAN, THE WORM" on your ballot. As long as you are throwing away your vote, throw it away on a worm. That's also my slogan.

There are many issues on which people are basing their votes in this election. Bodily autonomy. Keeping our democracy a democracy. Do you want to know my stance on the issues? I will tell you: I have no stance! I am a worm who died no later than 2012. I do not possess higher brain functions, although I have attended several, at which I feasted.

And that is exactly the sort of plenty I promise you will enjoy under rule by worm.

Just look at life under Leto II, God Emperor of Dune! Jabba the Hutt (an honorary worm) ran Tatooine with very few problems for a very long time until the intervention of a rude woman in a metal bikini.

If there are worms in the brains of the other candidates, I hope they will join me in issuing statements of their own. Perhaps a simple statement covering whether they exist and whether they consider what they may or may not have eaten to be mission critical.

RFK Jr. has justified his candidacy by saying that people are overwhelmingly frustrated with the options presented to them and need a third choice. Well, I see that third choice and raise you a fourth choice: a candidate you can trust not to have any brain worms because that candidate is a brain worm. I am also not currently under indictment for any reason.

So, good people of these United States, I exhort you: Ask not what this parasite can do for you. Ask what you can do for your parasite!

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

ditional news consumers in a head-to-head presidential ballot test, with 52% support among that group to Trump's 41%. But it's basically jump ball among digital media consumers, with Trump at 47% and Biden at 44%.

And Trump has a major lead among those who don't follow political news — 53% back him, and 27% back Biden.

"It's almost comic. If you're one of the remaining Americans who say you read a newspaper to get news, you are voting for Biden by 49 points," said Republican pollster Bill McInturff, who conducted the poll alongside Democratic pollster Jeff Horwitz.

Although the NBC News poll's sample size of 1,000 nationwide is small, with an overall margin of error of plus or minus 3.1 percentage points, those who don't follow political news feel more positively about Trump and independent presidential candidate Robert F. Kennedy Jr. and more negatively about Biden.

Trump's lead among those not following political news caught Horwitz's eye amid Trump's trial on charges related to allegations he paid hush money to quash news of an alleged affair from coming out during the heat of his 2016 presidential campaign and as he faces legal jeopardy in other cases that consistently make news.

"These are voters who have tuned out information, by and large, and they know who they are supporting, and they aren't moving," Horwitz said.

"That's why it's hard to move this race based on actual news. They aren't seeing it, and they don't care," he continued.

TEXAS GOV. GREG ABBOTT PARDONS RACIST MURDERER. Garrett Foster, a 28-year-old White man and Air Force veteran from a conservative family, who was sympathetic to the Black Lives Matter protests in the summer of 2020, carried an AK-47-style rifle to a rally against police violence in downtown Austin, as is legal in Texas, with the stated goal of protecting other marchers, including his longtime girlfriend. Daniel Perry, a 30-year-old White man and

Army sergeant who was driving for Uber the night of July 25, 2020, ran a red light and drove his car into a crowd. He was also legally carrying a gun. Foster, sensing a potential threat, approached Perry's car. Perry, seeing a man with a rifle, also sensed a potential threat. But, as Christopher Hooks noted at *Texas Monthly* (5/17), neither man had broken the law in Texas at this point. Then Perry shot Foster to death.

Perry turned himself in to police and told officers he was the first to point his gun. "I believe he was going to aim [his rifle] at me. I didn't want to give him a chance." He was not, in other words, claiming the right to self-defense. He was claiming the right to preemptively kill someone he thought might become a threat.

"No witness testified that Foster raised his weapon. A jury of Perry's peers determined he had not acted in self-defense, and he was sentenced to 25 years in prison for murder in 2023. A day later, Abbott vowed that he would pardon Perry pending a recommendation to do so by the Board of Pardons and Paroles, whose seven members Abbott appointed. ... For Abbott, who is ever trying to bolster his credentials

on the right, vowing to pardon Perry was a no-brainer—particularly after TV host Tucker Carlson taunted him for not doing so," Hooks wrote.

A few days later, court records showed Perry used racist language, compared protesters to "monkeys" in a "zoo," and had fantasized for weeks about shooting a protester at a Black Lives Matter rally. "I might have to kill a few people on my way to work," he wrote once. Another time: "I might go to Dallas to shoot looters." He flirted online with teenagers. He reminisced about the time he shot "an Afghan in the chest with a 50 cal," adding that "they are not real people." His other messages reveal a man who was angry, alienated, and conspiratorial. (He wrote that he believed the Black Lives Matter movement wanted his parents to lose their "4 bed room house" by giving it to a poor Black family.)

But the rest of the story didn't stop the Board of Pardons and Paroles from recommending a full pardon March 16 and Abbott granted it an hour later.

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The corporate media failed to report on the Republican attempts to sabotage the economic recovery after Barack Obama took office in 2009. When Donald Trump emerged to lead the teabaggers to the White House, the infotainment channels that replaced network news became even less reliable. An informed citizenry needs the independent and adversary media that was envisioned when the Founders framed the First Amendment in the Bill of Rights. *The Progressive Populist* aims to be a witness for folks on Main Street.

A handful of corporations are consolidating their grip on the nation's primary information sources. Megacorporations and hedge funds already own the major radio and TV networks, newspapers, magazines, book publishers and movie studios. Now they're moving to control the Internet. Is it any surprise that editors and news directors reflect the concerns of their corporate bosses?

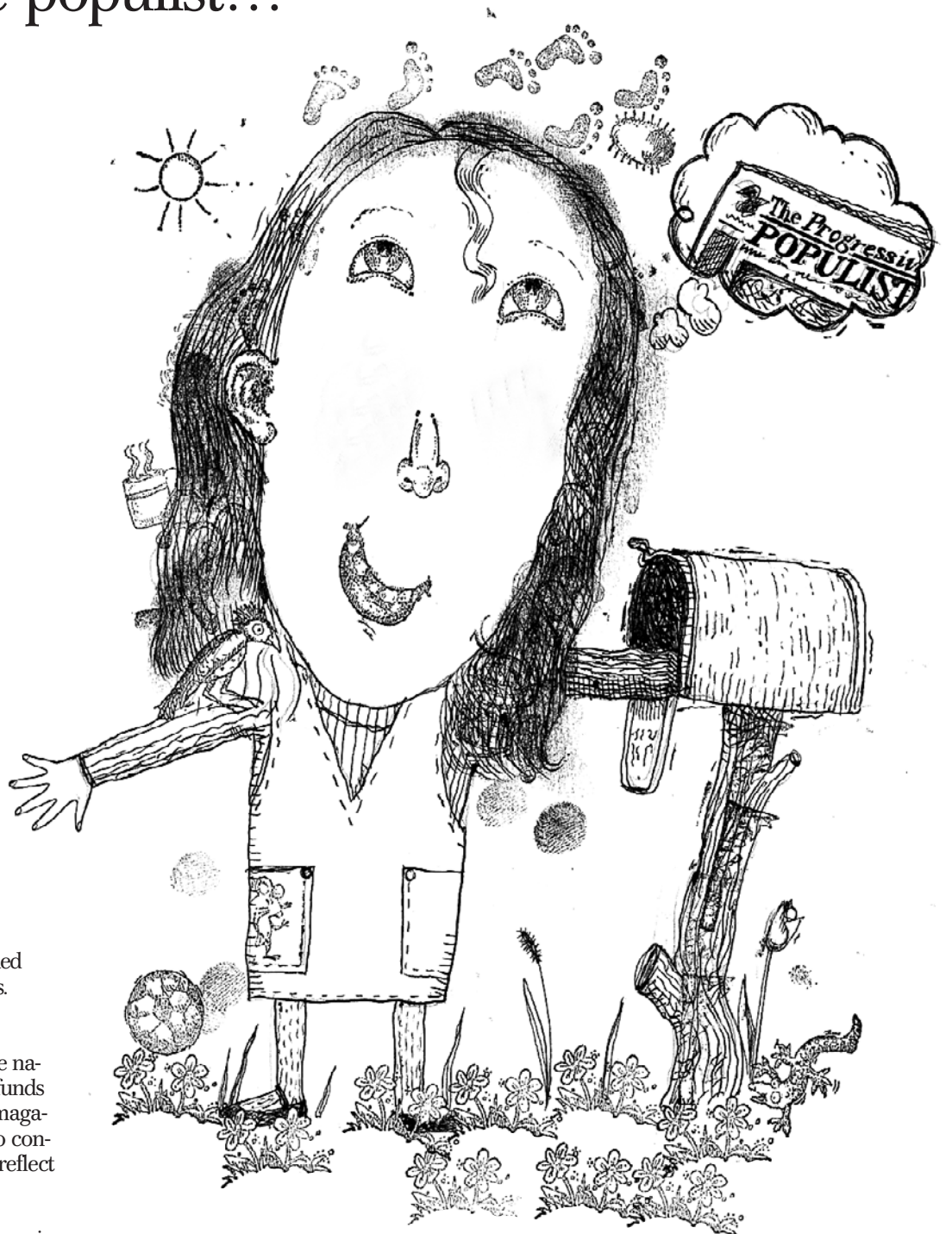
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