



What Donald Trump's Criminal Trial Reveals About a Potential Second Term

The picture that emerged in the New York courtroom was of a person on top of details, aware of what his team is doing. Along with outside events, it suggests Trump will be even less constricted by rules and norms than he was before.

By ANDREA BERNSTEIN, ProPublica

This story was originally published by ProPublica.

There's a tape that both the defense and the prosecution played in summations in former President Donald Trump's criminal trial. In it, you can hear the chaos of Trump's office at Trump Tower in September of 2016: Trump seems to be having multiple conversations almost simultaneously. He talks to an unidentified person on the phone. He discusses polls with Michael Cohen, his executive vice-president at the time. Trump and Cohen talk about a diversity initiative and stopping the media from unsealing the records of Trump's first divorce. His executive assistant pops in with word of a call from a developer. Trump calls for a Coke.

And then, very clearly, you can hear Cohen saying, "I need to open up a company for the transfer of all of that info regarding our friend, David, you know, so that — I'm going to do that right away. I've actually come up and I've spoken ... I've spoken to Allen Weisselberg" — then the Trump Organization's chief financial officer — "about how to set the whole thing up."

Trump interrupts and says, "So, what do we got to pay for this, 150?" Then he says, "Cash?"

"No, no, no, no no," Cohen says. "I got it."

On the most literal level, the tape showed Trump discussing the logistics of paying off a woman who said she had an affair with him. This was key evidence for the jury's ultimate finding that he had intended to alter the outcome of the 2016 election by making unlawful hush money payments.

When this tape was first made public, in 2018, it was hard to pin down exactly what it all meant. But as Trump's seven-week trial proceeded, the broader meaning of the tape emerged in sharp relief: Everything is connected in Trump world, ethical borders are easily crossed and Trump is on top of every detail.

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Illustration by DOLORES CULLEN

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Republicans are close to fulfilling the 'mudsill theory,' which holds the working class must be powerless and uneducated.

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AN EDITORIAL

Big Lie Party Backs Their Guy

Donald Trump reacted the only way he knows how to deal with a challenge May 30 when a New York jury returned guilty verdicts on all 34 felony counts against him after only two days of deliberation. Jurors found Trump falsified business records to cover up a potential sex scandal that could have wrecked his 2016 presidential campaign. Trump replied with lies and threats.

The Trump defense team may have been surprised by the quick verdict after a six-week trial. They may have thought they had a ringer among the jurors who would hold out against a guilty verdict and possibly force a mistrial, which would sideline the case at least until after the election. If so, they lost that bet, big time.

Trump refused to take any responsibility, of course. "This was a disgrace. This was a rigged trial by a conflicted judge who was corrupt," Trump told reporters after the verdict. He insisted he is "a very innocent man."

"I was just convicted in a rigged political witch hunt trial: I did nothing wrong," Trump wrote in a message to backers.

Trump and his flunkies, including House Speaker Mike Johnson, blamed President Joe Biden, whom they accused of "weaponizing" the Department of Justice and making the U.S. into a banana republic. But the U.S. would look more like a banana republic if it let a corrupt president get away with such crimes.

Banana Republicans ignored the fact that Manhattan District Attorney Alvin Bragg answers to the voters of Manhattan, not to Biden or Attorney General Merrick Garland.

Instead, Bragg's team brought a case to the state court that literally included the receipts that corroborated statements of damning witnesses, such as David Pecker, former publisher of the *National Enquirer*, who told how he agreed with Trump to execute "catch and kill" deals with porn actress Stormy Daniels and former Playboy model Karen McDougal in service of helping Trump's 2016 presidential campaign — a plot that prosecutors labeled a conspiracy to illegally influence the election. Trump's former lawyer, Michael Cohen, who made the payment to Daniels, filled in the details. When Trump was president, he let Cohen take the fall. Cohen served prison time for his role in the federal election violation.

Republicans have been trying to bluff their confidence that Democrats are playing into Trump's hands ever the New York trial.

"I think it's time we put a felon in the White House," Republican Riverside County, California, Sheriff Chad Bianco said in a video posted to his personal Instagram account.

A post-conviction poll conducted by YouGov between May 31 and June 2 found Republicans are more receptive to having a criminal candidate for president.

In April, just 17% of Republican voters said convicted criminals "should be allowed" to become president while 58% said they should not. But now 58% of Republicans say felons "should be allowed" to be president, while just 23% say they should not.

More Republicans now say felons should be allowed to become president. But other polls show majorities of all registered voters approve of the verdict, which puts the convict in a bit of a hole.

Trump now says that, because of his conviction on 34 felony counts, he has "every right" to go after political opponents should he be elected in November. He tells supporters that his return to the White House will feature "retribution" against his enemies, who are also their enemies. When the trial started in April, Trump claimed he passed on the chance to prosecute Hillary Clinton during his presidency. It would've been "a terrible thing" if he'd taken such a step, he claimed.

"This remains a bizarre lie," Steve Benen wrote at Maddow-Blog.com. In Trump's first year in the White House — after the 2016 election was over and Clinton largely withdrew from public view — the then-president publicly called on the Justice Department to go after Clinton. "Everybody is asking why the Justice Department (and FBI) isn't looking into all of the dishonesty going on with Crooked Hillary & the Dems," Trump claimed at that time.

Republicans have joined Trump in claiming Democrats have weaponized the justice system and Trump has made it clear that he intends to purge the federal government of impartial career officials and replace them with Trump loyalists if he gets back in the White House. The Heritage Foundation's "Project 2025" aims to destroy the DOJ's impartiality and turn it into an attack dog for Trump.

But Republicans aren't waiting. They're moving forward with an aggressive plan to obstruct state and federal prosecutors who have brought another 54 felony counts against Trump that are still awaiting trial. They are targeting other Trump inquisitors ahead of the election.

Voters deserve to know the facts on Trump's indictments brought by special prosecutor Jack Smith in Florida, where Trump is accused of keeping classified documents after leaving the White House and storing them at his Mar-a-Lago Club, including in a ballroom, a bathroom and shower, an office space, his bedroom, and a storage room," according to the indictment. He is also accused of a "scheme to conceal" those documents from federal officials seeking their return.

Trump is accused in D.C. federal court of participating in a scheme to interfere with the transfer of power after he lost the 2020 election to now-President Joe Biden. The indictment accuses Trump and six unindicted, unnamed co-conspirators of knowingly spreading lies that there was widespread fraud in the election and that he had actually won, ultimately leading to the Jan. 6, 2021, attack on the Capitol. Trump denies wrongdoing and argues he is immune from prosecution.

Trump and 18 others are accused in state court in Atlanta under Georgia's Racketeer Influenced and Corrupt Organizations (RICO) of coordinating an effort to thwart proper certification of the state's 2020 presidential election, which Biden won. The investigation was launched after disclosure of a recorded phone call to Georgia Secretary of State Brad Raffensperger on Jan. 2, 2021, in which Trump pressed him "to find 11,780 votes." Trump denies the allegations.

That trial has been delayed until at least October as three Republican appointees on the Georgia Court of Appeals consider a bid by Trump and his allies to remove Fulton County District Attorney Fani Willis, a Democrat, and her office from the case because of a personal relationship she had with special prosecutor Nathan Wade, who has since withdrawn from the case.

House Speaker Johnson outlined a "three-pronged approach" on how House Republicans can target the DOJ, New York and other jurisdictions that try to investigate Trump. Those plans call for launching investigations and cutting funds for Jack Smith and any state that tries to investigate Trump's attempts to overturn the 2020 election.

In a May 31 appearance on Fox News, Trump adviser Stephen Miller, who reportedly is on the shortlist to be Trump's next attorney general, urged Republicans to pick up the pace in weaponizing the system against the judicial process.

"Is every House committee controlled by Republicans using its subpoena power in every way it needs to right now?" Miller asked. "Is every Republican DA starting every investigation they need to right now?"

Stephen Miller will never try to talk the Convict in Chief down from a proposed retribution scheme. Neither of them belongs back in the White House.

— JMC

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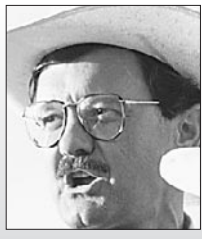
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JIM HIGHTOWER



Our nation's multibillionaires have vastly increased their wealth under Joe Biden's presidency, but they wail that he has not courted and coddled them.

Going from Democracy ... to Plutocracy ... and Now to Kleptocracy

One group of oppressed Americans has become especially outspoken this election year, contending that top government officials (Democrats in particular) are ignoring their community's basic needs and stifling their pursuit of economic advancement.

I speak, of course, about the tragic plight of our nation's downtrodden multibillionaire class. While it's true that Elon Musk, Peter Thiel and these other Silicon Valley sad sackers and weepy Wall Streeters have vastly increased their wealth under Joe Biden's presidency, they wail that he has not properly courted and coddled them. Indeed, Biden set their hair on fire this March by calling out their outrageous tax-dodging ploys, demanding they start providing their fair share of support for America by paying a "billionaire tax."

Thus, these poor, put-upon moneyed elites have been jetting around to Hollywood, Palm Beach and other posh enclaves, holding secret strategy sessions and rallying the uber-rich class to defeat Biden this fall. Of course, since self-centered, plutocratic billionaires are less popular than bed bugs, they can't win with their ideas and votes but only by buying elections — and these gilded conspirators intend to do just that, amassing billions to bury Biden.

But, oops, one money confab in April exploded into public view when some 20 poobahs of such oil giants as Chevron, Exxon and Occidental conferred with Trump himself. In a straight-out bribery offer, he pledged to repeal environmental protections the industry dislikes — if they pony up \$1 billion for his presidential campaign.

This sordid palace intrigue is the product of the right-wing Supreme Court's 2010 edict letting selfish wealthy interests secretly dump unlimited sums of corporate money into our elections. They're turning our democratic ideals into a kleptocracy.

Return of the Swamp Drainer: Making a Mockery of Democracy

Remember Donald Trump, the "swamp drainer"?

In 2016, candidate Trump promised to end the grubby money corruption of American politics. "The special interests, lobbyists, donors," he rightly and righteously noted, "make large contributions to politicians, and they have total control over those politicians." Asserting that he knows the political rot better than anyone, he said he'd "fix that system, because that system is wrong."

Eight years later, here comes the Donald again — but the swamp is bigger and suckier than ever. And instead of bold talk about draining it, Trump is auctioning off the swamp, flagrantly offering direct presidential benefits to Big Oil, Wall Street hucksters, high-tech tycoons and all other moneyed interests that "make large contributions" to him.

How large? The *Washington Post* reports that one businessman asked to have lunch with Trump, promising a million-dollar check. "I'm not having lunch," Trump retorted. "You've got to make it \$25 mil-

lion." He has also demanded a cool billion bucks from a covey of Big Oil executives. Promising to cut their corporate taxes and deliver an array of other special benefits, the presidential wannabe punctuated his itemization of political goodies with an un-subtle monetary nudge, saying, "be generous, please."

Since a Supreme Court majority of extreme partisans opened the floodgates 14 years ago, corrupt corporate cash has gone from merely polluting American democracy to now swamping it. Trump is not the only bribe huckster, but he is the most blatant, shamelessly nuclearizing the going rate for buying public policy, mocking the ideal of a citizens' government. Trump himself is fond of telling fat-cat donors that he doesn't spend 10 minutes with anyone who can't give \$10 million. Hello — where does that leave you and me? And our country?

Cruising Along with Ted Cruz

A Republican senator once tried excusing the egomaniacal right-wing nastiness of his colleague, Ted Cruz, declaring, "Sometimes Ted is his own worst enemy." I said to myself: "Not while I'm alive he's not."

But now, I'm reassessing, because Cruz keeps descending deeper into self-pity and self-destruction. For example, he's recently been trying to gut a consumer-friendly rule requiring airlines to make automatic, hassle-free refunds to passengers when their flights are unduly delayed or cancelled. However, kissing up to his airline political donors, Ted's amendment would put the hassle back in refunds, requiring abused passengers to file written requests to the various impenetrable corporate bureaucracies of airlines to get their money back — maybe ... someday.

In fairness, though, Cruz has been working hard to make air travel much easier for one class of travelers: U.S. senators and House members, plus their staffs and families! He wants to make us common taxpayers fund "airport security escorts" for him and other privileged ones, moving them ahead of everyone and zipping them through the screening and boarding process. This, Ted explained, will help in "keeping the flying public safe."

He really means keeping the public from seeing or interacting at airports with public officials like him. You might recall that, while hundreds of Texans were literally dying during the state's power grid's failure in 2021's calamitous deep freeze, Ted was photographed in tropical attire at Houston's airport, waiting to board a flight to Cancun, fleeing the cold and his constituents. By getting special airport escorts, though, so-called public servants like Cruz won't be exposed to public view.

Hello — of all the public needs crying out today for taxpayer funding — where would you rank providing an airport escort for Ted Cruz?

How Silly Can Right-Wing Culture Warriors Get?

If you're wondering whatever happened to Ron DeSantis, he's now re-ensconced in Florida ... goofier than ever.

Last year, backed by a covey of billionaires, Gov. Ron was all set to be our next president until national voters discovered he has the personality of a dirt clod and the political sensibility of a tin-pot totalitarian.

Even in the GOP primaries, most voters gagged at his ruthless anti-abortion absolutism, his "Fahrenheit 451" book bans, his vigilante rampages against local librarians, his dictate that textbooks whitewash American history, his cruel toying with desperate asylum seekers and so awful much more.

Thus, the Potentate of Tallahassee limped back home. But far from chastened, Ron has doubled down on political goofiness, frittering away his remaining prestige and gubernatorial credibility on right-wing hokum. For example, he has banned the sale of alternative meat products in Florida. Also, in a bizarre commandment he calls "Freedom Summer," he has decreed that Florida's bridges can only be lit up in hues

of red, white and blue — no "liberal" colors like green or purple.

His latest tilt-at-windmills stunt is to repeal state efforts to fight climate change! He's reversing state policies encouraging agencies to switch to electric vehicles, prohibiting several wind and solar-powered projects, and eliminating state incentives for energy-efficient homes. As sea levels rise all around Florida — flooding its coastal cities — DeSantis rants against "the agenda of radical green zealots," maniacally declaring: "We're restoring sanity" to energy policy.

If Republican Party strategists wonder why voters think the GOP has gone nuts, look no further than Florida's authoritarian governor, who's busy dictating people's meat choices — and the color of bridges — while his state sinks into the sea.

An Anti-Abortion Creep: Worse Than a Snake in the Grass

Let me be clear that I mean no disrespect to reptiles when I note that Jonathan Mitchell is a snake.

An extremist right-wing Texas lawyer, Mitchell is actually creepier and altogether more diabolical than your average serpent could think of being. Mitchell slithers around the country as a self-appointed anti-abortion vigilante, terrorizing women's advocates, health clinics and doctors. And now (turning truly creepy), he's singling-out individual women with his bullying legalistic theatrics.

By perverting an obscure judicial procedure, called Rule 202, Mitchell threatens to publicly expose and sue women who make an entirely legal, out-of-state trip to terminate a pregnancy. Moreover, he threatens to sue any of her family, friends and others who aid or encourage her pursuit of reproductive freedom. Moreover, even without actually suing them, Mitchell proclaims that he can use the coercive power of government to compel each of them to be interrogated.

This gross assertion of theocratic power, wielded by a religious partisan with zero public authority, goes beyond mere tyranny. He is resurrecting the hysterical demagoguery and satanic extremism of Cotton Mather and the Puritan fanatics who fomented the Salem Witch Trials and executions of the 1690s. Mitchell and his theocratic clique are trying to weaponize Rule 202 so false accusations and even gossip can be enough to subject any woman to a hostile court-ordered grilling. Mitchell's witchcrafters don't need to win or even actually file such frivolous and venomous legal actions, for their goal is raw intimidation. Simply accusing vulnerable women of being abortion witches would force them

to hire lawyers and endure public inquisition — or surrender their liberty without due process.

Vipers are not this vicious! To help reject Mitchell's misogynistic scheme, go to Abortion Access Front: AAFront.org.

What If Our Lawmakers Were Working-Class People?

Whatzamatia with Congress? And most of our state legislatures, too?

Why do these so-called representative bodies keep stiffing middle-class and poor families, refusing to respond to the most urgent needs and goals of this vast majority of Americans?

Take lawmakers' indifference to the child care crisis crushing the finances, health and spirit of millions of working families. Plus, intentionally denying basic health care for low-income children in this spectacularly rich nation.

These common incidents of child neglect are products of the creeping plutocratic ideology now dominating capitols across America. Most legislatures today push corporate profiteering, including re-legalizing robber baron exploitation of children. Bills to reinstate child labor are being advanced in 28 states, and 12 have already passed!

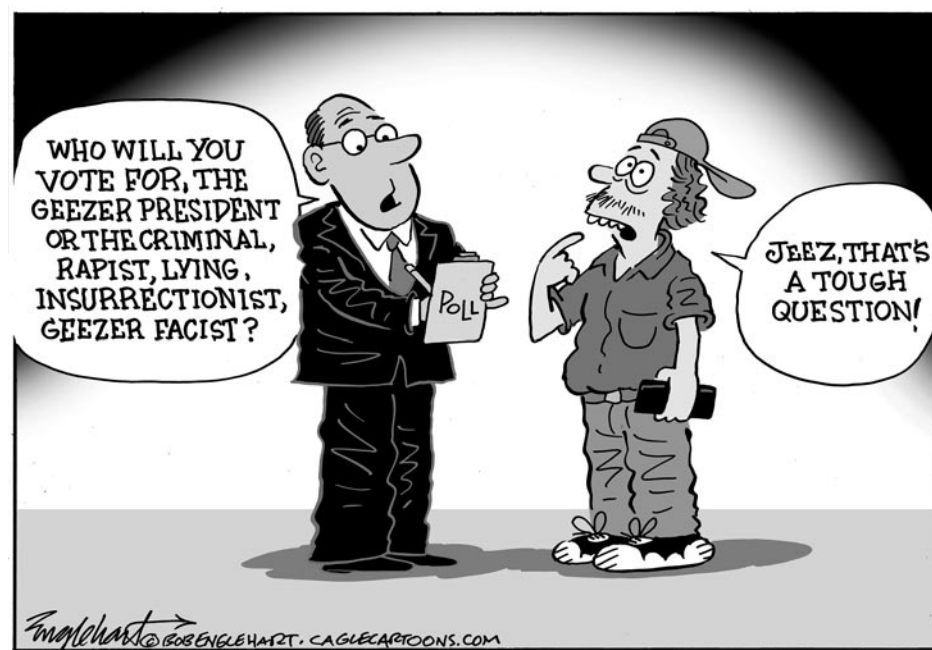
Why is the workaday majority being ignored and corporate supremacy being imposed over the common good? In a word: class.

Think about it: Who holds nearly all of the seats in Congress and in state legislatures? Bankers, lawyers, corporate executives, lobbyists, millionaires and ideological goofballs. Wait — no plumbers, mechanics, taxi drivers, trash haulers, hotel housekeepers, computer programmers, farm workers — or, golly, no child care providers?

No. Even though half of America's jobs are working-class, roughly 1% of our nation's 7,300 state legislative seats are held by the working-class people who actually make America work. As the old saying goes: If you're not at the table, you're on the menu. And our political system has been rigged by corporate lobbyists, lawmakers and judges to hold public office hostage to Big Money — intentionally excluding the working-class majority from its rightful place at America's policy table.

To start freeing democracy from corrupt corporate money, go to Public Citizen at citizen.org.

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Clueless on Gaza?

I was shocked and terribly disappointed after reading your front page article ["Campus in Crisis: Clueless on Gaza?" By Hal Crowther, 6/15/24 *TPP*] on the genocidal war Israel is waging on the Palestinians. Shocked that the writer considers himself "anti-establishment" which he is absolutely not, criticizing the anti-Vietnam protests, supporting Israel's genocidal war on Palestine, and treating right winger Thomas Friedman as a Guru. And doubly shocked that *TPP* would have such a pro-establishment and untrue article printed on its front page.

It states that Jewishness and Israel are inseparable: that is absolutely false: I and all Jewish protesters separate themselves from the policies of Israel, and feel we are the more Jewish by doing so. Israel has been conducting an apartheid government since it was created, and killed thousands of Palestinians prior to the Oct. 7 raid (and I have never seen any proof of the atrocities said to have been committed at that time, Oct. 7). What were the Palestinians supposed to do, just stand by and let themselves be murdered and their lands and villages be confiscated by Israel? Sooner or later they had to fight back ... Hamas, or no Hamas.

And, as for Israel, whose many citizens and their forefathers experienced the attempted genocide of the Holocaust; how can they (Israel) turn around and do the same thing to the Palestinians? To me, as a Jew, and a human being — this is unbelievable and disgusting. A so-called Jewish state, Israel, should hold itself to a higher, not lower standard.

And as for the author of "Clues on Gaza," whose name I cannot even utter, he never mentions that all the protests for Palestine are peaceful, and the ones concerning Vietnam were not. I guess that is a good thing, but the establishment doesn't usually react to peaceful protests. He also brings up the point, that while the US was expanding it treated the native Americans as the Israelis are treating the Palestinians ... as if that makes it right. He later in the article states that Joe Biden and Anthony Blinken are scrambling to create a cease fire. This is such a stupid comment as to be laughable. All they have to do to stop the war is to quit sending arms to Israel.

I'm sorry, but this article makes me wonder just where *The Progressive Populist* is coming from.

BOB BOGNER, Aspen, Colo.

Wayne O'Leary's linkage of Vietnam and Israel/Palestine

In his zeal to condemn Israel and exalt the pro-Palestine protest movement generally ("Lyndon Baines Biden," 5/15/24 *TPP*), Wayne O'Leary simplistically analogizes the situation of Vietnam in the late '60s and Israel/Palestine today. The situations are actually quite different.

1) The Vietnam situation involved Johnson's escalation of direct American troop involvement and destruction in a far-off war. Biden has not committed any American troops to such a war.

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A Farewell to Bill Walton

By **DON ROLLINS**

"I've had 36 orthopedic operations, I have two fused ankles, my knees, hands and wrists don't work, I now have a fused spine, other than that, everything is great." — Bill Walton

Accolades for the recently departed Bill Walton continue to pour in. A collegiate and professional basketball standout, the 71-year-old bridged with abandon the worlds of professional sports, classic rock and political liberalism — a rare fusion in the realm of sports, past or present.

Walton's roots were in greater San Diego, where he anchored a Helix High School team that won 49 straight games and back-to-back state championships (1969 and 1970). During his final two years at Helix, he shot a still-record national high 78.3% from the floor, and placed in the top seven in total rebounds and rebounds per game.

Highly recruited by blue-blood college programs across the nation, Walton chose UCLA and legendary coach John Wooden. During the by-then '611" center's three dominant years (1972-1974) the team finished 86-4. Meanwhile, Walton won nearly every major award in men's collegiate basketball. Some more than once.

But the congenital foot conditions that would plague and eventually end his professional career were already evident. Playing through pain had already become his normal.

Walton's professional career was at once shining and tragic. When healthy enough to contribute to any of the three NBA franchises for which he played, the statistics and achievements were impressive: league-leading totals in rebounds and blocked shots; NBA All-Defensive First Team; All-NBA Second Team; NBA Most Valuable Player and: two-time NBA champion.

Yet the foot and other injuries limited Walton's playing time to just 468 games over 10 seasons. And most of those 468 were played on mangled feet and ankles.

Walton's next incarnation was as a bas-

ketball sportscaster, working alternately for CBS, NBC, ESPN, the Sacramento Kings and the Pac 12 Conference. Known for his obscure literary references, random rock lyrics, on-camera tie-dye T shirts and bantering with his co-broadcasters, two generations of basketball fans grew up with Walton as their inside if cosmic source on the game.

2) Vietnam involved American disregard of an international consensus that Vietnam was a single state, to be reunited after nationwide elections, pursuant to the Geneva Accords of 1954. The goal of the American support for Israel is to guarantee the existence and security of the State of Israel, affirmed by numerous UN resolutions and the conferring of UN membership itself.

3) O'Leary erroneously refers to the Israel/Palestine conflict as an "internal civil conflict." Unlike Vietnam, which involved conflict between divided parts of a single nation ruled by dueling dictatorships, Israel/Palestine involves a conflict of two separate ethno-national peoples, one of which is a majority in the State of Israel as recognized internationally, and one of which is a majority in occupied territories which most nations believe should be the basis for a Palestinian state alongside Israel.

4) O'Leary wrongfully lumps South Vietnam and Israel governments together as corrupt and dictatorial. South Vietnam was indeed a one-party and inherently dictatorial state; Israel still has the ability through democratic elections to replace the corrupt Netanyahu government.

5) One cannot possibly compare Joe Biden with Lyndon Johnson, who kept escalating Vietnam pursuant to old Cold War assumptions. When one gets past the more extreme pro-Palestine rhetoric, it is clear that Biden has no interest nor enjoyment in seeing people bombed indiscriminately in Gaza. Unlike Johnson in the late '60s, Biden is now actively advocating proposals for a cease-fire and release of hostages. But he still has an interest in ensuring Israel's existence, which motivates his policy; he is not interested in aggrandizement, personally or of the American military machine.

6) "Iranian Islamism" is not the enemy today for Biden. If anything, he has tried to minimize conflict with Iran itself, as had been fostered by his maniacal predecessor. More specifically, his concern is the terrorist group Hamas, backed by Iran, which instigated this awful round of violence by its treacherous and barbarous Oct. 7 attack on Israel.

7) It is absurd of O'Leary to link Biden's stance on Israel/Palestine to his apparent non-involvement in Vietnam protests. Many progressives, like myself, were quite active against the Vietnam war effort in the late '60s, even as we supported Israel as its existence was threatened by Arab neighbors in 1967, and therefore its preemptive strike in the Six-Day War. Dr. Martin Luther King, for one, had no problem supporting Israel's right to exist and defend itself while opposing the Vietnam war.

Finally, I fail to see how Biden is encouraging violent official reactions to anti-Israel demonstrators. Nor are all those demonstrators peaceful. Contrary to O'Leary, many who spout anti-Zionism as their watchword are indeed Jew-haters. What does O'Leary think "from the river to the sea" means? The continuance of a Jewish state and a Jewish people in historic Palestine? Expulsion or maybe even widespread death on the order of Oct. 7 would be more like it. Real progressives need to continue to strive for a two-state solution of two peoples living in peace.

STEPHEN E. APPELL, Brooklyn, N.Y.

Tripping the Right Fantastic

Regarding Frank Lingo's assertion that there is "No need to throw the baby Jesus out with the bathwater of the Church" ("Tripping the Right Fantastic," 6/15/24 *TPP*) I would say that a Christian is not an isolated person hiding in a protective cocoon waiting for the Last Judgment. Rather, Christians belong to a people, the People of God, which constitutes the Church. The nature of the Church, according to St. Paul, is Christ's mystical Body: We hear, "He is the head of the body, the church" (Col 1:18). So, if the Church is a body, then it is basically a living

organism, not an organization, as articulated by St. John Henry Newman. Given that, Jesus is the Head of the Body and the Risen, Glorified, and Ascended Christ chooses to operate in the world through his mystical Body, the Church. So, Christianity without the Church just doesn't make any sense. The upshot is that we're called to full-bodied, enthusiastic membership in the Church with all of that entails and to be in communion with the Triune God and in fellowship with our brothers and sisters.

Peace and good will,

DEACON JIM McFADDEN, Fair Oaks, Calif.

None Safe In Fascist Rule

Re: "Would Dictator Trump Kill His Rivals," by Thom Hartmann, 6/1/24 *TPP*, says "Mussolini brought the death penalty back to Italy specifically for political 'crimes against the state,' sentencing 43 people to death by firing squad between 1927 and 1943."

Hartmann failed to mention that one of those 43 victims was Mussolini's own son-in-law !!!

Watch out Jared, Jews are on the short list of the Proud Boys!

Thank you,

VINCENT F. LUTI, Westport, Mass.

No, Donald

No, Donald, Judge Merchan is not corrupt, he is meticulous and honest. But you wouldn't know how to recognize honesty.

No, Donald, the trial wasn't rigged. It followed prescribed procedures for giving attention to actual facts and the real requirements of the law. But you wouldn't know true facts since you spread thick and widespread lies to cover up your felonies.

No, Donald, this wasn't political retribution, although that is what you keep promising if you ever set foot in the White House again. It was bringing you to legal accountability because even Presidents are not above the law.

"Disgrace," Donald, is a word you like to use when you don't get your way. The word suits you perfectly.

No, Donald, this isn't a s—hole country, although it might become one if you were to get your way.

BRUCE JOFFE, Piedmont, Calif.

Memorial Day

Today, I visited a pioneer cemetery where some of my ancestors lie. Graves dating from the time of settlement were near more current sites. In these older areas, small 8X10-inch markers were more common. They had only one date, making the loss of an infant. Secondly, I noted more second wives buried beside the patriarch. The stones told the story of the perils of childbirth in the years before obstetricians or birth control, and the general uncertainty of life before antibiotics or inoculations. I see thees advancements as being far more pro-life than their rejection.

PAUL BENSON, Hawarden, Iowa

Three Presidenteers

Well, here it is, an election year like no other. As presidential candidates we have the Three Musketeers! Donald Trump, Joe Biden and Robert F. Kennedy Jr. For which candidate will you be casting your ballot on Election day? Good question. I haven't been following the news much lately. I'd rather be out mowing the lawn. In the weeks ahead, take the time to unwind.

LELAND ALPER, Barnet, Vt

and gave an address at the memorial service for the controversial activist Abbie Hoffman. Walton's intensity on the court was easily matched when attacking or defending a position, and he seemed to care little when quoted or photographed in a negative light.

References to Walton's rougher personal side were likewise real and sometimes costly. He was known to vehemently challenge coaches, officials, team owners, fans and other players, some of whom were his teammates. Words were exchanged, blame was laid. When asked about those times, Walton replied with uncharacteristically few words: "Life is about growth. People are not perfect when they're 21."

Take, leave or shrug him off, Bill Walton was an original. His toughness often led to recklessness, his exuberance sometimes grated on the soul. But like his self-proclaimed "brothers" from the Grateful Dead, Walton was on a trip of his own making. Too bad it ended so soon.

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

Voter Challenges Coming

As resident of a state where all the electoral votes went to Donald Trump in 2020, I didn't have to worry about challenges to our voting system. The challengers who questioned the integrity of our electoral systems were Republicans, after all, and a state that went 100% Republican raised no questions.

Calm as the 2020 race was in Missouri, there was tension during the 2022 (midterm) election. The poll workers at my voting place are neighbors, all women, and they were watchful. I recognized one husband—the guy with the backhoe that digs out ponds—sitting on a lawn chair in the bed of his pickup truck when I pulled into the parking lot. He had potato chips, a cooler and a water bottle and seemed to be settled in for the day. Looking back, I wonder if his wife had been threatened.

This year, 2024, the Missouri situation is even more interesting. While once again I hear arguments for Trump from my neighbors, yard signs are few and far between. Our local newspaper has begun running ar-



This year the Missouri situation is more interesting. While once again I hear arguments for Trump from my neighbors, yard signs are fewer and far between.

ticles that put the orange guy in a bad light and I take that as a sign that they are more confident in having a few Democrat-leaning subscribers. At the same time, my most strident pro-Trump neighbors are parroting his statements of a rigged jury trial.

And petitioners obtained 10,000 signatures to get Robert Kennedy Jr. on the ballot, running as an Independent. So far, according to a Zogby poll taken in April, Kennedy Jr. was out-polling Joe Biden 52% to 37% and Kennedy Jr. was polling at 42% to Trump's 45%.

Please note: In April, when the poll was taken, Kennedy Jr. wasn't on the ballot yet. So, these numbers show he has name recognition and that always pays. And the narrow margins from both parties mean that voters of all kinds might switch to Kennedy Jr. Thus, there's room for contention on both sides of the aisle. Another note: Back in 1960, when Junior's Uncle John F. Kennedy was on the ballot, he only

squeaked to a Missouri win by 9,980 votes.

How to explain Kennedy Junior's stealth campaign? At age 70, he's the youngest candidate, but a more likely explanation is simply that voters are fed up with the dull, predictable, sedentary choices offered by the dominant parties.

Another interesting wrinkle in the Missouri situation is the strong possibility of an abortion rights vote on the ballot. Missourians for Constitutional Freedom collected 380,159 signatures for their initiative petition, more than twice the total needed to qualify for the November ballot. The Secretary of State's office is still verifying signatures, but if it goes to a vote, we'll decide on a measure that legalizes abortion up to fetal viability, turning back a June 2022 order that makes every abortion illegal except in medical emergencies. Will that bring out pro-Biden voters?

There are other initiative petition issues that will likely get on the November ballot, promising to create a large turnout. While we would expect initiative petitions to benefit Democrat nominees, the Kennedy Jr. race puts an unexpected new wrinkle in the Presidential vote, and a new way for ballot challengers to complain.

One thing we can do if we don't trust the election process is to apply for one of those election jobs, and check IDs ourselves. It's a community service and it pays a little. In Missouri, each poll watcher must declare membership in a political party so each polling place has two Democrats and two Republicans as election judges. Unaffil-

iated persons may be hired for other election-day jobs, but not as poll watchers. Election day, by the way, can go 12 to 14 hours. Those folks should be treated like heroes.

If you're not comfortable working at the polls, do your part by getting informed. In my case, surrounded by Fox News watchers, I can watch Fox, and then check the facts. We can expect that Fox will cover all of Biden's errors and slips while Trump's will be ignored. To learn more, ask your internet search engine for "Fact Checking."

As the pundits are constantly reminding us, we are still five months away from the election. Also note that these Zogby poll numbers assume a two-man race in each case and as far as I know there have been no polls asking what voters would do in a three-way Biden-Trump-Kennedy race. It is extremely interesting that the big media hasn't picked up on the Kennedy Jr. race but there ya go. His team is making noise about getting him on the stage for the so-called debate and that would be (in my humble opinion) a real draw for whatever advertisers, if any, sponsor the program.

At this time, there's no predicting what will happen in Missouri. And, in your state?

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

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DISPATCHES

STUDY MAKES CASE TO 'ABOLISH' MEDICARE ADVANTAGE. A new academic analysis published in *JAMA Internal Medicine* details the enormous sums that privatized Medicare Advantage plans have cost U.S. taxpayers in recent years and calls for the abolition of the program, which has been massively profitable for the insurance giants that dominate it, Jake Johnson noted at CommonDreams (6/10).

Citing the nonpartisan Medicare Payment Advisory Commission, the paper notes that Medicare Advantage (MA) plans have overcharged the federal government to the tune of \$612 billion since 2007—and \$82 billion last year alone.

MA plans—now used by more than half of the eligible Medicare population—utilize a range of tactics to reap larger payments from the federal government, which provides insurers a lump sum for each Medicare Advantage patient. The size of the payment depends on the enrollee's health, which MA plans are notorious for portraying as worse than it is in order to receive heftier government payments.

"Paradoxically, despite those overpayments, MA plans spend 9% less on medical services than [fee-for-service] Medicare spends for comparable enrollees," reads the new study. "If MA plans pay for less care, where do the overpayments go? Some pay for supplementary benefits, although plans do not disclose how much they spend on them, and MA enrollees do not get significantly more dental care or incur lower out-of-pocket dental costs than those in FFS Medicare. Instead, overhead and profit eats up the lion's share."

The study's authors estimate that MA plans' overhead from 2007 to 2024 was \$592 billion, which is "equivalent to 97% of taxpayers' \$612 billion overpayments to them during that period."

Dr. Adam Gaffney, an assistant professor of medicine at Harvard Medical School and the lead author of the new study, said in a statement that "Medicare Advantage is a bad deal for taxpayers."

"Money that could be used to eliminate all copayments or shore up Medicare's Trust Fund is instead lining insurers' pockets," said Gaffney. "And the private insurers keep Medicare Advantage enrollees from getting needed care by erecting bureaucratic hurdles like prior authorizations and payment denials."

Gaffney and study co-authors Drs. Stephanie Woolhandler and David Himmelstein—co-founders of Physicians for a National Health Program (PHNP)—argue based on their examination of Medicare Advantage's decadeslong history that "the time has come to declare MA a failed experiment and abolish it."

"Medicare Advantage plans have, in effect, stolen hundreds of billions from taxpayers," says Himmelstein, a lecturer at Harvard Medical School and a research associate at the consumer advocacy group Public Citizen. "And the private plans' schemes also raise seniors' Part B Medicare premiums. Even seniors who don't choose to enroll in Medicare Advantage are subsidizing the private plans' profits."

The study's authors observe that the elimination of Medicare Advantage would allow the federal government to use the roughly \$88 billion in estimated MA overpayments for the coming year to instead "upgrade benefits for all Medicare beneficiaries." Traditional Medicare typically does not cover dental, vision, or hearing services, which often leads people to choose MA plans.

"A smarter, thriftier way to expand benefits and lower out-of-pocket costs is possible for all Medicare beneficiaries, but first, we must eliminate MA and double down on traditional Medicare, covering all enrollees in an expanded and improved Medicare program," the analysis concludes. "That would be a good deal for patients and taxpayers."

Wendell Potter, a former insurance executive who has become a trenchant critic of Medicare Advantage, told Common Dreams that he agrees with the study's authors that MA "should be eliminated."

"Not only has it never saved taxpayers a dime since it was created during the George W. Bush administration, but it has cost us \$592 billion over the last 17 years because of the high administrative costs inherent in the program and the way insurers have rigged the system to get paid excessively every year," said Potter, president of the Center for Health and Democracy.

"The program is so entrenched, and the companies have so much political influence over Democrats as well as Republicans through campaign contributions and lobbying, that eliminating the program will be a heavy lift, at least in the near term," Potter added. "That means that proposals to reform MA that address overpayments and abuses like prior authorization are essential and important for reform advocates to support."

TRUMP'S GUILTY VERDICT DRIVING AWAY VOTERS HE CAN'T AFFORD TO LOSE. New polling from the progressive outfit Navigator Research shows that Donald Trump's criminal conviction is poised to hurt him electorally among a critical bloc of swing voters: so-called double haters, or those who don't like either Trump or President Joe Biden, Kerry Eleveld noted at DailyKos (6/7).

The survey, fielded during a five-day period following the verdict, had roughly similar findings as other snap polls conducted in the immediate aftermath of Trump's conviction. The upshot: Majorities agree with the verdict, believe Trump is guilty, and think the trial was fair.

But among double haters—defined as voters who hold negative views of both Trump and Biden—the results were even more stark:

- 84% think Trump committed a crime as president.
- 76% say Trump is guilty and just 15% say he's innocent.
- 74% think Trump believes he's above the law.
- 66% think Trump should drop out of the race, while just 24% want him to stay in.

This group overwhelmingly believes the trial was fair, by nearly 30 points, 57% to 28%. And nearly 7 in 10 double haters say Trump was tried just like any other American, versus 31% who believe the proceeding was "rigged."

Perhaps most importantly, nearly one-half of these voters said the conviction makes them less likely to vote for Trump: 48% less likely; 36% no impact; and 10% more likely.

The post-verdict feelings expressed by double haters stray sharply from those of Republican voters, who have quickly embraced the idea of electing a convicted felon to the White House.

Double haters proved critical to the 2016 outcome, breaking for Trump over Hillary Clinton in the final weeks of the election. This cycle, the group accounts for roughly 14% of the electorate, according to recent Marist polling conducted for NPR and PBS NewsHour.

Asked what worried them most about the conviction, 50% of double haters said that Trump thinks "he is above the law," 35% said he is an "embarrassment to the country" and his party, and 26% said that he is "only running for president to get revenge and retribution."

Overall, the Navigator poll found nearly two out of three Americans say Trump has committed a crime—the highest point in Navigator tracking of the issue.

Continued on page 22



FROM HARROP



New York City is not the left-wing hotbed of Fox News' imagination. Mayor Adams is a law-and-order Dem and predecessors included D's, R's and I's.

The Manhattan Jury Pool Isn't All That Liberal

A rumor's going around that the Manhattan jury pool could not have produced 12 peers willing to give Donald Trump a fair shake. And that explains the jurors' decision to find him guilty on all 34 charges in the hush money case.

That rumor is unfounded, however. It is true that there are far more registered Democratic voters in Manhattan than registered Republicans, 70% versus just under

8%. But that 8% represents almost 87,000 Republicans. We can assume that registered Democrats are perfectly able to impartially assess evidence. (Trump's lawyers had to approve them.) Likewise, Republican Manhattanites are capable of finding fault in an ex-president's conduct.

The share of registered Republicans has been dropping in recent years as the party turned into a MAGA amusement park. It's a fair guess that many haven't officially defected and are merely heartbroken that so much of their party has dropped the conservative virtues.

New York City, meanwhile, is not the left-wing hotbed of Fox News' imagination. Mayor Eric Adams is a law-and-order Democrat whose main political irritant is the city's left-wing fringe. Of the seven mayoral terms that preceded his, three were led by Republicans, three by Democrats and one by an independent.

The perception problem for New York Democrats comes from media giving outsized attention to a few flamboyant radicals. A few dozen protesters recently walked out of NYU's graduation ceremony at Yankee Stadium, but 40,000 other graduates stayed. The Fox News headline: "NYU students walk out of commencement, demand university divest from Israel."

And the liberal media did little better. Manhattan is a largely a rich borough, and its Republicans have tended toward traditional conservatism. They like civic order and a strong defense. Trump is not their guy. Trying to violently overturn the results of an election is beyond the pale. And only a dangerous clown would invite Vladimir Putin to invade Europe.

Their kind of conservative would not blow up the federal deficit: Trump piled up more national debt than Barack Obama. Joe Biden is adding to deficits, true, but the money is going to investments in the country — to fix bridges, expand internet access, build the chips industry. Trump talked a lot about a desperately needed infrastructure program, but talk was all he did.

Investors are happy that the Dow Jones Industrial average recently closed past 40,000. And despite the challenges of persistent inflation in some sectors, the U.S. economy remains the envy of the world.

While some MAGA constituencies may find servile pleasure in having Trump pat them on the head, these conservatives and their libertarian cousins are not as receptive. When Trump tried to flatter libertarians at their recent convention, the audience booed him.

"Any libertarian worth their stripes

who has looked at Donald Trump's record, will see that he barely aligns with the conservative camp and is a far cry from the Libertarian Party," said Steven Nekhaila, director of the Libertarian National Committee.

There was a time when many Manhattanites of various political leanings found Trump entertaining, and give this to him, he is an entertainer. But he was never Mr. New York or the king of Gotham real estate. The thing that made him real money was a reality TV show.

There is no way of knowing how many of Trump's jurors were registered Democrats, but all had serious jobs. They worked in law, banking, engineering, wealth management, health care. You didn't have community organizers and social workers.

Judge Juan Merchan, by the way, was first appointed to the city's court system by Mayor Mike Bloomberg, when Bloomberg was a Republican.

Say what you want about the verdict. It was honestly reached.

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

These People Aren't Serious About Our Most Basic Enterprise: Food

By ART CULLEN

Politicians do not appear to be serious about passing a new five-year farm bill before the November elections. The House Agriculture Committee controlled by Republicans on a 33-21 vote May 28 recommended a bill to the floor that is dead on arrival in the Senate. The bill will cut nutrition benefits by \$27 billion, which Democrats cannot accept.

"I think the fact that we're crossing that red line raises the real possibility of being unable to get a farm bill through the process," Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack said. "It is essentially a crack in the coalition that is absolutely necessary to the passage of a farm bill."

"... Key parts of the House bill split the Farm Bill coalition in a way that makes it impossible to achieve the votes to become law," said Senate Ag Committee Chair Debbie Stabenow, D-Mich. "And it is also clear that we do not have time to waste on proposals that cannot meet that goal."

Congress blew past a farm bill deadline last September. Its extension expires Sept. 30. House Ag Committee Chair GT Thompson, R-Pa., swore he would get a bill out of committee before Memorial Day. That doesn't mean it's going anywhere.

Of course, the \$1.5 trillion legislation is vital to Iowa, covering everything from crop insurance to conservation payments to school lunch programs. Lobbyists jammed the com-

mittee room to make certain their sundry nests remain feathered.

Four Democrats joined 29 Republicans to put forward legislation that lifts income caps for larger farms, increases subsidies for crop insurance and limits executive authority over the Commodity Credit Corp. None of this can (or should) get past the Senate or the White House.

Republicans held up the last farm bill two years over funding for nutrition and conservation programs. The bill finally passed in 2018. The same old issues come up again, already having been argued ad nauseam. The result is delay and uncertainty. What was a bipartisan exercise has become a vehicle for grandstanding.

It shows how unserious the House GOP is about governing. Thompson pledged bipartisanship but defeated every Democratic amendment on a straight party-line vote. We will increase subsidies for larger farms and shift conservation funding their way, while cutting food aid for the poor. To hell with amendments and children who need a decent meal.

Farmers need city folks to subsidize their crop insurance premium. That's the coalition that can pass big legislation. The House GOP is more interested in making a point about welfare queens than it is about how to make the popular Conservation Stewardship Program available to more Iowa farmers.

The Senate Ag Committee has been more bipartisan. Minority Leader Mitch McConnell understands how important SNAP benefits are to poor rural Whites in Kentucky. He advised his friends in the House to tread carefully, but they did not listen.

Vilsack has been accommodating to corporate interests wanting a chunk of that climate-smart money. He thought he was buying their complicity in doing something about

agricultural resilience against obviously extreme weather (see Greenfield, Iowa). What he gets in return is a kick in the teeth. The House bill attempts to emasculate him. What is the point?

Just a few weeks ago, leading Republicans in the Senate, including Sens. Joni Ernst and Chuck Grassley of Iowa, acknowledged that another one-year extension probably will be required. Let a new Congress and president hash it out. That well could be under a flipped scenario: Democrats narrowly in control of the House, Republicans taking the Senate, and Donald Trump back in the White House.

All the posturing suggests that the most important piece of federal legislation affecting Iowa will get punted again. More of the same, even if something can get rushed through this year.

We could address economic diversity, soil health and water quality, and better nutrition if we were serious about it. The House farm bill shows that we're not. Meanwhile, another dairy worker just came down with the avian flu. Louisiana is giving way to the Gulf of Mexico, and they can barely water the cattle in Kansas. We're shipping black gold down the river. In Storm Lake, the food pantry lights go out for lack of funding — we aren't feeding the hungry in the protein capital of the world, Christian soldiers! More of the same stuff that has been hollowing out rural Iowa for a half-century, bought and paid for by those lobbyists packing the meeting room.

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.

Words Matter ... Until They Don't

By ALAN GUEBERT

We in agriculture have a long tradition of marketing our bounty by more pleasant, if not less-than-truthful, names in hopes that less-informed eaters buy the sizzle rather than the fact.

For example, the beef checkoff has spent millions urging people to purchase something called flat-iron steak that isn't steak at all but just a plain old chuck roast sliced thicker and grilled.

Likewise, the pork checkoff's slogan, "Pork: The Other White Meat," is often cited as a brilliant stroke of barnyard marketing: "Look, hogs are chickens!"

No they aren't: U.S. per capita consumption of pork was 51 pounds in 1989, 51 pounds in 2005, and 51 pounds in 2022. Over the same period, poultry—the real white meat—saw its per capita consumption more than double.

Still, facts be hanged, we bugger on with our word games. Indeed, the House Ag Committee's proposed 2024 Farm Bill is so filled with euphemisms, misdirection, and flat-out untruths that it's hard to tell if its sponsors are serious, or seriously out to lunch.

For instance, early on House Republican ag leaders were urged to protect food as-

sistance programs, the biggest being SNAP, or the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, if they hoped to attract needed Dem support for their bill. When their draft was released, however, it showed a \$27 billion (some analysts estimate \$30 billion) slice in food assistance, the steepest cut since welfare reform in 1996.

When the butcher's bill hit Capitol Hill, however, it was quickly condemned by everyone who could read. GOP staffers swiftly reframed the cuts as "cost neutral" and moved on.

After a network of non-profit food banks pointed out the obvious—that cuts usually aren't "cost neutral" — a baloney-filled House Ag staffer called anyone who objected to the SNAP cuts "hunger weirdos ... in the business of poverty."

Then there's the GOP proposed changes to today's principal "farm program," crop insurance, that, "As expected," notes farmdoc-DAILY, "... increases statutory reference prices for all covered commodities but with significant differences across commodities."

Translation: Most of that "cost neutral" \$27 billion in SNAP cuts are going directly into fatter government subsidies for crop revenue insurance programs that, all things being equal, are often very far from equal because some feature "significant differences ..."

Translation of the translation: Some "Crop [insurance] supports would be set so high ... by House Republicans that cotton,

peanut, and rice growers, and probably wheat and sorghum farmers too, 'would receive a payment every year,'" FERN noted May 21, quoting an Environmental Working Group analysis of the proposed, even more fattened crop insurance program.

Equally remarkable is how few people who grow U.S. rice, cotton, and peanuts will benefit from this bigger helping of GOP-supplied, all-but-guaranteed gravy.

In fact, the U.S. Rice Federation counts just 5,563 rice growers, the National Cotton Council says in "2023, the cotton farming industry employed 14,921 people," and the National Peanut Council estimates there are "7,000 peanut farmers."

The cotton group's use of the word "employed," rather than the other groups' more definitive "growers" or "farmers," hints at its legendary command of semantics.

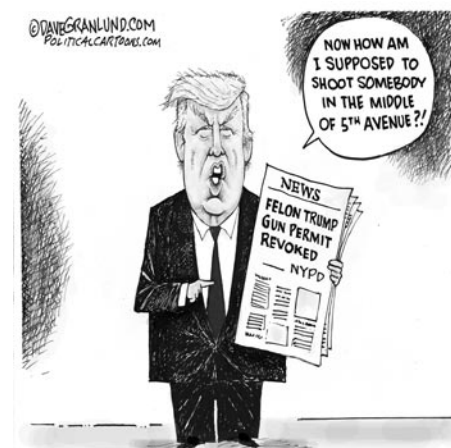
For example, after Brazil filed claims with the World Trade Organization (WTO) that challenged U.S. cotton subsidies in 2002, the U.S. settled in 2009 by paying Brazil \$300 million in reparations and steeply cutting government subsidy programs for "cotton."

Shortly thereafter, however, a new U.S. support payment scheme emerged for something called "seed cotton," the industry's euphemism for plain cotton that hasn't been ginned to remove its seeds—like, in fact, all just-harvested cotton worldwide—carries no WTO oversight.

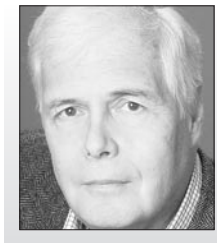
It's a clever, words-only way to avoid

trade sanctions while guaranteeing American cotton growers—sorry, "employees"—income from now until taxpayers catch on that they are paying for steak and getting sausage.

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 farmand-foodfile.com



GENE LYONS



Trump's pretty much constantly in court. And he nearly always loses. Following his 2020 election defeat, he filed 62 lawsuits and lost every single one.

Lock Him Up!

To hear angry MAGA Republicans tell it, former President Donald J. Trump's conviction for 34 felony counts of falsifying business records is a shock and an outrage. But how could anybody be surprised? Never mind that the evidence presented to the New York jury was voluminous and pretty much uncontested.

For all his bragging and whining, Trump didn't dare testify — officially. But the judge's gag order didn't prevent him from spouting off. That was a Trump lie for the MAGA chumps in the cheap seats.

Legally speaking, has there ever been a bigger loser than Trump? Kevin Drum compiled a list on his invaluable website, jabberwocking.com.

He's pretty much constantly in one court or another, Trump. And he nearly always loses. Following his 2020 election de-

feat, the candidate filed 62 — yes, sixty-two — lawsuits alleging election fraud.

And lost every single one.

Back in 2018, a federal court ordered him to pay \$25 million in restitution to students defrauded by the Trump University scam. In 2019, a New York judge ordered the Trump Foundation permanently closed for playing fast and loose with the charitable organization's funds. He and his family were fined \$2 million and forbidden to operate a charity in the state again. Trump whined that they should have investigated Bill and Hillary Clinton instead.

So, he sued Hillary. That one ended up costing him only \$1 million after a federal judge in Florida ruled that the suit was "completely frivolous" and should never have been brought. Trump, the judge wrote, was no babe in the woods: "Mr. Trump is a prolific and sophisticated litigant who is repeatedly using the courts to seek revenge on political adversaries. He is the mastermind of strategic abuse of the judicial process."

That same day, Trump dropped a lawsuit against New York State Attorney General Letitia James that sought to stall her office's civil case against the Trump Organization. The resulting trial found the Trump Organization guilty of massive tax fraud. "Their complete lack of contrition and remorse borders on pathological," Judge Arthur Engoron wrote.

The chief financial officer of the Trump Organization, Allen Weisselberg, pleaded guilty to tax evasion and was sentenced to five months in prison. He subsequently

pleaded guilty to perjury and returned to the slammer for another five months.

For his part, Trump called the ruling a "sham," the judge "crooked," and James "corrupt." He denounced the case against him as "ELECTION INTERFERENCE" and a "WITCH HUNT."

Sound familiar? Evidently, the Trump Organization was staffed by cheats and perjurers like Weisselberg and star prosecution witness Michael Cohen from top to bottom. Everybody but Boss Trump, who knew nothing.

Elsewhere, Trump has brought lawsuits against the *New York Times*, CNN, NBC News and the *Washington Post*. All were dismissed due to lack of evidence. He was successfully sued for sexual abuse by magazine columnist E. Jean Carroll, and ordered to pay her \$5 million in restitution. When Trump continued to mock and malign her publicly, a second jury ordered him to pay her \$83 million for defamation. But for the statute of limitations, the judge in the Carroll case commented, Trump could have been convicted of rape.

Needless to say, these levies are all on appeal. Chances are that Trump's estate will end up owing E. Jean Carroll and the State of New York many millions of dollars in fines and interest.

Meanwhile, the hot-button issue of the day is whether or not Judge Juan Merchan will put Trump behind bars come his July 11 sentencing. And there, I fear, Trump's big mouth is giving Merchan no choice.

Normally, a first-time offender of a

paper crime would be sentenced to probation. But Trump shows no remorse, only contempt and defiance. During the trial, he openly and repeatedly violated a gag order intended to protect the proceedings against threats to court personnel, witnesses and jurors.

Indeed, Trump continues to defy that order, which remains in force until the judge says it doesn't. He's aided and abetted, it must be said, by canting Republican politicians who fear the MAGA horde.

Trump went on "Fox & Friends" the other day to vend the preposterous lie that he never chanted "lock her up" about Hillary Clinton. Anybody who believes that will believe anything — the hallmark of a MAGA cultist. As for jail time, he said the prospect doesn't trouble him, but that he's "not sure the public would stand for it ... You know, at a certain point, there's a breaking point."

And then what? To me, it's an empty threat. Trump's been trying to raise a MAGA mob throughout his tenure, and they keep not showing up. People aren't going to risk their own freedom to save his mangy ass.

But a threat is a threat, and no American court can stand for it. Even if it's only for a couple of months, Judge Merchan is going to have little choice but to lock him up.

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

It's Time to Put Americans' Health Decisions Back In Our Own Hands

Working in reproductive care wasn't easy in the South even before Roe fell. Now it's an emergency.

By KELSEA McLAIN

We all deserve the right to make informed decisions about our own health. That right has been in danger for years — and since the Supreme Court overturned *Roe v. Wade*, it's under siege.

I grew up in the South with an abstinence-only education — if you can call that an "education."

This approach, which teaches nothing about sex except not to have it, is an utter failure. It's been proven to have no effect on reducing adolescent pregnancies. And couples who've received abstinence-only mes-

saging use less birth control and STD protection than couples who've been taught about them.

When I went to college and became aware of the harmful effects of abstinence-only "education," I joined a peer-based sex ed group on campus. We were health- and sex-positive. But abortion was still only discussed in the shadows, in hushed tones, if at all.

But now, like sex ed, these discussions need to be out in the open.

When my birth control failed, I became pregnant. My now-husband and I were in a long-distance relationship while he finished a paramedic program. We were considering marriage, but we weren't there yet and didn't have enough money to raise a child. We made what was, for us, the responsible decision.

The truth is, all kinds of people get abortions. More than half are already parents. People who identify as "pro-life" get abortions, and people who are married get abortions. And the vast majority of Americans support the right to choose an abortion.

After my legal abortion, I began volunteering at an abortion clinic in Florida. Years later, I was offered a job at the Yellowhammer Fund, which provides support to pregnant people seeking reproductive

care and family planning in Alabama and across the South.

Reproductive health care wasn't easy even before the Supreme Court reversed *Roe*, especially in the South.

For instance, in Alabama, we had only three health care providers willing to provide abortion care. The state imposed stricter than national average gestational limits, a two-visit prerequisite, and a 48-hour waiting period. If the situation was an emergency, the documentation for a medical exception was extremely difficult to obtain.

Now it's even worse. Not only can we not provide care, we can't help patients cross state lines to get it elsewhere. We can't even help patients understand where and how they can receive the abortion care they need. Our speech has been criminalized.

In states like mine where care has now been prohibited, it's not the pregnant person, their family, and doctors who determine their care. It's ideologically extreme lawmakers with no medical background or knowledge of individual circumstances who dictate those deeply personal decisions.

We're doing what we can. For now, we can direct people seeking abortion care to published articles where they can find information. We can still help families with legal challenges and provide safe sex kits.

Importantly, we're also training community members across the rural South to be advocates and provide supportive resources for those seeking reproductive justice. And the Yellowhammer Fund has launched a lawsuit to restore our right to help clients find abortion care, and there is some hopeful movement.

But we also need lawmakers to know that every decision they make restricting reproductive care is life-ruining. They aren't "pro-life." They aren't saving lives. All too often, when women can't get miscarriage treatments or other emergency care, they're ending lives.

Midwives and birthing centers need to be free to care for their patients in ways that maximize that patient's health and family, free of state control and threats of prison. This is a message that the majority of Americans support. We need to make sure lawmakers listen.

Kelsea McLain was born and raised in the South. She's the Deputy Director of the Yellowhammer Fund in Alabama and a member of the Southern Reproductive and Sexual Health Advocates table convened by the National Health Law Program. This op-ed was distributed by OtherWords.org.

Ah, Hah; Mueller Probe Found Criminal Act

By JOHN YOUNG

From "Grab 'em by the p—ssy," to "Sh—hole countries," to, "I fired his a— so fast," to so much more: Donald Trump's ride to reckoning has been paved with expurgations.

With his criminal fraud conviction in Manhattan, one of them just took on new and deeper meaning:

"I'm f—ed."

Extended: "Oh, my God. This is terrible. This is the end of my presidency. I'm f—ed."

This is what Trump blurted to staffers in 2017 when a bear of an investigator, former FBI director Robert Mueller, was appointed special counsel into Trump's relationship with Russia.

When Mueller's report came out, Attorney General Bill Barr paint-sprayed it with whitewash. Trump crowed "complete and total exoneration."

That's not what the report said. Mueller

stated that Trump could be criminally liable for obstruction. He just couldn't be indicted in office.

Now let the record reflect seven years after his appointment how Mueller helped hold Donald Trump accountable for a criminal conspiracy over fraudulent records and hush money to a porn star.

This comes from the lead prosecutor in the Mueller probe, Andrew Weissman.

Weissman's work helped send former Trump campaign director Paul Manafort to prison for illegal lobbying overseas.

In the process of investigating Manafort's financial crimes, Weissman stumbled over a curious transaction — a \$130,000 payment from another Trump associate, attorney and so-called "fixer" Michael Cohen. Recipient: a lady named Stephanie Clifford.

"My first thought was of the infamous blue dress" associated with Bill Clinton's romantic entanglement with Monica Lewinsky, he writes in "Where Law Ends: Inside the Mueller Investigation."

Weissman didn't know his porn figures, didn't know the screen name that would end up in court filings and on Americans' lips.

He also didn't know exactly what to do about the suspicious activity he had uncov-

ered. He went to Mueller.

Unlike Kenneth Starr's investigation of Bill Clinton, which lily-padded from a weird Arkansas land deal to a presidential tryst, Mueller said his probe would be limited to the Russia angle. But he did share Weissman's suspicions with investigators at the Southern District of New York.

There you have it: Mueller's tip led to this.

Speaking of Mueller and the Russia probe: One of the crimes for which Michael Cohen went to prison for doing Trump's bidding was lying to Congress about the extent to which Trump negotiated with Russian interests for a proposed Trump Tower in Moscow — all the while seeking to lead our government and saying there were no such negotiations.

A shady go-between for Trump with the Russians, Felix Sater, thought that a business arrangement with Russia and with Vladimir Putin would boost Trump's global profile into the stratosphere.

In Michael Isikoff and David Corn's book, "Russian Roulette," Sater is quoted telling Cohen of a trip to Russia in which, "I will get Putin on this program, and we will get Donald elected. Buddy, our boy can be president of the USA, and we can

engineer it."

Trump had several business ventures in Russia. He produced a Russian version of "The Apprentice." He initiated a Trump Vodka line. He relied on easy cash from Russian oligarchs when Florida's real estate market sagged.

As Isikoff and Corn write, a Moscow tower with "Trump" name on the side was his fondest wish — until even bigger things beckoned.

"Russia is a ruse," he said in a 2017 White House press conference. "I have nothing to do with Russia. Haven't made a call to Russia in years."

Watergate is the first time I heard the term "plausible deniability."

Richard Nixon's denials proved implausible.

Donald Trump could not lie his way out of this web of lies.

We who believe no person is above the law owe the Mueller investigation a debt of gratitude. Let history record it.

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Cover Story...

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The verdict in the criminal trial provided answers to a narrow series of questions, not least of which was whether a presidential candidate had used illicit means to prevent voters from learning about a pay-off to conceal a sexual encounter. (Trump has vowed to appeal.) But the trial also unveiled a broad array of evidence that went far beyond the charges. It revealed a lot about how Trump went about running his company and the presidency — and provided hints of how that might play out in a second Trump administration.

For most of Trump's presidential term, I co-hosted the ProPublica/WNYC podcast "Trump, Inc.," whose mission was to delve into the conflicts of interest between Trump's business and his presidency. Because there was so much that journalists didn't — and couldn't — understand about a privately held company that clung tightly to its secrets, "Trump, Inc." billed itself as "an open investigation." We were candid about what we did and did not know because we lived in a world of doubt.

"Trump, Inc." uncovered a lot, including unearthing Cohen's dubious connections in 2018 and outlining how his role as Trump's lawyer (then still intact) created a cloak of legal privilege that hid their interactions.

But we saw just tiny glimpses of the documents that have now been revealed in their entirety in the criminal trial; we had no access to the many Trump employees, current and former, who have now described, under oath, the inner workings of the Trump Organization.

That testimony confirmed what that tape seemed to show: that Trump pays close, close attention to all his business affairs, and always has. This, in turn, suggests that the mixing of Trump's presidency and business that "Trump, Inc." and others documented occurred under that same watchful eye. And if voters elect Trump a second time — this time knowing that he was convicted of a crime, one where key acts were committed in the Oval Office, on top of his two impeachments — Trump can conclude that America's voters have blessed his way of doing business. There's every reason to believe his conflicts of interest will only be more open and more unapologetic.

The Trump campaign did not respond to a request for comment.

Trump employees testified to his intense level of control in three trials against Trump or his company over the past two years. These were among five trials since 2022, each of which I covered in person, including the criminal trial of his company for tax fraud, two defamation suits brought by the writer E. Jean Carroll and the New York attorney general's civil fraud trial. Each trial ended badly for Trump or his company (and each is being appealed).

Donald Trump's criminal trial in New York offered one sharp revelation after the next. The disclosures came not just from the talked-about witnesses, such as former *National Enquirer* publisher David Pecker, Stormy Daniels and Cohen himself, but also from Trump's former comptroller, his executive assistant and the aide who sat closest to the Oval Office. Some of these individuals, including a junior bookkeeper for the Trump Organization and the head of the company's accounts payable department, work in Trump Tower to this day.

The picture that emerges from their testimony is of a boss — "The Boss" is what they nearly uniformly call him — who manages the tiniest of details but leaves the faintest of traces of all that management. Up until the throes of the 2016 campaign, Trump had to approve every payment over \$2,500, an extraordinarily tiny sum for a mogul with assets around the globe. (For the duration of the campaign, until he became president, that amount inched up, to \$10,000.) Trump would reject checks he didn't want to pay and send them back to his underlings, with the word "VOID" scrawled on them in Sharpie.

Trump watched every expense in this way, his comptroller Jeff McConney testified. Trump once told him, early in his time at the company, "You're fired," because McConney hadn't made an effort to reduce

Trump's bills before presenting Trump with payment documents. "It was a teaching moment," McConney said on the stand. This close attention and tight-fistedness extended company wide: When it came to Trump University, Cohen testified, it was part of his job to offer a vendor 20% of what they were owed, or to pay them nothing at all.

Trump brought this ethos to the White House, where, as his lawyers liked to point out, he was the "leader of the free world." He took time to write "PAY" on a \$6,974 invoice sent by Trump Organization executive assistant Rhona Graff for an annual membership and "food minimum" at the Winged Foot Golf Club in Mamaroneck, New York.

Trump, of course, handed over control of the Trump Organization, including the oversight of its payments, to his older sons and Weisselberg at the outset of his administration. But he never gave up ownership of his company. He always made money from it, and does to this day.

And Trump, while president, went to extraordinary lengths to keep control of his "personal" checking account. That account actually belonged to a Trump Organization business entity, which underscored the lack of separation between Trump and the company he had ostensibly separated himself from. Trump's personal checks were approved by Weisselberg; generated by Deborah Tarasoff, the head of Trump's accounts payable department; stapled to the approved invoice; and sent via FedEx by Trump's junior bookkeeper, Rebecca Manchio, to the Washington home of Trump's bodyguard-turned-White House aide, Keith Schiller, who would bring them over for Trump to sign. That's how the checks that Trump signed to Cohen made their way to the Oval Office.

"Checks came in a FedEx envelope" that Schiller delivered, testified Madeleine Westerhout, Trump's director of Oval Office operations. "I opened the envelope. And inside was a manila folder with a stack of checks. And I brought the manila folder in to the president for him to sign."

Money wasn't the only thing Trump paid close attention to. He wrote all of his social media posts, save for a few written by an aide, Dan Scavino. Sometimes, Trump would dictate tweets to Westerhout. She would type them up, print them out and show them to Trump so the president of the United States could take time to scrutinize, and adjust, the punctuation. "He liked to use the Oxford comma," Westerhout testified.

Trump did not send emails or text messages. This aversion has long been known, but the trial testimony laid out a whole series of ways in which Trump communicated without leaving precise documentation.

He was on the phone beginning at 6 in the morning and "late into the night after I went to bed, so I always felt guilty about that," Westerhout testified. He'd often use Schiller's cellphone to make calls, and employees would use that number to reach Trump. There were no Trump memos, no notepads, no Post-it notes, just an occasional Sharpie scrawl. And largely, except for Cohen's, no testimony that what these employees did, they did "at the direction of" and "for the benefit of" Donald Trump. (This was an essential part of the judge's charge to the jury: that Trump "personally, or by acting in concert with another person or persons, made or caused a false entry in the business records of an enterprise.")

This is the backdrop for the conflicts "Trump, Inc." and other news media covered while Trump was president. To recap some of them (at a moment when polls show many Americans have forgotten much of what transpired during his administration): Trump's hotel in Washington became a must stop-by for foreign officials, earning his company millions. He caused the U.S. Treasury to spend more than \$1 million to house Secret Service agents in rooms with top-of-the-market rates at Mar-a-Lago and had the government pick up the tab for \$1,005.60 in cocktails apparently enjoyed by administration officials and friends at his resort's bar.

During Trump's presidency, the response to questions about all this went something like this: As a global businessman, he or his allies would say, how could

he possibly pay attention to whether the presidential seal was used on his golf courses? Or whether his son, Don Jr., was trading on the name "Donald Trump" to sell condos in India. Or whether businesspeople with foreign ties were trying to make a buck, or millions, from his presidency?

Indeed, this was part of Trump's defense in the criminal trial, and in the civil fraud trial at which Trump was ordered to pay hundreds of millions of dollars to New York state for what a judge found was a yearslong practice of lying about the value of his assets. When he testified at that civil trial, Trump distanced himself from the fraud: "All I did was authorize and tell people to give whatever is necessary for the accountants to do the statements," he said. And the false statements of financial condition? "I would look at them, I would see them and maybe on some occasions, I would have some suggestions."

As is his right, Trump chose not to testify at his criminal trial, but his lawyer Todd Blanche argued on his behalf that Trump "had nothing to do, had nothing to do with the invoice, with the check being generated, or with the entry on the ledger" and that he was so busy being president he maybe didn't even look at the checks he signed. "Sometimes he would sign checks even when he was meeting with people, while he was on the phone, and even without reviewing them," Blanche said during closing arguments.

The jury did not buy that defense.

Trump is currently leading in the polls. It's entirely possible he will be elected president. Yet he's continuing to aggressively pursue business deals in countries that will have a long list of issues on which they will be seeking U.S. support.

The Trump Organization entered a full-on partnership with LIV Golf, an entity majority-owned by the government of Saudi Arabia, for tournaments at his golf courses. And last year, a *New York Times* reporter and photographer visited what the reporter called a "multibillion-dollar project backed by Oman's oil-rich government that has an unusual partner: former President Donald J. Trump." The project was launched and is being built while Trump is the front-runner for a second presidency. But neither the Trump Organization nor the Trump campaign tried to defend or separate the project from the candidate who, while not running the company, still makes money from it.

"It's like the Hamptons of the Middle East," Eric Trump, who now runs the Trump Organization, told the *Times*. The paper wrote: "Oman, in fact, is nothing like the Hamptons. It is a Muslim nation and absolute monarchy, ruled by a sultan, who plays a sensitive role in the Middle East: Oman maintains close ties with Saudi Arabia and its allies, but also with Iran, with which it has considerable trade."

It isn't just the foreign deals. In April, right around the time Trump was about to be criminally tried in New York, he offered oil executives gathered at Mar-a-Lago "a deal," the *Washington Post* reported. The publication summarized his message as: "You all are wealthy enough that you should raise \$1 billion to return me to the White

House." In exchange, the *Post* said, Trump promised to reverse President Joe Biden's initiatives to slow climate change, vowing to roll back some of them "on Day 1."

And, as has been widely reported, with Truth Social going public, Trump has set up what Vox called "a perfect avenue for potential corruption." As Vox noted, it's "a way for Trump's supporters to personally offer him financial support at a time when he desperately needs it." By propping up the share price of the stock of the cash-hemorrhaging social media company, shareholders have potentially put billions of dollars in Donald Trump's pocket.

It's clear that Trump plays favorites and rewards loyalty; nearly eight years after he was inaugurated in 2017, it's hard to imagine that any savvy businessperson or foreign leader fails to recognize this.

Certainly, those who were once in Trump's orbit, if only briefly, testified to the dark side of that equation. Both Cohen and Daniels described the torrent of retribution they've experienced. Trump is unapologetic about his quest for vengeance. As he put it in one social media post last summer, "IF YOU GO AFTER ME I'M COMING AFTER YOU."

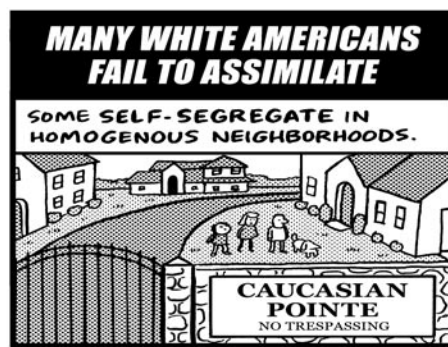
Merely having been once employed by Trump seems to have taken a toll, on even relatively minor figures. In the civil fraud trial, Trump's former comptroller, McConney, started weeping when he was asked why he no longer worked at the Trump Organization. He said he could no longer "deal with" the legal scrutiny he'd suffered. In the criminal trial, both former communications director Hope Hicks and Westerhout burst into tears on the stand, reflecting on their work history with Trump. Both said they remained loyal, but both had been banished from Trump's graces.

And as for Weisselberg, he was not called to testify in this trial. His previous testimony in the trial of Trump's company resulted in felony convictions on 17 counts and a five-month jail sentence. He is now serving a second jail sentence, in Rikers Island, for committing perjury in Trump's civil fraud trial.

In the courthouse, Trump spent long stretches of time in an uncomfortable room with the shades always drawn, the fluorescent lighting unforgiving. He was required to listen to weeks of unflattering testimony, including, several times, to his own voice on that tape Cohen made of him, utterly cognizant of the tawdry deal he was striking. Saying, "So, what do we got to pay for this, 150?" After all the testimony in his criminal trial, this no longer seems like a random moment. It sounds like who Trump is: his attention to detail, his willingness to subvert the rules, the way he wields money to enhance his power, and vice versa, and is utterly unashamed.

The public knows all this now. In a second Trump presidency, it's exactly what we'd get. Except this time, it will be all out before us, not in a secretly recorded tape.

Andrea Bernstein is a Peabody and duPont award-winning journalist and author of "American Oligarchs: The Kushners, the Trumps and the Marriage of Money and Power." She wrote this for ProPublica.



Are Americans So Depraved That They'll Put a Convicted Felon in Power?

Looks like we'll find out.

By DICK POLMAN

Before we ponder the big unanswerable question – is this country so sick that it'll put a convicted felon in the White House? – we should expel a brief sigh of satisfaction.

What we witnessed May 30 was an historic triumph for the rule of law. Twelve everyday citizens did what the gutless Senate Republicans twice refused to do. And, if I may wax patriotic for a moment, I'll simply note that the verdict in the New York trial could never have happened in any of the autocratic nations – Russia, Hungary, Turkey – that the convicted felon reveres. Thomas Jefferson said it best, in 1788: “I consider trial by jury as the only anchor ever yet imagined by man, by which government can be held to the principles of its constitution.”

And if Judge Juan Merchan doesn't sentence the felon to jail, I'd suggest community service – like cleaning the latrines at the Port Authority bus depot. That's the minimal punishment one should mete out

to someone who committed crimes to steal a presidential election.

What we don't know, however, is whether his criminal status will repel a sufficient share of voters and consign him to permanent exile. Serious question: Is convicted felon a fatal stigma in contemporary politics? I can't believe I even need to ask that – I'm old enough to remember when the “law and order” Republican party would never nominate a criminal – but, hey, anything is possible in this benighted nation, given how he and his MAGA puppets have so thoroughly debased American civic life and warred against fact-based truth.

Some smart observers insist that he's toast. Richard Painter, who served as the ethics lawyer in George W. Bush's administration, says with confidence: “Americans will not elect a convicted felon to the White House.” *Washington Post* columnist Ruth Marcus, who followed the election-interference trial closely, says, “there is a segment of the Trump-doubting but not Trump-hating public that will be turned off by the notion of electing a felon to be president of the United States.”

If the polls are right (big caveat), the felon may indeed have a problem. According to an ABC News survey earlier in May, 20% of the felon's supporters said that, if he were convicted by a jury, they'd either reconsider their fealty or dump him forthwith. An NPR-Marist poll released May 30 said that 17% of all voters would be less likely to cast a MAGA ballot if duh leader was a felon. Those numbers, if true, are hefty enough to swing a close election.

But they may also be ephemeral. There's plenty of time left on the clock for

wavering MAGAts to convince themselves that even though he's a criminal, he's their criminal – as the relentless MAGA propaganda machine will remind them 24/7. The felon's puppets on Capitol Hill (Marco Rubio, Susan Collins, J.D. Vance, Tim Scott, Mike Johnson, et al, ad nauseam) are already busy with their anti-American bullsh*t, hailing the felon as a martyr and tearing down our judicial system. That vile messaging could sway lots of impressionable naifs, especially the low-information types who barely know there was a criminal trial.

That messaging will win unless it's relentlessly counter-programmed. The Biden campaign and the Democratic party have been handed a golden opportunity, if they're not too characteristically timid to seize it. Just imagine if Hillary or Obama or Biden had been criminally convicted of 34 charges in the midst of a presidential campaign; then GOP, as is its wont, would be pounding away at that every waking moment until Election Day. The Dems should do no less. This is a street fight for the future of democracy, and Marquess of Queensberry rules will not suffice.

I agree with Dan Pfeiffer, a former senior Democratic adviser: “The media will move on in a matter of days. Other news will intrude. One of the core lessons of communications – especially in a world where the traditional press has a fraction of its previous reach – is that if you want people to know something, you have to tell them and then tell them again and again. Once you are so sick of saying something that you might puke, you probably need to say it a couple more times.”

True that. Every Republican candidate

up and down the ballot should be confronted daily: “How can you support a convicted felon?” Granted, this isn't the only issue this year, but it can be tied to all the others.

For instance: “The felon committed crimes to steal the '16 election, then he put three people on the Supreme Court who made it possible to steal women's bodily autonomy.”

For instance: “Joe Biden is rebuilding and repairing our roads and bridges and railways, while the felon who stole the '16 election wasted four years getting nothing done.”

For instance: “Joe Biden has put billions into fighting the horrific effects of climate change, which the felon has dismissed as a ‘hoax.’”

(But naturally, the Dems being Dems, they're wavering on what to do. A 2020 Biden campaign official tells *Politico*, “This should be such a layup for us, and yet we might miss the shot.”)

Bottom line: The presence of a convicted criminal on the ballot for president of the United States is itself a malignant affront to everything this country purports to stand for. This historic (and perhaps final) free election will be the ultimate stress test. It will tell us whether we the people are still as decent as we'd like to believe, or as fatally depraved as we may fear.

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

No, You're Not a 'Political Prisoner'

By JOE CONASON

“I am a political prisoner,” declared former President Donald Trump the day after his 34-count felony conviction.

If we were to take that remark seriously, it would quickly become obvious that Trump is not, in fact, a political prisoner but merely a remorseless criminal. Unlike actual political prisoners, who never hesitate to take the witness stand in their own defense, Trump made the cowardly decision to avoid testifying, despite his blustering promises to do so.

“Yeah, I would testify, absolutely,” he said just before the trial began in New York's Supreme Court. “I'm testifying. I tell the truth, I mean, all I can do is tell the truth.”

That claim of candor evaporated post-verdict, when Trump tried to explain why he had chickened out. He vaguely blamed “rulings” by Judge Juan Merchan. He said the prosecution could bring up “anything” from his “great past.” He said there was no reason to testify because “they had no case.” He said to testify would risk a perjury indictment, an excuse that sounds odd from a

man who insists he can only tell the truth.

If Trump were any kind of political prisoner, he would have leapt at the opportunity to speak on his own behalf and to advocate his cause, in the fearless tradition followed by history's legendary political defendants.

When John Brown was on trial for his life after the 1859 raid on Harpers Ferry, he served not only as a witness but as his own counsel. The militant abolitionist repeatedly spoke in court, at great length, to excoriate slavery, explain the violence he had perpetrated and denounce the “mockery of a trial” that concluded with his death sentence. Nobody can say he didn't make his point.

Nearly a century later, Fidel Castro, also appearing as his own counsel, delivered a four-hour defense summation in court which was sufficiently compelling to be published as a book titled “History Will Absolve Me.” Although history will condemn the late Castro for turning away from agrarian reform and democracy to Communist oppression, at least he had the guts to address the court that sent him to prison. (He had led a raid on an army fort to seize weapons, rather than paying off an adult film star for a sexual encounter, so his argument would have possessed a certain dignity that Trump lacks.)

Then in 1963, when South Africa's apartheid government put Nelson Mandela

and several of his comrades on trial for their lives, the great democratic revolutionary delivered an eloquent address in the dock that held his listeners spellbound for four hours. Titled “I Am Prepared to Die,” as he declared to the court, it laid out in irrefutable detail Mandela's contention that the South African justice system and the country's entire governmental structure were illegitimate – and his promise to replace it with equal representation for all, a crusade for which he was ready to sacrifice his life.

By contrast, whenever Trump squawks about being a “political prisoner” and decries the authority of a duly constituted court, he sounds like the self-aggrandizing buffoon that he always has been. He had the best counsel that his dumb donors could buy, and those lawyers evidently persuaded him that his long trail of lies, both under oath and in public, would prove ruinous if he dared to take the stand.

Rather than an authoritarian tribunal, Trump faced a jury of his peers, all chosen with the consent of his attorneys, a dozen New Yorkers who faced down his daily abuse as well as the threats of his MAGA goons. The jurors' courage and Trump's bullying call to mind the kind of defendant he truly resembles, a mob boss like Al Capone or John Gotti.

The convicted Trump will have every opportunity to appeal, perhaps all the way to the Supreme Court, where he expects the

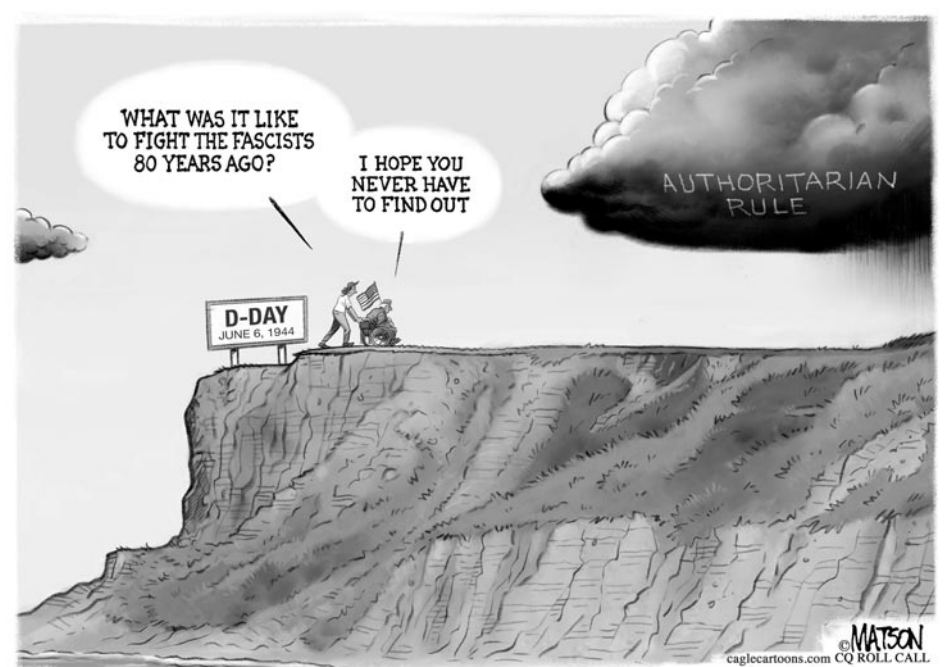
justices he appointed to rule in his favor, and where two disreputable jurists who should recuse will nevertheless hear his case. But whatever they do, the stain is indelible.

Let us hope that come Election Day, Americans will follow Trump's advice in 2016 concerning presidential candidates under indictment. Back then, he believed Hillary Clinton would soon face trial on bogus charges of mishandling classified documents (the same offense for which he should now be on trial, except for the intervention of another unscrupulous judge).

“She shouldn't be allowed to run,” said Trump. “If she wins, it would create an unprecedented constitutional crisis. In that situation, we could very well have a sitting president under felony indictment and, ultimately, a criminal trial. It would grind government to a halt.”

How much more true for a would-be president already stamped “guilty” 34 times.

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



We're Here. And We're Strong.

By DAVID MCCALL

Doneta Williams, president of United Steelworkers (USW) Local 1025 and a longtime optical fiber maker at the Corning plant in Wilmington, N.C., knows how important it is for workers intent on forming a union to speak directly with peers who walk in the same shoes.

So Williams agreed to send three of her colleagues to Corning's Tarboro facility, about 145 miles away, when workers at that site approached the union with questions about organizing.

Local 1025 members shared firsthand accounts of how the union boosted their wages, gave them a voice and kept them safe on the job. And about two weeks ago, the workers at Tarboro filed for an election to join the USW.

They're among a growing number of workers across the South eager to leverage the power of solidarity and build brighter futures, even as CEOs and Republicans in this part of the country still conspire to hold them down.

"It's all about making life better," said Williams, who also serves as a vice president of the North Carolina AFL-CIO, noting that workers are organizing across numerous industries in a string of Southern states with traditionally low numbers of union members.

"The narrative on unions in the South needs to change," she added, pointing out that growing numbers of workers are grasping the benefits of collective action and demanding their fair share in the booming post-pandemic economy.

"We're here," she said. "We're strong. We're standing up, and we're fighting with all that we have."

About 1,400 workers at the Blue Bird electric bus factory in Fort Valley, Ga., last year voted overwhelmingly to organize through the USW.

The vote was a breakthrough for workers on the front lines of a vital, growing industry. It also sent a pointed, defiant message to a Republican governor who lies about unions and tries to prevent Georgians from joining them.

On the heels of that monumental victory, autoworkers at a Volkswagen plant in Chattanooga, Tenn., overcame Republican opposition and voted by a huge majority last month to unionize.

Their counterparts at a Hyundai plant in Alabama continue their own organizing drive, citing safety issues and irregular scheduling making it virtually impossible to make plans outside of work. Despite the poor conditions that these and other workers face, however, the state's anti-union governor brags about her subservience to corporations and urges workers to vote against their best interests.

Corning, a maker of glass products for broadband, solar power and many other industries, has seven locations in North Carolina. While only workers at Wilmington enjoy USW membership now, their counterparts at other sites across the state intend to change that.

Williams says workers are educating themselves about collective action, seeing through the right-wing corporate pandering, and then shunning off the South's anti-labor traditions to chart a path forward for their families.

"The mindset of workers, in general, has changed," observed Williams, who credits President Joe Biden's pro-union agenda and job-creating legislation like the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act with helping to fuel demand for unions.

"We are in full support of everyone who is trying to organize," she said, noting that North Carolina's Democratic governor supports unions, unlike his Republican counterparts in other states. "We're helping any way that we can."

In one-on-one meetings and on Zoom calls, for example, Local 1025 representatives talk to prospective union members about how they bargain higher wages, quality health care and retirement security.

Williams said she can sense the workers' interest growing as she explains how unions empower their members to look out for one another, fight discrimination, and ensure fairness in scheduling. And she emphasizes that workers at every location control their own destiny and build the contract that's right for them.

"It's your contract," she says. "It's what you want your workplace to look like. Every workplace is different."

Unions lift up entire communities, a U.S. Treasury Department report confirmed last year.

They raise members' wages by as much as 15%, creating a competitive environment in which non-unionized employers also must increase pay to hold on to workers. Union

contracts provide workers with better benefits and retirement security than they'd otherwise earn, and their focus on workplace safety "can pull up whole industries," the report concluded.

Unions fight favoritism and discrimination, creating more equitable workplaces and communities. And the collective spirit forged inside the organized shop extends beyond the plant gates, with union members not only voting more often than other workers but also volunteering and donating to charity more often.

"You own this. Don't let the boss own this," longtime USW activist David Beard tells workers who are considering an organizing drive to take control of their futures, noting unions are families that safeguard members from unfair treatment.

"You're not protected without a union, especially if you're a mouthy guy like me," explained Beard, executive board member for Local 752L, which represents workers at the Goodyear plant in Texarkana, Ark.

Companies long located in the South because of generous incentive packages and non-union work forces. Although companies and Republicans desperately want to maintain the status quo, he said, "people are hungry" for better.

During one conference call, Williams stunned workers at a non-union Corning site when she explained the holiday premium pay Local 1025 members receive. She pointed out that those workers can fight for the same pay—and get her help doing it.

"We're just stronger together, and we are here to support them," she said.

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

How Freelance Journalists Are Moving from Precarity to Solidarity

By SETH SANDRONSKY

A new US Department of Labor rule restores protections for misclassified workers and could help reduce the precarious status of freelance journalists, Samantha Sanders of the Economic Policy Institute in Washington, D.C. These protections are sorely needed in an industry buffeted by layoffs. Freelance workers are organizing to make sure needed reforms like the new DOL rule stick.

The difficult economic conditions faced by newspaper staff these days are well known. In 2023, through November, there were nationally a total of 2,681 editorial job cuts, according to the global outplacement and business and executive coaching firm Challenger, Gray & Christmas, Inc.

Two examples are a case in point. The Arena Group, publisher of *Sports Illustrated*, communicated its intentions to potentially lay off the entire staff over three months. *Los Angeles Times* management announced plans to lay off 115 workers, more than 20% of the paper's journalists.

Fortunately, amid these layoffs, freelancers are organizing. Such solidarity efforts in an industry undergoing drastic restructuring requires creativity, according to Abigail Higgins, a freelance journalist and co-chair of the Freelance Solidarity Project, which is the digital media division of the National Writers Union (NWU), focused on organizing freelance media workers. Why? "We are dispersed and face anti-worker laws," she says.

How does the creativity of which Higgins speaks show up? One way is through the Freelance Isn't Free Act, which became law in New York City in 2017. Forms of that law have followed in New York state; Illinois; Columbus, Ohio; and Los Angeles, California. In the Golden State, a form of the Freelance Isn't Free Act is on the legislative agenda, thanks to state Senator Scott Weiner (D-San Francisco), who introduced Senate Bill 988, the Freelance Worker Protection Act, on Jan. 31. Such labor reform efforts are gathering steam to set minimum work standards for freelance journalists, create a comprehensive rate-sharing database for digital media workers, and strengthen their intel-

lectual property rights.

The Struggle to Enforce Freelancer Protections

Eric Thurm is legislative coordinator for the NWU. The Freelance Isn't Free Act requires employers to provide freelancers a written contract, full and timely payment, and protection from discrimination and retaliation for the exercise of such rights, according to Thurm.

Without such labor standards, freelancers are subject to exploitation, including but not limited to late and partial remuneration for their work. "The core tenets of the Freelance Isn't Free Act would not read as especially big guarantees," Thurm says, "but I think that speaks to how precarious freelancing actually is. For example, getting a written contract for one's work might seem obvious to people who have not freelanced."

Protecting freelance media workers from retaliation if they try to negotiate higher pay or better working conditions with a publication is a real danger. The Freelance Isn't Free Act also protects freelancers from a publication paying the agreed upon fee late.

"Generally speaking, payment is within 30 days of completion of freelancers' work," according to Thurm. Publications that violate an agreement for prompt payment can be liable for up to twice the amount owed to freelancers under the Act.

Building a Pay Rate Database

Information is power at work. For instance, knowing what fellow workers learn, all things equal, can create the conditions for improving everybody's pay rates. When the opposite prevails, employers can and do hide pay information to decrease compensation. "It is hard to know if you are being offered a rate that is fair or not," says Higgins, whose reporting centers on gender, inequality, and labor. "That makes it really challenging for freelancers to make a living."

Take rental housing. A record half of all US renters experience unaffordable prices, according to a new report by the Joint Center for Housing Studies of Harvard University. The sharpest rise in unaffordability since 2019 was for households making \$30,000 to \$74,999 a year. As a freelance journalist for decades, this re-

porter has never earned annual wage-income close to \$30,000.

A challenging work relationship with employers has big impacts on freelancers' capacities to organize as well. What can they do? "There are a few different things that we are doing about pay rates to improve that situation," says Higgins. One is building a pay rate database that freelance journalists generate, a regular part of their work process. The data includes publication name, scope of work, i.e., word length, and compensation. Moreover, the database creates a simple and powerful tool for freelance journalists to read and learn what their peers are earning from other publications.

What is unknown to dispersed freelance journalists disadvantages them, as working alone curtails communication with fellow workers. Under such labor conditions of isolation, chats around a water cooler, say, in a newsroom where full-time journalists ply their trade is not part of the freelance equation. In other words, labor remoteness is an employer's dream and a nightmare for wage earners. "A lack of pay transparency is the breeding ground for inequity," Higgins says. That burden falls hardest on working-class freelancers who are female, nonwhite and queer, according to her.

Low Pay Punishes Freelance Journalists

"There is a real lack of public awareness over just how difficult it is for freelance journalists to earn a living," Higgins says. Accordingly, educating the public about this occupational economic inequality is high on the union's list of priorities. Higgins notes that unpaid time to research and pitch publications is part of this equation. "Many if not most freelance journalists are unable to make a living with the earnings they receive," according to Higgins. "A lot of us consult or work in coffee shops or other hustles and side jobs to make ends meet." Some term this the "gigification," or irregular pay, of the economy.

More firings of journalists—like those at the *Los Angeles Times* and *Sports Illustrated*—are likely to further swell the ranks of freelance journalists. That can and does benefit employers seeking to harm labor and hike profits. "Layoffs of full-time journalists means that publications can contract

with freelancers, who do not earn benefits and pay on a per article, or piece work, basis," Higgins says. "The takeaway is to cut the cost of producing journalism."

This situation cries out for increasing the amount of public information about the connective tissue between journalism and democracy. Reaching out in this way to digital and print news consumers with a focus on informing them about the labor conditions of the journalism producers is a potential bridge of solidarity, a critical part of social movements for progressive change. There are recent examples to emulate. As has become a refrain of teachers' unions: "Teachers' working conditions are students' learning conditions."

Defending Intellectual Property Rights

Intellectual property—or writers' right to own their work—is another terrain of struggle. Harmed by news aggregators like Facebook and Google, many local publications are in part dealing with that loss of revenue by curtailing freelancers' rights to their intellectual property. "There have been a proliferation of what is called 'work for hire' agreements," Higgins says, "which basically strips freelancers of all of their rights to their work."

"If a freelancer wants to take an article and turn it into a book or serialized podcast, or a studio wants to turn an article into a film," Higgins says, "the freelancer has lost all rights to the original work. The publication owns the rights. That is egregious when we live in a world where freelancers spend days, weeks, months, and even years working on a story that earns them a few hundred dollars." By contrast, industries such as Big Tech and Big Pharma profit insanely thanks to IP policies.

"Freelancers should get fair pay and fair contracts," according to Higgins, "and retain the rights for their work, with publications receiving exclusive or first rights for 30 or 60 days, but not forever."

The Road Ahead

Moving forward, freelancers are organizing to improve on their existing protections—and to respond more effectively to current challenges.

It is plain as day that employers will not concede such improved labor condi-

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MARY SANCHEZ



Harrison Butker appears to be an adherent of Opus Dei, a century-old arm of the Catholic Church, whose harshest critics have labeled it a cult.

Harrison Butker's Tantrum Against Catholicism

Be grateful that Harrison Butker is an NFL kicker, not a politician, or a person with any authority over others.

Because people who are beholden to his religious identity – Catholicism's ultra conservative Opus Dei – have long stirred a global backlash.

Opus Dei, which is Latin for “work of God,” is a century-old arm of the Catholic church, whose harshest critics have long tried to label it a cult, tracing early adherents to fascist dictators.

This is the backstory that's gone curiously untold about Butker, who plays for the Kansas City Chiefs, when he was invited to give a commencement speech to graduates at Benedictine College, a small Catholic

school in Atchison, Kansas.

Few people likely caught the nods to Opus Dei that Butker made in his speech. But he made specific and repeated references to Opus Dei, citing Josemaría Escrivá, the Spanish priest who started the organization in 1928.

Now a saint, Escrivá's beliefs were elevated in the faith in 1982 when Pope John Paul II made Opus Dei a personal prelature, meaning the organization's leadership reported directly to him.

There are about 85,000 Opus Dei members worldwide. But only about 2% of priests globally are part of the organization.

Butker appears to be among the 3,000 Opus Dei adherents in the U.S. It's hard to know for sure as its membership is shrouded in secrecy.

If people have heard about the organization, it might be from the book and subsequent movie, “The Da Vinci Code,” which spun on that secrecy and a whole lot of fictionalized movie drama (murder, etc.).

Opus Dei's core practices include fasting, prayer, and abstinence from whatever might bring pleasure.

The most controversial practice associated with the organization is self-flagellation or wearing a cilice, which can be a harsh garment that is very uncomfortable to wear. One can also wear a metal chain with a spike, usually to irritate an upper thigh. These items are worn during repentance rituals.

None of this is exactly everyday Catholicism.

But it's the context to understand that

Butker's 20-minute grievance was primarily a denouncement of fellow Catholics, including priests and bishops.

Understandably, people focused on what rang off-key to their ears, skipping over what didn't resonate.

Butker took on a pious tone to verbally place women on a pedestal, but only if they embody examples of motherhood and marriage that he views as acceptable.

He asked the female Benedictine graduates, “How many of you are sitting here now about to cross this stage and are thinking about all the promotions and titles you are going to get in your career?”

He gave a nod to that being maybe OK with this: “Some of you may go on to lead successful careers in the world.”

And then came the “but” of Butker's speech: “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.”

A spreadsheet would be necessary to keep track of everyone he took a swipe at in his remarks. LGBTQ people were referenced with a nod to Gay Pride, in their month of recognition and “deadly sins.”

There was a dog whistle of “cultural elite.”

But Butker spent a good portion of his speech still stewing about COVID lockdowns, which prevented him from attending mass in person and therefore not receiving the sacrament of communion.

According to the Catholic News Agency, “virtually every U.S. diocese shuttered churches during the COVID-19 pan-

demie.”

Many bishops issued dispensations from the obligation to attend mass on Sundays.

Butker pretty much called them weenies for doing so.

“As we saw during the pandemic, too many bishops were not leaders at all,” Butker said. “They were motivated by fear, fear of being sued, or being removed. Fear of being disliked, showed by their actions, intentional or unintentional, that the sacraments don't actually matter.”

He also noted, “There is not enough time today for me to list all the stories of priests and bishops misleading their flocks.”

He called on priests to set aside their own personal comfort and embrace the cross. He castigated the clergy who “let their guard down.”

He also included a snide reference about priests who are pictured with their dogs in the parish directory. (Pretty sure that one was a personal dig at a priest somewhere, likely outside of the kind of Latin mass Butker prefers).

So be grateful Butker is a very good NFL kicker and not a member of the clergy who decides whether or not you are worthy of God's grace.

All indicators are that most people, be they ordained or not, do not meet his expectations.

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

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The Support Our Public Services Briefly Had—and Still Need

And how President Biden can make that goal a better campaign theme

By ROBERT KUTTNER

In 2020 and 2021, under Presidents Donald Trump and Joe Biden, Congress passed more than \$5 trillion in COVID relief funding in six separate bills. The March 2020 CARES Act alone, at \$2.2 trillion totaling about 10% of one year's GDP, was the largest non-wartime federal stimulus ever.

Without that funding, unemployment in the COVID recession would have easily reached 20%, as the economy spiraled into a 1930s-style self-deepening depression. Entire industries, such as airlines and restaurants, would have collapsed.

The COVID stimulus, which dwarfed the \$831 billion stimulus approved under President Obama in 2009 (now widely acknowledged to be inadequate), is a good illustration of government spending sufficient sums to avert an economic disaster. But if you take a good look at where that money went, much of it was money needed for long-deferred, everyday public needs. And 2024 is the year when a lot of that money runs out.

For instance, under the Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER) Fund, the nation's schools got \$190 billion. As that money is exhausted, public schools face a massive teacher shortage, deferred maintenance expenses, and a fiscal cliff. Philadelphia has a budget gap of \$407 million. New York's is at least \$700 million. Across the country, there are potential teacher layoffs and program cuts.

COVID relief also provided funding of \$16 billion for public-transit systems and Amtrak. After decades of chronic underfunding and operating deficits, that emergency money was a godsend.

The pandemic sent many transit agencies into a death spiral. Reduced ridership meant reduced income from fares, but increasing fares only reduced ridership further. This downward spiral continues, as the federal funds are depleted.

Deferred maintenance and unreliable service also pushed more riders into Uber. Likewise, more people working at home. In California, the relatively modern and efficient Bay Area Rapid Transit system has only 43% of its pre-pandemic riders. New Jersey's state system faces a \$1 billion budget shortfall by 2026. In Boston, where the antiquated subway and trolley system dates to the 19th century, the budget shortfall for the coming fiscal year, which begins July 1, is projected at between \$567 million and \$652 million.

COVID relief under the Families First

Coronavirus Response Act included a temporary boost to the federal share of Medicaid costs. In exchange, states had to maintain continuous coverage, even if an enrollee's income status changed. Now, states are disenrolling people who no longer qualify, and national enrollment will decline by 8.6% in 2024.

The good news is that the strong economy lightened the blow that was feared on some of these fronts. For example, the expected “child care cliff” never really materialized, as labor force participation of mothers of young children is larger than ever, and child care sector jobs remain strong. But the damaging rollbacks of the pop-up COVID safety net still have a significant impact in many areas.

THE POINT IS THAT THIS “EMERGENCY” FUNDING pulled back the curtain on public services that are strapped for funds, day in and day out. Biden's original Build Back Better program, blocked by the Republicans with the assistance of Sens. Joe Manchin (D-WV) and Kyrsten Sinema (I-AZ), would have provided about a trillion dollars more money for public needs, including free and universal pre-kindergarten for all three- and four-year-olds.

The refundable Child Tax Credit, which was really a universal child allowance for all kids under 18, was allowed to lapse after one year. During the year it was in effect, it reduced child poverty by

over 40%. Build Back Better proposed to make it permanent.

Next year, Manchin and Sinema will be gone. If the voters return Biden and a Democratic Congress, Biden can take another stab at providing the level of public support that our threadbare public services need.

This goal—of better ongoing support for popular public services—also provides Biden with much better talking points. Republicans oppose good public services. They'd rather have tax cuts for the rich. As part of the 2023 deal to increase the national debt ceiling, Republicans demanded and got a “clawback” of unspent COVID relief funds for the states totaling \$27 billion.

Biden has made a mistake in campaigning on how great the economy is. Though it certainly has improved in many respects since 2022, the economy just isn't all that great for lots of working people.

Build Back Better also proposed expansions in affordable housing and child care, and much more. It would be far better for Biden to campaign on what he could do with a working majority in Congress than brag about how much he has done. Nothing better illustrates the divide between the two parties.

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

The Supreme Court's War on Democracy

By GENE NICHOL

In the Supreme Court's South Carolina case in May, *Alexander v. NAACP*, the Roberts Court continued to press the Republican crusade against pluralistic democracy. Earl Warren and Thurgood Marshall (and Julius Chambers) weep.

In 2013 — without textual, historical or precedential justification — the U.S. Supreme Court invalidated the crucial preclearance requirements of the iconic federal Voting Rights Act in *Shelby County v. Holder*. Chief Justice John Roberts famously declared “things have changed dramatically” in the American South. “Discriminatory evasions of federal decrees are rare.” North Carolina Republican leaders rejoiced, claiming “now we can go with the full bill” — as they enacted one of the most restrictive and discriminatory voting provisions in the mod-

ern era.

Next, in the North Carolina case, *Rucho v. Common Cause* (2019), the federal high court decreed, for the first time, that political gerrymandering cases cannot be heard in federal tribunals. Roberts and his colleagues effectively embraced what the nation's leading election law scholar deemed “the most brazen and egregious” gerrymanders in American history. Justice Elena Kagan noted in dissent that North Carolina's districting decisions “debased and dishonored our democracy, turning upside down the core idea that government power derives from the people.” Tar Heel Republicans took her words as a compliment.

And now, in the South Carolina decision, the Supreme Court has dramatically expanded the *Rucho* loophole. Justice Samuel Alito, that Dobbs-writing, upside-down-flag flying friend of democracy, authored a predictable 6-3 partisan ruling making it decidedly more difficult to prove race discrimination cases. As UCLA's Rick Hasen put it: “Alito once again came up with a legal framework that makes it easier

for states to engage in redistricting to help White Republicans maximize their political power.” Justice Clarence Thomas would have gone even further — making racial gerrymandering permissible across the board.

After *Rucho*, of course, partisan gerrymandering is permitted while racial gerrymandering is theoretically banned. But, for Alito, “these doctrinal lines collide when race and partisan preference are highly correlated.” Therefore, when a legislature asserts partisan justification for its efforts, “courts must exercise extraordinary caution” in determining claims of race.

Such charges assert “offensive and demeaning conduct” and must, accordingly, be heavily presumed against — “reflecting due respect for the judgment of state legislators.” Alito therefore demanded what the dissenting justices deemed “new rules of evidence to burden plaintiffs in racial gerrymandering cases.” No surprise there.

This is familiar terrain in North Carolina. We know well the mantra — “we're not discriminating against voters because they're Black, we're discriminating against

them because they're Democrats.” Our hands are clean.

Does anyone in North Carolina actually think, with the Alito-led majority, that you can separate race and politics in the Tar Heel State? Really? If the (usually) all-White Republican caucuses of the N.C. General Assembly — who repeatedly and almost famously over the last dozen years have enacted statutes designed to limit the electoral, political and dignitary rights of African-Americans (or so the courts tell us) — establish voting regulations, are they racial or merely political?

Now, not only is political cheating okay, but we must create a safety zone for political conniving which “correlates highly with race.” This is said to be necessary lest our lawmakers be accused of “offensive and demeaning conduct”. Snowflake grievance written into law. Better to exclude Black voters from the polity than hurt the feelings of white lawmakers.

Oddly, the bolstered *Alexander* case presumptions create an incentive in favor

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'Tough-on-Crime' Doesn't Apply to People Like Donald Trump

Trump's conviction is not proof that the criminal justice system works. The joy and disbelief we may be feeling is because it was never intended to ensnare people like him.

By SONALI KOLHATKAR

Many Americans are celebrating the news of Donald Trump's conviction on 34 felony charges in a hush-money incident that took place ahead of the 2016 presidential election. Newspaper headlines screamed "TRUMP GUILTY ON ALL COUNTS" and media reports relied on superlatives such as "historic" and "unprecedented" to label the unanimous jury verdict. Given that Trump has been unusually adept at avoiding accountability for a staggering number of alleged crimes, the verdict felt like a long-overdue comeuppance.

It was even more shocking than the news of Derek Chauvin's conviction in the murder of George Floyd four years ago—but not by much. The United States criminal justice system was not designed to be applied equally across race and class. It was designed to protect men like Trump and Chauvin — powerful elites who bend laws to suit their purpose and the henchmen who serve them.

This is why the fact that Trump is now officially a "felon" feels so earth-shattering. For years people convicted of felonies were unable to vote in elections in many states. Felony disenfranchisement disproportionately impacts Black voters. According to Dyjuan Tatro, an alumnus of the Bard Prison Initiative, as of 2016 "Black Americans [were] disenfranchised for felony conviction histories at rates more than four times those of all other races combined." It is highly unlikely that the U.S. would tolerate the disproportionate (or even proportional) disenfranchisement of wealthy Whites.

Although many states are slowly overturning the loss of voting rights for people who have finished serving their sentences, in the vast majority of U.S. states people still cannot vote while incarcerated. Republicans tend to back

felony disenfranchisement, perhaps because of the assumption that those marginalized populations that our criminal justice system targets tend not to favor them.

Florida, the state where Trump officially resides, has been ground zero for the battle over felony disenfranchisement. When Floridians in 2018 voted to restore the voting rights of those convicted of felonies, the state's Republican governor, Ron DeSantis, effectively overturned the measure by forcing it to apply only to those who have paid off their debts. It was a clearly classist move, one that prison reform advocates dubbed "pay-to-vote." Given the preservation of felony disenfranchisement in Florida, some have speculated that Trump may not be able to vote for himself in November depending on the sentence he is handed. But given that he was convicted in New York, he may ironically be able to cast a ballot in Florida thanks to New York's ban against felony disenfranchisement laws.

Incredibly he can still run for president in spite of being labeled a "felon," and could even be elected from within prison walls. But if he was a low-income person of color merely looking to rent an apartment or apply for a job as a janitor or schoolteacher, he would have likely been barred from doing so freely.

States have generally enabled legalized discrimination against people convicted of felonies. Aside from the loss of voting rights, it is acceptable to engage in housing and employment discrimination against them. It's no wonder that the label "felon," has been considered by human rights advocates in recent years as deeply dehumanizing. The same is true for terms such as "inmate," "parolee," "offender," "prisoner," and "convict."

This is why Trump's conviction is so astonishing. And this is why abolitionists—those who want to dismantle the entire criminal justice system and replace it with a system based on equity and the sharing of collective resources as a means of promoting public safety — are watching with bated breath if the former president will actually be ensnared by a system intended to reward people like him and instead serve prison time. In general, we live in a system where "the rich get richer and the poor get prison." It is a rare exception for someone of elite status to be criminalized.

Each felony count against Trump carries a maximum sentence of four years which could be served concurrently. He could also be sentenced to house arrest or be put on probation. The minimum sentence is zero. The Associated Press is reporting that "Manhattan District Attorney Alvin Bragg declined to say whether prosecutors would seek prison time." In other words, in spite of Trump's clear guilt,

it is possible he could face no punishment whatsoever. His fate lies in the hands of Judge Juan Merchan, who will hold a sentencing hearing on July 11.

"Without law and order, you have a problem," said Trump in 2016 months before he won enough electoral college votes to be deemed president. "And we need strong, swift, and very fair law and order," he added. Such rhetoric remains common among Republicans (as well as centrist Democrats such as current president Joe Biden). It is the sort of language that marginalized people understand is aimed at them. But in rare instances when the system functions in the way it was never meant to—when it ensnares powerful elites or law enforcement—the "tough-on-crime" crowd shows its hand in myriad ways.

Those who are emotionally invested in the notion that we live in a society with equal justice under the law see it as proof that the system works, even if it can benefit from some reforms. Trump's verdict is apparently "a triumph for the rule of law." But, it has been eight years since the *Wall Street Journal* first reported that Trump arranged to pay off Stormy Daniels in exchange for her silence over their affair. Since then, he has remained free, even as low-income people of color are jailed before trial at the drop of a hat for far lesser alleged crimes.

Others, such as Republican supporters of the former president, see Trump's verdict as a "shameful" exception that proves the system is "corrupt and rigged"—against the wealthy and powerful, not the untold numbers of wrongfully convicted Black and Brown people.

Meanwhile, Trump has engaged in ethical breaches and criminal acts faster than the system can respond. Just weeks before his conviction, Trump was reported to have overtly demanded a \$1 billion bribe from oil and gas executives at a fundraiser. Barely did Senate Democrats have time to launch an investigation into the apparent quid-pro-quo when he did it again. His hubris stems from an implicit belief that the system was never designed to hold people like him accountable. He's right, it wasn't.

Erica Bryant at the Vera Institute of Justice pointed out that the U.S. would be "one of the safest nations in the world" if mass incarceration was an effective way to protect us from crime. "[W]hy do we have higher rates of crime than many countries that arrest and incarcerate far fewer people?" she asked. A Vera Institute poll found that a majority of U.S. voters prefer a "crime prevention" approach to safety rather than a system based on punishment, one that prioritizes fully funding social programs rather than traditional "tough-on-crime" policies like in-

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Can Biden Become a Pugilist for Populism?

Why it's time to take Adam Tooze's advice and "re-politicize the economy."

By KATRINA VANDEN HEUVEL

If David Lynch directed a political thriller—that's how surreal this election season must feel to Democratic strategists. A recent *New York Times* and Siena College survey showed President Biden somehow losing in five swing states to a man who was enduring one of the most personally embarrassing trials in American history. The number-one source of discontent? The economy, which more than half of voters rated as "poor." It is true that stubborn inflation continues to hike the price of essentials like gas and food, stoking consumer pessimism. And yet Biden's economic moves have also brought record job growth, sub-4% unemployment, and a boom in wages that's outpaced inflation.

So, how to explain this gap between perception and reality? To hear party stalwarts tell it, Biden's polling conundrum is simply a signal that Democrats have yet to—sing along if you know the words—get out their message. Should voters stop watching so much TikTok, and instead consult some 30-second ads and a stump speech or two that tells them the economy is great, actually, they'd come to appreciate this period of unique prosperity.

But what if the average American already understands their own economic circumstances? Let's imagine for a second that Americans' dissatisfaction has less to do with a failure to read the jobs report and more to do with loan delinquency spiking, household debt ballooning, and personal bankruptcies multiplying. For all the good news in the traditional economic indicators, we're also in the midst of the worst debt crisis since the Great Recession.

That's largely due to the predatory

practices of multinational banks, billionaire lenders, and other exploitative corporations. Perhaps voters' resentment is not misplaced but misplaced.

While the Biden campaign might be frustrated that the president's economic achievements aren't getting enough recognition, the average American is more concerned about a different sort of credit. Last year, Americans' credit card debt topped a record high of \$1 trillion. The default rate on that debt has more than doubled since 2021. The expiration of pandemic-era debt relief programs explains these trends only in part. Another cause was uncovered in a recent audit from the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau, a crucial advocate for workers saved in May by a surprisingly reasonable Supreme Court decision. The CFPB found that the largest credit card companies charge higher interest rates and higher annual fees than smaller institutions—to the tune of \$400 to \$500 a year of excessive payments from the average cardholder. That represents a windfall of billions for the corporations who least need it, courtesy of the customers who can least afford it.

The same spike in default rates has hit the auto industry. According to the Thompson Consumer Law Group, this curve is especially steep in the swing states of Georgia, Michigan, and North Carolina—which have three of the top 10 highest auto loan default rates in the country. The path of responsibility here, too, leads to Wall Street. Auto loans are becoming harder to pay partly because costs associated with car ownership have risen. That includes motor vehicle insurance, which has soared at a rate not seen since the days of stagflation almost 50 years ago. These record increases have brought others: This year, shares of Travelers and Allstate have traded at all-time highs. Meanwhile, subprime auto lenders have taken a page out of the Lehman Brothers playbook, making loans to buyers with zero credit and then loading those buyers with millions of dollars in illegal fees. Just the latest sign of the pervasive influence of the Rumpelstiltskin School of Economics.

And when hedge funds aren't saddling Americans with hopeless debt, they're inflating rents to leave even less money for ever-bigger interest payments. Private equity firms like Blackstone are increasingly buying up single-family homes, and institutional investors are projected to own 40% of the market by decade's end. They have a funny habit of raising rents while refusing to maintain their properties, and then evicting residents who complain. From the home to hospice care, no area of family life seems too sacred for private equity's profiteering.

Advocates and lawmakers have already offered Biden a portfolio of solutions to the debt debacle. The Poor People's Campaign, for example, has put together a five-part Jubilee Platform that calls for forgiving medical, housing, and utility debt, and waiving all interest payments. Less sweeping but still effective is Democratic Senator Jeff Merkley's bill that would eliminate corporate ownership of single-family homes. It remains mysteriously stuck in

committee. Biden might consider putting the full heft of the executive branch's power behind such proposals, and making debt relief one of his campaign's signature issues.

More than that, Biden could "pick fights," to quote Center for American Progress President Patrick Gaspard. Specifically, he could follow economic historian Adam Tooze's injunction to "re-politicize the economy." The recently announced June 27 debate would be a perfect forum for this strategy's debut. There, he could announce himself as the people's champion against Trumpian economics by exploitation. He could muster the same moxie with which he challenges hecklers to push-up contests, and tell the billionaires lately flocking to Trump's campaign that they should meet him outside in the parking lot. He could, in short, become a pugilist for populism.

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Why the GOP Deploys the 'Mudsill Theory' to Destroy Social Mobility in America

Today's Republicans are finally close to fulfilling Hammond's and Reagan's vision (while ironically repudiating America's first Republican president, Abraham Lincoln)...

By THOM HARTMANN

Odds are you've never heard of the "mudsill theory of labor," but you and everybody else in this country really should learn about it. It explains a whole spectrum of Republican behavior that otherwise seems baffling and self-defeating. For example:

— The past seven years have seen a near-fivefold increase in documented child labor violations by employers. States have responded to this alarming trend in two ways: Democratic-controlled states are putting more teeth into their laws and upping enforcement; Republican-controlled states are loosening their laws and cutting back on enforcement so children can drop out of school and go to work.

So far, three Blue states (and two Red ones) have made it harder for employers to exploit child labor, while eight Red states have made it easier for children to get trapped in a cycle of work that often ends their educational progress and consigns them to a lifetime of manual labor. Eight other Republican-controlled states are currently considering legislation to weaken child labor laws, while 13 mostly Democratic-controlled states are in the process of tightening their restrictions.

— Meanwhile, Republican-controlled states are waging war against universal quality public education for their children. The first shots were fired in efforts to strip schools of books and curricula referencing America's history of slavery, Jim Crow, Native American genocide, and brutality

against the queer community. Those were followed by often-violent threat-filled appearances at school board meetings by militia members and other White supremacists "calling out" teachers and school administrators for "woke indoctrination."

Most recently, multiple Red states moved to kneecap public schools by removing their funding and reallocating it to families who can afford private academies, religious schools, and home schooling. Arizona, Arkansas, Florida, Indiana, Iowa, North Carolina, Ohio, Oklahoma, Utah, and West Virginia have all instituted universal or near-universal school voucher programs in the past few years.

These programs, advocated by rightwing billionaires, are designed to ghettoize Red state public schools by subsidizing middle- and upper-class children's tuition while leaving poorer students — who can't afford the costs beyond the vouchers — stuck in defunded and thus failing public schools. Tennessee, Missouri, Louisiana, Nebraska, and Alabama have put into place or are also about to institute voucher programs that go nearly as far.

— Finally, Republican-controlled states go out of their way to make it difficult for workers to unionize or for existing unions to succeed and expand. The immediate result of this "right to work for less" mentality and activity is that social mobility — the ability of a person to move from being the working poor into the middle class, or from the middle class into the upper middle class — is largely frozen.

My family is probably typical of American social mobility. My grandfather was a poor immigrant from Norway who made furniture. My father worked at a tool and die shop, a good union job. I've done much better than my father, just like he did much better than his father. And my son, with a Master's degree and his own business, will do better than me.

Social mobility in America today, however, is lower than in any other developed country, a huge change since the 1950-1980 decades before the Reagan Revolution when we led the world in social mobility. Most American children today are locked into the social and economic class of their parents; the opportunity for advancement that union jobs used to provide is half of what it was when Ronald Reagan became president.

Maryland, Minnesota, Delaware, Vermont, New Jersey, New York, Connecticut, Massachusetts, Pennsylvania, Michigan, Montana, and Utah have the highest social and economic mobility in the United States; only Utah is a "right to work for less" state and all the rest welcome unions.

Oklahoma, South Carolina, Alabama, Florida, Kentucky, Mississippi, North Carolina, and Texas — all "right to work for less" states — are the states where workers stuck in poverty are most likely to be frozen in the social and economic class into which they were born.

If you notice a pattern, you're right: young people are far more likely to exceed their parent's economic accomplishments in Blue states than in Red states, and have been since Reagan killed the union movement and defunded public education in the 1980s.

So, what does all this have to do with mudsills, the first layer of wood put down on top of a home's concrete or stone foundation to support the rest of the house? And how and why did today's GOP adopt the mudsill theory, even though that word to describe it has gone out of fashion?

For that, we must step into the Wayback machine.

On March 4, 1858 slave plantation owner and South Carolina Senator James Henry Hammond rose to speak before his peers in the US Senate. At the time, his speech wasn't noted as exceptional, but over the following year it was published in the newspapers and caught the imagination of the plantation owners and "scientific racists" of the South; it was soon the talk of the nation.

Hammond asserted that for a society to function smoothly, it must have a "foundational" class of people who, like the way a mudsill stabilizes the house that rests atop it, bear the difficult manual labor from which almost all wealth is derived.

"In all social systems there must be a class to do the menial duties," Hammond proclaimed, "to perform the drudgery of life. That is, a class requiring but a low order of intellect and but little skill. Its requisites are vigor, docility, fidelity.

"Such a class you must have, or you would not have that other class which leads progress, civilization, and refinement. It constitutes the very mud-sill of society and of political government; and you might as well

attempt to build a house in the air, as to build either the one or the other, except on this mud-sill."

Hammond claimed that every society throughout history rested on a mudsill class; that even Jesus advocated this when he said, "The poor you will always have with you."

To stabilize society, he additionally argued, such a group of people must be locked rigidly into their mudsill class.

Hammond said the logical group of people to form the mudsill of American society were those people kidnapped and transported to this continent from Africa, thus justifying race-based chattel slavery:

"We use them for our purpose, and call them slaves. We found them slaves by the 'common consent of mankind,' which, according to Cicero, 'lex naturae est.' The highest proof of what is Nature's law."

He added that slavery existed in the North, too, but by another name:

"[Y]our whole hiring class of manual laborers and operatives, as you call them, are essentially slaves."

In this, Hammond was arguing for a modern reinvention of the system of serfdom that dominated Europe from the 3rd to the 19th centuries and still operates in some underdeveloped countries.

Hammond's mudsill theory was quickly embraced by the southern plantation owners as well as many northern industrialists and newspaper owners, although progressive politicians and spokesmen for labor were outraged, particularly at the idea that social mobility must be denied to the laboring class.

President Abraham Lincoln jumped into the debate with a speech on Sept. 30, 1859 in Milwaukee. At the time he was a lawyer in private practice and a fierce advocate for the right of social mobility for working class White people. Speaking of the industrialists who employed child labor, opposed education, and used brutal methods to keep workers in line, he said:

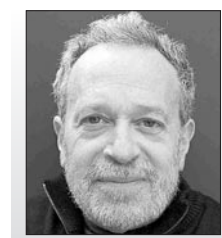
"They further assume that whoever is once a hired laborer, is fatally fixed in that condition for life; and thence again that his condition is as bad as, or worse than that of a slave. This is the 'mud-sill' theory."

Lincoln didn't find the argument persuasive; in fact, he was offended by it.

"Another class of reasoners," he said, speaking of himself, "hold that labor is prior to, and independent of, capital; that, in fact,

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ROBERT REICH



There are two types of American consumers — and increasingly, they live in different worlds, as hourly wages have not kept up with inflation.

A Tale of Two Consumers

The government measures all sorts of consumer behavior: consumer spending, consumer confidence, consumer sentiment. The business pages are filled with analyses about whether consumers are buying or holding back, flush or poor.

But there's not one American consumer. There are really two — and increasingly they live in different worlds.

Lower-income consumers are paid in hourly wages, which have stagnated for years when adjusted for inflation. The pay of lower-income consumers is now rising a bit faster than inflation, but for most of the last three years it had not — which meant their paychecks bought less and less.

Lower-income consumers have blown through their pandemic savings. They're now racking up credit card and other loan debt and are being squeezed by high interest rates on that debt.

The average American household now owes \$7,951 in credit card debt. That average includes a large number of higher-income consumers with little or no debt.

While there's no reliable data on the credit card debt of lower-income consumers, you can assume it's much higher than the average. Also note that the average interest rate on credit card debt is now 20.66%.

There has also been a surge in "buy now, pay later" programs that could be masking an even bigger lower-income consumer debt problem.

Not surprisingly, parts of the economy most dependent on purchases by lower-income consumers are under stress. Mass-market brands — such as the fast-food companies McDonald's, KFC and Starbucks — are reporting that consumers are pulling back on spending.

Ramon Laguarta, PepsiCo's CEO, says, "The lower-income consumer in the U.S. is stretched," adding that this type of customer "is strategizing a lot to make their budgets get to the end of the month." (Ironically, PepsiCo has so much monopoly power it's been able to raise prices, blame inflation, shaft consumers, and score record profits.)

Higher-income consumers are in a different world. Mostly college educated with jobs in the knowledge economy, they're the richest 10%. High interest rates don't affect them, because they tend to have comparatively little mortgage, car, student loan, or credit card debt.

These higher-income consumers also own more than half of all shares of stock owned by Americans. So, as corporations pump up the stock market with stock buybacks, these higher-income consumers are scoring healthy gains.

Which is why the parts of the economy that cater to higher-income consumers are soaring. Airlines and hospitality are doing well. Higher-income consumers are busily booking flights, hotel rooms, and tables at pricier restaurants. And they're buying big-ticket items.

Even Walmart is shifting to higher-in-

come consumers. Over the past three years, households earning over \$100,000 have provided the biggest gains in Walmart's market share. Its merchandise now includes AirPods, MacBook Air, and other items that "appeal to a high-income demographic," according to John David Rainey, Walmart's chief financial officer. "The more we move into that space ... the more we're going to retain this cohort."

Given that lower-income consumers constitute the majority of Americans, the stark differences between them and higher-income consumers help explain why voters continue to give President Biden poor marks on the economy.

This is "an economy of the haves and

have-nots," Michael Reid, an economist for RBC Capital Markets, told the *New York Times*' DealBook. "The haves just have so much more spending power."

Even as convicted felon Trump promises huge tax breaks to America's haves — including the biggest corporations and richest people in America — he's channeling the anger, anxiety and frustrations of the have-nots.

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/>

THIS MODERN WORLD

by TOM TOMORROW

TRUMP FELONY CONVICTION TALKING POINTS FROM THE G.O.P.*
*AN INCOMPLETE LIST

THE JUDGE WAS CORRUPT AND THE TRIAL WAS RIGGED
AMERICANS WILL LOSE FAITH IN THE RULE OF LAW!
AT LEAST, IF WE HAVE ANYTHING TO SAY ABOUT IT!

IF THEY CAN DO IT TO TRUMP, THEY CAN DO IT TO ANYONE
WHO AMONG US HAS NOT FALSIFIED BUSINESS RECORDS IN AN ATTEMPT TO INFLUENCE THE OUTCOME OF AN ELECTION?
YOU MIGHT AS WELL CRIMINALIZE BREATHING!

WHAT ABOUT UNRELATED THINGS
I HAVE HEARD THAT OTHER CRIMES ARE FREQUENTLY COMMITTED IN THE CITY OF NEW YORK!
WHY ISN'T THE D.A. INVESTIGATING THAT?

NO LAWS WERE BROKEN
IF ARRANGING A COMPLICATED HUSH MONEY SCHEME THROUGH A FIXER IN ORDER TO WIN THE PRESIDENCY IS WRONG--
--I DON'T WANT TO BE RIGHT!

JOE BIDEN ORCHESTRATED EVERYTHING
HE IS SENILE AND INCOMPETENT--
--AND ALSO THE SECRET MASTERMIND MANIPULATING THE LEVERS OF POWER TO PERSECUTE DONALD TRUMP!

THIS WILL SET A DANGEROUS PRECEDENT
WHAT WILL HAPPEN TO THIS COUNTRY IF IT BECOMES NORMAL TO DEMAND YOUR POLITICAL RIVALS GET LOCKED UP?
I SHUDDER TO EVEN THINK OF IT!

THIS IS GOOD, ACTUALLY
THOSE JURORS HAVE JUST GUARANTEED THAT DONALD TRUMP WILL BE THE NEXT PRESIDENT!
NOTHING PROVIDES A POLITICAL BOOST LIKE 34 FELONY CONVICTIONS!

REVENGE IS A DISH BEST SERVED AT ANY TEMPERATURE
THERE WILL BE RIOTS! AND BLOOD-SHED! OUR ENEMIES WILL SUFFER A TERRIBLE RETRIBUTION!
BECAUSE OF OUR GREAT RESPECT FOR THE RULE OF LAW!
ER, YES, THAT.

TOM TOMORROW © 2024 4-06-03 ...

JESSE JACKSON



The facts in the criminal indictments Trump faces are not really in question. The only question is whether he will be or can be held accountable for them.

There Are No Doubts About Donald Trump

The felony conviction of Donald Trump for paying off Stormy Daniels in the last days of his 2016 campaign to deep-six the fact that he slept with her has set off a firestorm. The Republican leadership, for the most part, has rallied to Trump's side. Pollsters probe to see the effects on voters. What gets lost in the furor is what is beyond dispute.

In this case, as in the other criminal indictments that Trump faces, the facts are not really in question. There's no doubt that Trump paid off a porn star to hide his tryst with her. There's no doubt that he took classified documents to Mar-a-Lago and, remarkably, sought to evade the efforts of the National Archives and the FBI to recover them. There's no doubt that he summoned to Washington the mob that sacked the U.S. Capitol and then sat and watched the destruction in an utter dere-

liction of duty, all as part of a multi-layered effort to overturn the results of an election that his own Justice Department admitted was fair. There's no doubt that he tried to influence election officials in Georgia to come up with votes to change the results there. There's no doubt that he assaulted E. Jean Carroll in a department store dressing room. Anyone paying attention knows what Trump did. The only question is how these acts violate the law and whether he will be or can be held accountable for them.

Much gets lost in the resulting furor. First, how defending Trump has deformed the Republican Party. The party that prides itself on morality now defends someone convicted of paying off a porn star and violating a woman against her will. The party that brays about law and order defends a person who stood idly by as brave men and women in blue were assaulted and bloodied in defense of the Capitol, and joins Trump in defending the mob, calling them patriots. The party that preaches balanced budgets defends the man who as president added more to the deficit in four years than any of his predecessors. The party of free markets and free trade salutes a man who as president slapped tariffs on the Chinese, paid billions in subsidies to big agriculture, increased subsidies and benefits to big oil, and essentially abandoned any effort to curb monopoly power and pricing.

Finally, what also gets lost in the furor about Trump's past criminal behavior are the dangers posed by his plans for the future. Put aside the bluster about prosecuting Joe Biden and other opponents. His central promise – reinforced by the billionaires that are lining up to finance his campaign – is to sustain his tax cuts that are

scheduled to expire. This would add literally trillions to the deficit over the next decade while deepening the obscene inequality that is so poisonous to our economy and our democracy.

His second promise – reinforced by direct pledges to Big Oil executives – is to implement the big oil wish list, while terminating all things related to the climate and renewable energy in the federal government. The U.S. is already at peak oil production. Climate change is already costing billions of dollars and more and more lives. Four years of inaction while climate change accelerates will pose a clear and inescapable threat to our security.

His third big promise – repeated in virtually every stump speech – is to launch the largest deportation offensive in the nation's history, mobilizing the National Guard to deport 10 million undocumented immigrants from this country. The upheaval this will trigger as workers are seized from their jobs, fathers and mothers are torn from their children and children are shipped to countries that they no longer remember is hard to imagine. The economic effects, however, are clear: ripping workers from their jobs will add to our labor shortage, force employers to raise wages or reduce production, and increase prices dramatically.

Add to that Trump's pledge to slap 10% tariffs on all imports – up to 60% on products made in China – and this is a recipe for explosive inflation, forcing the Federal Reserve to raise interest rates dramatically. Bigger deficits, higher prices on imported products (and on domestic products that compete with them) and increased shortage of workers – if you are concerned about the inflation we suffered coming out

of the pandemic, it's about to get far worse if Trump is elected.

If he returns to power, Trump will nominate more of the right-wing zealots who are deforming our courts. The right-wing assault on women's right to choose will worsen. The gutting of the Voter Rights Act and rollback of civil rights will accelerate. The systematic undermining of democracy – opening the spigots to big secret money, giving free rein to political gerrymandering, turning a blind eye to voter suppression measures – will continue.

These are just the promises that Trump repeats in his stump speeches. His beltway acolytes are detailing far more aggressive agendas. Trump hasn't signed on to all of those, but he has promised to issue an executive order that will enable him to turn senior civil service jobs into political appointees – 20,000 or more – that will turn the federal government into a spoils system that can only add to corruption, fraud and abuse of power.

No leader is without flaws. All of us have our weaknesses. Trump's past offenses aren't in dispute; they are simply a matter of fact. It is his plans for the future that are even more alarming. If you are a billionaire, you might throw in with Trump, assuming you can pocket the tax breaks and your wealth will insulate you from the chaos. For the rest of us, Trump's plans for the future are far more destructive than his offenses in the past.

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GRASSROOTS/Hank Kalet

No Room at the Inn

Immigration has historically been a flashpoint in American politics. As far back as the founding, the federal government and the states have sought to restrict entry to people and groups the government or public considers "undesirable."

The arguments favoring these laws have always been the same and disingenuous. They raise the specter of invasion and infiltration, of a threat to a vaguely defined "American way of life," and usually target those who are different and – the argument goes – dangerous.

The Alien and Sedition Acts of the late 18th Century were justified on national security grounds. Anti-Chinese restrictions on both economic and race-purity grounds, and the national quota system of the 1920s on a broadly defined concept of race, as well. These laws, in part, were about maintaining the United States as a largely White, Christian nation – African Americans post-slavery occupied a separate class and were not a part of the calculus.

Over the decades, some of these groups – Eastern European Christians, Italians, and to a lesser extent Jews – were redefined as White, assimilated into the broader culture. Others – some Asians, Jews – remained different in the minds of the public, but were assigned "model minority" status. These shifts occurred against a backdrop of racial change. Black Americans demanded and mostly won equal status, and the new class of "ethnic Whites"

were convinced that these hard-won gains came at their expense, which led to a political retrenchment that froze African American progress in its place and put other dark-skinned groups in the cross hairs.

Periodic national security scares ramped up the anger, and we are now at another moment of inflection. President Joe Biden's executive order in early June, which restores Trump-era restrictions, is only the latest salvo in a bipartisan dance on the issue. No president has been immune from the political pressures. Barack Obama, for instance, is one of the few presidents since Ronald Reagan to ease life for immigrants in the United States through his DACA program, but he also severely ramped up border security and enforcement.

According to the Texas Tribune the new rules "will largely suspend entry of noncitizens into the country," with exceptions for "permanent U.S. residents and unaccompanied children."

The limitations are to be discontinued two weeks after there has been an average of less than 1,500 migrant encounters between official ports of entry for seven consecutive days. The restrictions would resume when there has been an average of 2,500 encounters or more for seven consecutive days.

Advocates in Texas, the Tribune reports, say the Biden order "resembles failed policies of past administrations and will put many migrants at risk of violence as they wait on the Mexican side of the southern border to secure an asylum appointment with U.S. officials following already-treacherous journeys north."

"You're really seeing incredible dismantling and restrictions imposed on accessing asylum," said Karla Marisol Vargas, a senior lawyer for the Beyond Borders Program at the Texas Civil Rights Project. "In practice, what this means

is trying to even ask for asylum or ask for any of these protections is going to be well-near impossible."

In issuing the order, Biden is acceding to political pressure and fear stoked by Republicans and some Democrats. The president's immigration record has been inconsistent and haphazard, a reactive mess of shifts and reconsiderations. In the end, despite his rhetoric in 2020, he is following the playbook set out by his predecessor on the issue.

Donald Trump opened his 2016 presidential campaign with an attack on Mexican immigrants and he spent his four years in office and the four years since attacking immigration, using overtly racist language and arguments and ginning up his nativist base. The Democrats have failed to push back in any meaningful way, and instead have been fighting this issue on Trump's turf.

Biden's executive order is more of the same in this regard. The motivations appear political – an effort to win over swing voters – and perhaps this will work. Or, it will offer another reason for more progressive Democrats to stay home – a disastrous outcome given that doing so will return an unhinged and unremorseful Trump to the White House, where he has promised to dismantle what is left of our democratic safeguards.

In the meantime, the poorest and most vulnerable people on the planet – those fleeing climate catastrophe, war, and gang violence – are being told by the United States, but his supposed "nation of immigrants," not only that there is no room at the inn, but that we really don't care.

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Kolhatkar...

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creased policing and mass incarceration.

Those of us who understand that Trump's conviction is neither welcome proof that a "tough-on-crime" approach works, nor evidence that it's rigged against elites are nonetheless celebrating the headlines. It is akin to watching an overzealous

and greedy hunter step into one of his own traps. The ultimate goal is to end the hunt even as it feels incredibly satisfying to see Trump cut down to size.

Trump's emergence in the U.S. political system and his (nearly) successful avoidance of accountability for so long is clear evidence that our democracy and its criminal justice system are rigged against us in favor of wealthy elites. The fact that there is

still no guarantee that he will be punished or even disqualified from the presidency in a nation that zealously criminalizes marginalized communities ought to be all the proof we need that our criminal justice system does not deserve our faith.

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Sandronsky...

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tions for freelancers without a fight. The economics of this are straightforward, as hedge funds and billionaire-owned media shred news media infrastructure. Employers can and do tend to pay freelancers less than company employees, who are often unionized and covered by a collective bargaining agreement. Further, freelancers are responsible to pay the employer and employee share of Social Security. Freelancers also lack access to employer-provided health-

care insurance.

One area where improvements to the recent Freelance Isn't Free bills that have passed is to lower the thresholds in terms of how much work a freelancer has to do before provisions of the Act take effect. Another priority is establishing unemployment insurance payments for nontraditional workers, from home cleaners to freelancers—a measure that was briefly adopted in 2020 at the height of the COVID pandemic, but which has since been rescinded. Ultimately, Thum contends, security for freelancers requires establishing national standards for freelancers' working conditions.

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Remember
THE PROGRESSIVE POPULIST
In your will

Nursing Homes: A Conservative's Dilemma

Nursing homes present an increasingly profit-driven industry, one that has attracted private equity. From conservatives' vantage, the industry is hindered only by a meddling Uncle Sam from thriving.

And yet, conservatives, especially those with family in nursing homes, acknowledge the grim reality: too-few staff. The paucity of staff seems a fact-of-economic-life, much like the inflationary cycle. We want to trust that something will happen — maybe a recession? — and nursing homes will have a surfeit of applicants

The reality is not yet horrific. No Pulitzer-worthy exposes, at least not yet. The decades-old scandals that spawned Pulitzer prizes have passed. Libraries have archived the tomes — “Tender Loving Greed: How the Incredibly Lucrative Nursing Home ‘industry’ is Exploiting America’s Old People and Defrauding Us All” (by Mary Adelaide Mendelson), “Unloving Care: The Nursing Home Tragedy” (by Bruce C. Vladeck), and “Too Old, Too Sick, Too Bad: Nursing Homes in America” (by Frank Moss). Today the problem is no longer the inept, ill-trained, abusive staff, but not enough staff. Yet the correlation of staff with “quality of care” is inescapable. The lower the staff-patient ratio, the worse the care.

Now, to improve quality, Uncle Sam has upped the staffing standards. Since Medicare and Uncle Medicaid pay a hefty chunk of the nursing home tab, Uncle Sam felt a paternalistic interest in seeing that the government's patients

were treated well. The new standards were crafted to improve care, but the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services estimated that if all facilities embraced those new standards (3.48 hours of care daily per patient), 3,200 homes would have to hire almost 13,000 more registered nurses.

Whenever conservatives contemplate a solution, those solutions jar with conservative principles.

The simplest solution: raise wages. The homes need to raise wages and benefits to lure staff. Coincidentally, and understandably, the fewer staff on board, the more onerous the work-load — which leads to even fewer staff.

Yet conservatives, intent on protecting businesses from onerous federal mandates, are torn. On the one hand, conservatives understand facilities' ire. The trade group, the American Health Care Association, argues that many homes are barely able to hire staff as is ... asking them to increase staff risks financial suicide. In a for-profit world, moreover, capital is fungible; and investors can move their capital easily. When a nursing home closes, ultimately those who suffer are the current and future residents. In Uncle Sam's zeal to improve care, he might reduce it. On the other hand, conservatives understand families' anguish. Perhaps pragmatism rules: mediocre care is better than no care.

Immigrants are another plausible solution, but one that puts conservatives in an existential bind. Many immigrants — documented and not — in this country fill jobs that native-born Americans eschew. Forget the populist “deport-them-all” rhetoric: a week without immigrant workers would plunge the economy into chaos. And the chaos would be especially dramatic in health care. Nursing homes already depend on international nurses. Perhaps they should expand their outreach, their incentives? That of course might entail relaxing immigration regulations.

So the conservatives who care about their parents' care (and their own care-in-the-future) face a dilemma. To stay true to their xenophobic worldview, they want to stymie immigration; to help facilities, they should increase the non-native population. Again, a subtext is clear: maybe less-than-

optimum care might be better than inviting onto our shores more foreigners.

The “tech” solution that has replaced bank tellers with ATMs, clerks with self-scan machines, and overall administrative staff with apps will not work for nursing homes. We might want AI to solve the problem, but it won't. (In fact, the assisted living industry blames “bad” algorithms for staffing shortages (*Washington Post*).) It wasn't the accountants that made them stint on staff: it was the algorithm. The usual cost-effective strategy calls for substituting less skilled for more skilled staff, but nursing homes have been doing that. Staff need to help residents bathe, dress, eat, ambulate; staff need to distribute medications. The geniuses behind computers cannot craft technological solutions.

Back to the obvious solution: higher pay. If facilities paid better wages, with sick leave, health insurance, vacations, and pensions, the job fairs would fill. Again, conservatives confront a dilemma. Higher pay is key, yet higher pay will depend on upping Medicare and Medicaid reimbursement — which translates to higher taxes. And “higher taxes” remains taboo for conservatives. That group has been pleading, incessantly, for lower, not higher, taxes. Benefits too remain a conservatives' challenge. If the nation guaranteed affordable health insurance, the facilities might get away without offering health insurance. But any kind of government-financed health insurance is another taboo. Ditto for housing subsidies. Lower-income workers struggle to find housing that they can afford; government subsidies would help — another conservative taboo.

Finally, maybe caring for the elderly and infirm should not be a “for-profit” industry ripe for equity investors. Maybe we need more homes that are “mission-driven,” not profit-driven. This admission that the corporate world cannot solve all social problems marks the greatest challenge to conservatives.

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Don't Take Any Lip from Bulldogs

By SAM URETSKY

“Outside of a dog, a book is man's best friend. Inside of a dog it's too dark to read.” Attributed to Groucho Marx, but possibly written by S.J. Perelman

Kristi Noem, the governor of South Dakota and aspiring vice presidential candidate if Donald Trump wins the Republican nomination for president, wrote a book noting proudly that she had shot Cricket, a 14-month-old wire-haired pointer who was too excitable and untrainable. It set off a large number of editorials. Humans and dogs have had a symbiotic relationship for about 15,000 years, though some evidence suggests the relationship may date back as far as 36,000 years. Our species has been breeding dogs for specific purposes almost that long. After all, Carthage had elephants and the Romans opposed them with dogs. They were big dogs, but still not that big — and the Romans won.

It has been suggested (by Google's Gemini) that “While there aren't definitive statistics crowning a single champion, strong evidence suggests dogs are the most selectively bred animal species. Here's why:

“Length of Selective Breeding: The his-

tory of dog breeding goes way back. Estimates suggest humans have been selectively breeding dogs for at least 9,000 years, possibly even longer [newrootsinstitute.org].

“Diversity of Breeds: This long history has resulted in an incredible range of breeds. The World Canine Organization recognizes over 360 distinct dog breeds, each with unique characteristics bred for specific purposes.”

In 2022, the Labrador Retriever, which had been the most popular purebred dog breed in the United States for 31 years, lost its title to the French Bulldog. The Lab was #2 both years. According to the American Kennel Club “The bright, affectionate Frenchie is a charmer. Dogs of few words, Frenchies don't bark much, but their alertness makes them excellent watchdogs. They happily adapt to life with singles, couples, or families, and do not require a lot of outdoor exercise” The French Bulldog has also been recommended as a companion for the elderly. They are modest in size, no more than 28 pounds, and do not require extensive grooming.

The Frenchie's natural charm and good looks should be enough to earn the breed a measure of popularity, but it seems increased dramatically by the number of celebrities who have chosen the French Bulldog as a companion. Probably the best known is Lady Gaga, who has three French Bulls, Koji, Asia and Gustav. The pages of Instagram are filled with pictures of the trio,

from the *New York Post* and *Rolling Stone*.

Other celebs who have been seen with French Bulldogs are Reese Witherspoon, Megan Thee Stallion, Hugh Jackman who plays the Wolverine in the Marvel X-Men movies, and even Dwayne “The Rock” Johnson. David Beckham, Snoop Dogg, and Leonardo DiCaprio have posted pictures of their dogs on social media sites.

But as delightful as the French Bull and related breeds like the pug, the British Bulldog, the Boston Terrier, Shih Tzu, Pekingese, Lhasa Apso and several others may be unwelcome in much of western Europe and possibly in the state of New Hampshire. On March 24, Fox television reported, “First-of-its-kind bill could limit bulldog, pug breeding” “New Hampshire could become the first state in the country to limit the breeding of certain flat-faced dogs, as well as any other animals that are bred with extreme physical deformities.”

The Bulldog was probably the first of the brachycephalic, canines. They were bred for Bull Baiting — where a tethered bull was attacked by a group of dogs. The short muzzles, undershot jaws or protruding lower jaw, and punched-in noses helped the dogs hold a vice-like grip on the bulls. Also, the nose was far back on the dog's face, which helped the dog hold the bull while still being able to breathe.” This led breeders to selectively breed for the pushed in face trait, which has given the majority of brachycephalic dogs respiratory problems.

The British Bulldogs appear to be in chronic pain because of their selective breeding.

There have been records of breeds that were “ruined” by breeders focused on appearance rather than character and desirable traits. Brachycephalic dogs are prone to a collection of health problems:

- Brachycephalic Obstructive Airway Syndrome (BOAS) :trouble breathing
- Eye Problems: Their protruding eyes are more susceptible to injuries, dryness, and ulcers.
- C-section Delivery: The large heads of brachycephalic puppies can make natural birth difficult, often requiring a C-section.

There are other problems with the skin and digestion — but the dogs are cute, and celebrities love them. As Americans, we love dogs, and Gov Noem didn't get many fans for shooting her dog. In fact, Cricket may really have been incorrigible. There was a time when the Saint Bernard, the Gentle Giant, suffered from behavioral problems. The breeders were trying to get a show dog appearance and neglected to breed for behavior. In this case the proposal to ban breeding of Bulls, French Bulls, and Pugs, is intended to protect the dog, not humans. The term of breeding is called “torture breeding.” The dogs should be protected from the breeders, not the other way around.

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Hartmann...

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capital is the fruit of labor, and could never have existed if labor had not first existed — that labor can exist without capital, but that capital could never have existed without labor. Hence they hold that labor is the superior — greatly the superior — of capital. ...”

“[T]he opponents of the ‘mud-sill’ theory insist that there is not, of necessity, any such thing as the free hired laborer being fixed to that condition for life. There is demonstration for saying this. Many independent men, in this assembly, doubtless a few years ago were hired laborers.”

When president, Lincoln followed up with his goal of promoting social mobility; he signed legislation creating over 70 Land Grant colleges, including my mother's Michigan State University, where tuition was free or very affordable until the Reagan Revolution.

These days, Republicans generally take Hammond's point of view, while today's Democrats embrace Lincoln's perspective.

— This is why today's “conservative” advocates of the muddsill theory argue that “lower class” children shouldn't be “over-educated” but, instead, sent into the workplace as early as practical. Thus, the Red state movement to gut child labor laws.

— Quality education paid for by the state, they assert, should be kept out of reach of the muddsill class and only available to genetically “superior” students who are the children of the upper classes. Thus, the movement for universal school vouchers.

— And G-d forbid muddsill laborers should ever have a union represent them: that sort of empowerment may cause them to enter the middle class and then rise up in rebellion against their superiors. Thus, the multi-billion-dollar union-busting industry embraced by Republican politicians across the nation.

This didn't happen by accident or in a vacuum.

Russell Kirk was the 20th century's philosopher king of the muddsill theory, although he never used the phrase. As I laid out in detail in “The Hidden History of

American Oligarchy,” Kirk's 1951 book, “The Conservative Mind” argues forcefully, like Hammond did, that society must have “classes and orders” to ensure stability.

Kirk argued in the 1950s that if the American middle class — then under half of Americans — ever grew too large and well paid, then such access to “wealth” would produce a social disaster. His followers warned that under such circumstances minorities would forget their “place” in society, women would demand equality with men, and young people would no longer respect their elders.

The dire result, Kirk warned, would be social chaos, moral degeneracy, revolution, and the eventual collapse of American society.

While at first Kirk was mostly only quoted by cranks like Barry Goldwater and William F. Buckley Jr., when the 1960s hit and the Civil Rights movement was roiling America's cities, women were demanding access to the workplace and equal pay, and young men were burning draft cards, Republican elders and influencers concluded

Kirk was a prophet.

Something had to be done.

Ronald Reagan came into office with the mandate to save American society from collapse. To that end, he set out to reestablish a muddsill class in America by ending free college and gutting public schools, destroying the union movement, and weakening enforcement of child labor laws.

Thus, today's Republicans — from Sam Alito and Clarence Thomas to Mike Johnson, Sarah Huckabee Sanders, and Donald Trump — are finally close to fulfilling Hammond's and Reagan's vision of an America built on muddsill labor (while ironically repudiating America's first Republican president, Abraham Lincoln).

And now, as the late Paul Harvey would say, you know the rest of the story.

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WAYNE O'LEARY

Britannia Hunkers Down

Americans are not the only ones facing the agonies of the ballot box this summer. The British, too, will shortly be trooping to the polls to choose the lesser of the evils in an unappetizing contest between center-left and center-right defenders of the status quo.

As a previous column suggested (6/1/24 *TPP*), dissatisfaction with the results of what is called democratic capitalism has spread worldwide; it's now reached Great Britain, where the Conservative Party government of Prime Minister Rishi Sunak has called for national elections on July 4 in hopes that a slight uptick in economic conditions will save its collective skin.

Sunak, the latest in a line of forgettable Conservative U.K. leaders extending back 14 years (Liz Truss, Boris Johnson, Theresa May, David Cameron), will try to squeeze a little more grinding austerity and Brexit isolationism out of the British system. Son of Indian immigrants, Sunak, a multi-millionaire alumnus of Goldman Sachs connected by marriage to high-tech money (his wife's family owns Infosys), is perfect for the times. He was picked by the U.K.'s Conservatives in 2022 to replace the incompetent and unpopular Liz Truss and rescue the party from her extremist Thatcherite tax-cutting notions.

Sunak's response has been to position the Conservatives squarely on the squishy center-right, with a program best described as "Don't just do something, stand there." His uninspiring initiatives include an anti-smoking campaign, a reform of England's end-of-school exam system, and the money-saving termination of a proposed high-speed rail network connecting London to northern cities.

This should make Conservative incumbents easy pickings for a surging Labour Party; the problem: Labour's leadership and programs are not much better. Like the Tories, Labour is cleaving to the center. In a perceptive *New Yorker* article ("Time's Up," 4/1/24) on the upcoming election, Sam Knight, a London-based journalist, reports British centrists are relieved the parties are not much different from one another. The system, in short, has little to fear either way.

The Labour leader and presumptive next prime minister (the party leads in the polls), ironically named after legendary Labour Party founder Keir Hardie, is one Keir Starmer, whom Knight characterizes as "an unimaginative former prosecutor with a rigidly centrist program." That's an understatement. To date, Starmer has made no firm commitments on reversing Brexit (Britain's catastrophic withdrawal from the EU in 2016), or reinvesting in a depleted and diminished welfare state. Few know where he stands on anything, according to opinion surveys.

What Labour apparently intends under Starmer is a resumption of Tony Blair's discredited pro-corporate, third-way approach to government, emphasizing economic growth over income redistribution or enhanced public services, and encapsulated under the phrase "modern supply-side economics." Blair and his cronies are, in fact, being welcomed back into the Labour fold with open arms despite Sir Tony's disastrous pursuit of neoliberal globalization and financialization (shared by Bill Clinton in this country), which ended in crash, recession and rising inequality. Rejecting left-leaning solutions, Starmer summarized his vision of an updated return of Blairism early on with the bland proclamation, "We are the party of the center-ground."

Most noticeable about Labour's rush to the center under Starmer is what *The Economist* calls its "striking courtship of business." Party leaders have met with literally hundreds of top executives from Britain's largest firms in what has been termed the "smoked salmon offensive," a series of elaborate breakfasts in which Starmer and his aides have promised consultations and cooperation with CEOs as part of a "partnership" with business celebrating profit as the answer to the U.K.'s economic woes.

An obvious reprise of Tony Blair's cuddly "prawn [shrimp] cocktail offensive" with London's financial CEOs in 1997, the get-togethers formed a cordial backdrop for Labour's proposed grand bargain with corporate Britain — relaxed regulation and taxation in exchange for job creation and labor-market adjustments.

Incentives calculated to win business support include the following: a five-year freeze of the low corporate income-tax rate (25%), retention of an investment-tax allowance previously enacted by the Conservatives; no new taxes on high-end salaries; limited interference with corporate development plans; a cancellation of previously considered nationalizations; and, most worrisome to the left, an opening to partial privatization of the socialized National

Health Service (NHS) through outsourcing of services and "private provision" — something like what's happening with the American Medicare system.

In return for these offerings, big business would only have to accede to a few limited labor reforms: some added worker training, enhanced sick pay and dismissal rights, and less overt resistance to union-organizing activity. But, significantly, there would be no collective bargaining across the economy (a former Labour demand) and no closed union shops as in the pre-Thatcherite 1970s. Little wonder that a recent poll of British executives rated Labour better for business than the Conservatives by 46% to 32%.

It's all a far cry from what was proposed under Keir Starmer's immediate predecessor as Labour leader, Jeremy Corbyn, who revived the moribund party in 2017, then lost to Boris Johnson two years later after being undermined by Labour's now-triumphant centrists. Corbyn, the British Bernie Sanders, ran as an unapologetic social democrat attempting to break with the Blair legacy and return Labour to its pre-Thatcher roots.

His populist program included renationalizing the U.K.'s troubled railways and its top utilities, establishing a government-owned pharmaceutical firm, raising both the corporate tax rate and income taxes on the upper 5% of earners, enacting tuition-free college, and mandating large British companies to allocate 10% of their shares and one-third of their board seats to their employees.

It was heady stuff, recalling the halcyon days of 1945-50, when Labour created Britain's welfare state, but the Corbynites didn't reckon on modern identity politics. This took the form of charges of antisemitism unjustly leveled at Jeremy Corbyn for his career-long support of the Palestinian cause and his criticism of Israeli domestic policies.

Corbyn was victimized by the same argument lately used against pro-Palestinian demonstrators in the U.S., that lack of absolute, uncritical support of Israel is tantamount to bigoted antisemitism. The charge, which ultimately drove Corbyn from the Labour Party and marginalized his parliamentary supporters, was levelled at him by conservative party elements, Jewish and non-Jewish alike, opposed to his economically interventionist program. A good political purge is one way to derail a threatening reform movement.

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

Make the Justice Department Truly Independent

By JOEL D. JOSEPH

Former President Donald J. Trump claims that the Justice Department is controlled by President Joe Biden and is out to get him. Trump also states that he plans to use the Justice Department as a weapon against his enemies. To counteract these two propositions, we must ensure that the Justice Department is separate and independent of the President of the United States.

The office of the Attorney General was established by the Judiciary Act of 1789 as a part-time job for one individual. George Washington chose the first attorney general, Edmund Randolph, one of the lesser-known Founding Fathers. Randolph was selected as one of 11 delegates to represent Virginia at the Continental Congress in 1779, and served as a delegate through 1782. During this period he also remained in private law practice, handling numerous legal issues for George Washington, among others.

The Constitution did not establish the office of attorney general, the Justice Department or the FBI. In 1789 we were a developing nation with a small population without the need for a large legal bureaucracy.

The Office of the Attorney General and

the Justice Department have evolved over the last 245 years. At first, the "Justice Department" had one part-time employee (Mr. Randolph). Now it has more than 100,000 employees, including the Federal Bureau of Investigation.

Trump himself proved that the Justice Department is controlled by the White House. President Trump's firing of James Comey, and his desire to fire Special Counsel Robert Mueller, demonstrates that we need an independently elected attorney general to run the Justice Department. An independent Justice Department would not be subject to presidential influence or control.

Trump's control of the Justice Department was not unique. John F. Kennedy appointed his relatively inexperienced younger brother Robert to be his attorney general. President Kennedy joked that he thought his 35 year old brother should get some experience as attorney general before he started to practice law.

President Barack Obama appointed his close friend, Eric Holder to be his attorney general. And Richard Nixon appointed John Mitchell, his close associate, to be the first attorney general to go to jail for his crimes while in office. After his tenure as U.S. Attorney General, Mitchell served as chairman of Nixon's 1972 presidential campaign. Due to multiple crimes he committed in the Watergate affair, Mitchell was sentenced in 1977 to two-and-a-half to eight years in prison for his role in the Watergate break-in and cover-up. Mitchell served 19 months in Federal Prison Camp, Montgomery (in Maxwell Air Force Base) in Montgomery, Al-

abama, before being released.

Experience of the States

As we elect attorneys general in nearly every state, we should elect the U.S. Attorney General. The office of U.S. Attorney General has been a political, not legal, position for far too long.

An elected attorney general would be independent of the White House — he or she could not be fired by the President. The elected attorney general would be responsible to the people who elected him or her. As the FBI is part of the Justice Department, the elected attorney general would appoint the head of the Bureau.

Of the 50 state attorneys general, 43 are elected. In five states the attorney general is appointed by the governor (Alaska, Hawaii, New Hampshire, New Jersey and Wyoming). In Maine, the attorney general is selected by secret ballot of the legislature and in Tennessee, the state Supreme Court appoints the attorney general.

Real Independence

Trump's first Attorney General, Jeff Sessions, who recused himself from the Russian inquiry, nonetheless assisted President Trump in his removal of James Comey as head of the FBI. Neither the Attorney General, nor President Trump, had the right to fire the FBI director. Eighty-nine years ago, the US Supreme Court ruled against Franklin Roosevelt's firing of an FTC

Commissioner (*Humphrey's Executor v. United States*, 295 U.S. 602, 1935).

Director Comey, like Commissioner William Humphrey, was appointed for a designated term and could only be fired for cause. The cause cited by the president was clearly subterfuge — the real reason was to stop Comey's investigation of the Trump campaign's connection with Russia. James Comey could have filed suit to challenge his termination, but he apparently decided not to challenge President Trump's actions, and to write his side of the story in his book, "A Higher Loyalty."

Let the People Decide

Let the people decide who should enforce our laws. An independent elected Attorney General would no longer be the president's puppet, crony or brother. An independent Attorney General would appoint all of the US attorneys without any political assistance from the president or senators. An independent Justice Department and an independent FBI would investigate alleged crimes committed by occupants of the White House without fear of being fired and would improve the public's level of confidence in the fairness of the legal system.

Joel D. Joseph is author of "Black Mondays: Worst Decisions of the Supreme Court" and "Injustice Department: An Elected Attorney General and an Independent Department of Justice." Joseph was counsel to the Special Prosecutor Project in the 1970s that sought special prosecutors to investigate the Nixon and Agnew cases.

Defuse Tensions With China

By JASON SIBERT

The arms control treaties that protected the world from an uncontrollable arms race have gone by the wayside, a casualty of the current Cold War.

The Cold War between the United States and the Russia/China orbit could erupt into a hot war, maybe over Taiwan. Of course, the China/Russia orbit is doing everything it can to undermine the world order established after World War II, and it supports authoritarian and totalitarian governments, a danger to the concept of international law, diplomacy, and peace.

Is there a way to temper this Cold War and move forward? Can we take tiny steps in the right direction? Writer Michael D. Swaine gives us some direction in his story at the Quincy Institute for Responsible Statecraft, "Stabilizing the Growing Taiwan Crisis: New Messaging and Understandings are Urgently Needed."

The US-China relationship appears to have stabilized since the November 2023 meeting between US President Joe Biden and China's President Xi Jinping in San Francisco, said Swaine. The reality, however, is that the features and trends pushing both countries toward a confrontation over Taiwan persist, fueling a dangerous, interactive dynamic that could quickly overcome any diplomatic thaw between the world's biggest powers. These underlying forces — increased levels of domestic threat inflation in both the US

and China, the worst-casing of the other side's motives and intentions, and the resulting erosion in the confidence of the original understanding over Taiwan reached in the 1970s threaten to push Beijing and Washington into a crisis.

To defuse the tensions, the US and China must reaffirm their long-standing policy on Taiwan while also undertaking specific actions to stabilize their relationship. Swaine gives us a series of steps for stabilization. First, the Joe Biden Administration should explicitly reject extreme rhetoric towards China and the contention that an independent Taiwan is strategically crucial to overall Asian security. Second, the administration can further promote stability in US-China interactions with Taiwan by affirming

Continued on next page

Trump's Attempt at Planeticide Was Worse Than Hush Money Sex Pay-Off

By JUAN COLE

ANN ARBOR – It is great good news, of course, that Donald Trump was finally held accountable for his hush money payoff to porn star Stormy Daniels to keep her quiet about their hook-up so as to win the 2016 presidential election. Had she gone public in October, 2016 in the wake of the release of the Hollywood Access tape about grabbing genitalia, he may well have lost. That he is now a felon invalidates his entire presidency. It does not erase all the harm he did, in reshaping the Supreme Court as a tool of White nationalist Christian patriarchy, and it won't bring back the hundreds of thousands of people who died of COVID because of his wrongheaded public health policies. But it is some form of minor justice.

The conviction, however, underlines that American law and politics is still primarily about property rather than about the value of human life. Both Richard M. Nixon and Donald J. Trump went down over Lockean crimes. Nixon ordered a third rate burglary (twice!). Trump arranged for a pay-off to a porn star. Both committed their crimes in furtherance of their political careers. Nixon had the Democratic National Committee headquarters in the Watergate Building in Washington, D.C. burgled. Trump had a catch and kill scheme implemented for Stormy Daniels' memoirs. Ironically, likely neither needed to commit those crimes to win.

It is a little frustrating, however, that our priorities as a society are still so parochial and 20th-century in character,

and that we are not more outraged at the truly massive damage Trump did to our planet. He should have been tried and convicted of attempted planeticide.

1. Trump took the United States out of the 2015 Paris Climate Accord in November, 2020, trashing all the pledges the country had made to reduce its massive carbon footprint. The US, with 4.2% of the world's population, produces nearly 14% of the world's carbon dioxide, putting out twice as much CO2 as the 27 nations of the European Union. By leaving the Paris agreement, Trump encouraged other countries to slack off on their climate commitments, endangering the whole world.

2. Trump scrapped President Barack Obama's Clean Power Plan, his attempt to regulate CO2 emissions, and Trump's rules would have put an extra half a billion tons of carbon dioxide into the atmosphere over a decade. When we're trying to cut CO2 to zero by 2050, that was a step in completely the wrong direction.

3. Trump also lowered auto emissions standards, helping the big car companies avoid going electric longer and adding another 450 million tons of CO2. Now that China has more advanced electric car technology than the US and can make EVs more cheaply for the world market, it becomes clear that Trump may have knee-capped the US pre-eminence in the global auto-manufacturing sector, for good. Since it is increasingly clear that auto emissions cause Alzheimers, Trump also damaged our brains to be more like his own.

4. Trump actively promoted the production of the very dangerous atmospheric heating agent, methane, a greenhouse gas that prevents the heat caused by the sun's rays from radiating back out into space at the old eighteenth-century rate. He removed government regulations requiring Big Oil to limit methane emissions from drilling.

5. Trump put a 30% tariff on solar panels, vastly slow-

ing the expansion of solar power in the US and costing the country some 62,000 jobs in the solar industry. Since solar replaces coal and fossil gas for electricity generation, this is another way Trump promoted carbon dioxide emissions.

6. Trump's corrupt Interior Department subsidized coal and fossil gas, but raised the rents for wind turbines on federal lands. Trump, fueled by an irrational hatred of wind turbines, such that he falsely asserts that they cause cancer, was a constant worry to the industry all the time he was in office.

7. The sum total of all Trump's anti-climate regulations would have added 1.8 billion tons of carbon dioxide to the atmosphere had they not largely been reversed by the subsequent Biden administration. This one man tried to engineer an extra tonnage of CO2 emissions equal to the annual output of all of Russia.

I have suggested that we could get a better sense of how disgusting carbon dioxide and methane emissions are if we called them farts instead of using a fancy word like "emissions." How many tons of CO2 did America fart out last year?

Trump, who spent much of his trial farting and dozing, tried to have us fart out an extra 1.8 billion tons of CO2.

Some small percentage of all the damage human-made climate change will do to the United States in the coming years will have been caused by one man. And if he can get into office again he will try to doom the planet.

Now that is an indictment.

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Landslide Elects Mexico's First Woman President

By KENT PATERSON

Once again, an earthquake has rippled through Mexico. In 2024, tremors of a political nature moved the nation June 2 and resulted in the first woman elected as president in Mexico's 214-year history.

The victor is Claudia Sheinbaum, a onetime student activist, former Mexico City governor, member of the Nobel Prize-winning 2007 Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, and a dedicated co-crafter and adherent of outgoing President Andres Manuel López Obrador's Fourth Transformation political program of social, political and economic reform, or the 4T.

Like López Obrador, president-elect Sheinbaum, who will assume office Oct. 1, vows to continue with the 4T's landmark social programs, including its universal senior pensions. Moreover, she pledges to extend the 4T to a "second level," while governing in the interests of all Mexicans, not just the privileged few.

In post-election day remarks, Sheinbaum celebrated her victory as a collective triumph for Mexican women, who've steadily gained positions of political power

during the last two decades.

"Women have arrived at the highest distinction that our people could give us — the presidency of Mexico," Sheinbaum said. "I say this in the plural because as I said, I don't come alone — we all do."

Mario Delgado, head of Sheinbaum's Morena party, lauded his candidate's win as not only a gender milestone for Mexico, but for North America as well. Now it's up to Canada and the United States to catch up with Mexico and some day elect female heads of state.

Sheinbaum's landslide victory of 33 million plus votes, or nearly 60% of the total ballots cast, is the most votes ever received by a presidential candidate in Mexico, even surpassing López Obrador's own win with 30 million votes in 2018.

The 4T's June tidal wave did not stop with the presidency. With more than 20,000 political posts up for grabs across the nation, Mexico's biggest election ever, the preliminary election tallies now have Sheinbaum's three-party electoral coalition consisting of the Morena, Labor and Mexican Green parties on the cusp of possessing sufficient Congressional votes to pass constitutional reforms.

The Sheinbaum landslide likewise translated into the victory of coalition gubernatorial candidates in 24 out of 32 Mexican states, giving the future president greater political clout to expand the 4T's healthcare and other programs.

Despite the overwhelming wins for

Morena and its allies, opposition candidates are expected to file legal challenges in the coming days.

Though enjoying a renewed mandate for continued change, Sheinbaum confronts many balancing acts in consolidating the 4T and the emerging new social pact between the Mexican State and people, underpinned by what López Obrador and Sheinbaum call Mexican Humanism. On the economic front, she must manage financing the popular social programs with addressing budget deficit concerns.

In foreign relations, Sheinbaum vows to continue a "respectful" and friendly relationship with the United States, while maintaining differences with Washington over diplomatic ties and trade with Cuba, Nicaragua and Venezuela. A return of Donald Trump to the White House could spell trouble for Mexico.

Rated one of the most vulnerable countries in the world to climate change, Mexico's mounting ecological crises, evidenced by last year's hurricane that devastated Acapulco as well as growing water shortages across the nation, will test Sheinbaum's environmental credentials.

While Sheinbaum was the clearly the front-runner for months in most serious Mexican polls, U.S. and Mexican media outlets largely missed what was behind her resounding victory.

Foreign and national media coverage of the June 2 election focused on ongoing criminal violence, the murders of dozens of

mostly local and state candidates in several regions of Mexico, the possible but unproven infiltration of organized crime in the political races, and perceived or real shortcomings of the 4T. Logically, if such matters were decisive factors for the majority of voters, the opposition would have won or at least made a better showing.

But for masses of Mexicans, López Obrador's administration (and by extension Sheinbaum's candidacy) is the first time any government truly spoke their language and paid attention to their needs, delivering tangible benefits in the form of senior pensions, student grants, rural support programs, and more.

Ciudad Juárez author and book seller Antonio Chávez summed up the popular sentiment: "I'm 70 years old and I've never gotten a nickel from the government. I get 6,000 pesos every month (senior pension) ... it helps me pay rent."

At the end of the day, the center-right opposition never provided a coherent alternative to the 4T. "The results are for all to see," editorialized left-leaning daily *La Jornada*. "The political representatives of the neo-liberal right and oligarchy, their intellectuals and pundits and their 'civil' front organizations are now living a profound and irreparable defeat."

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Sibert...

Continued from previous page

and clarifying the One-China policy through a series of statements. Third, the US opposes any Chinese effort to coerce Taiwan or do unification through force. It would accept any resolution of the cross-strait issue reached without coercion and endorsed by the people on both sides of the Taiwan Strait. Fourth, the US does not intend to infringe on Chinese sovereignty and territorial integrity, interfere in China's internal affairs, or pursue a policy of "two Chinas" or "one China, one Taiwan."

Swaine looks to solve a problem through dialog or diplomacy. Of course, it's a cheaper and less lethal option than war. However, Swaine also admits that a perfect storm is upon us. The highly nationalist stakes involved in the Taiwan situation ensure a strong level of domestic elite and public pressure on the PRC government to look tough on this issue.

Swaine makes other suggestions in his story, recommending a strategy of deterrence and reassurance. For this story, we'll

hit on the most important ones. First, the US must state that a stable, constructive relationship between China and the US is in the interest of the Chinese and American peoples and contributes to peace in Asia and the world. Second, the US does not desire to weaken or overturn China's government and does not support Taiwanese independence. Third, despite the great strides in cross-strait relations made since the normalization of diplomatic relations between Washington and Beijing, the US believes that conditions have not yet been created for a peaceful resolution of the Taiwan issue by the two sides of the Taiwan Strait.

Fourth, the US thinks that all parties should display patience, eschew any unilateral changes to the status quo in the Taiwan Strait, and avoid actions that would compromise prospects for peaceful resolution. In this regard, the US attaches great importance to China's declaration that its fundamental policy is to strive for peaceful unification.

Fifth, the US will support Taiwan in the event of an attack, but Taiwan's defense is

primarily up to the Taiwanese. This would remove the US threat of military force and stress peace as an option. Sixth, the US should state it does not intend to infringe on Chinese sovereignty and territorial integrity, interfere in China's internal affairs, or pursue a policy of "two Chinas" or "one China, one Taiwan." However, the US will continue to maintain strong cultural, commercial, and other unofficial relations with

the people in Taiwan.

Let's hope our leaders will follow Swaine's suggestions for engagement, competition, and diplomacy because a war with China would be disastrous for the US, China, Taiwan, and the whole world.

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

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Nichol...

Continued from page 11

of heavily racialized political parties. If a party looks and behaves like a racialized entity, it will be easier to claim, or to defend, its districting plans as merely partisan, not racial. Maybe that's the theory.

Gene Nichol is Boyd Tinsley Distinguished Professor of Law at the University of North Carolina School of Law and in 2015 started the North Carolina Poverty Research Fund after the UNC Board of Governors closed the state-funded Poverty Center for publishing articles critical of the governor and General Assembly.

A Grave Moment in History

By JAMIE STIEHM

The Jan. 6 mob attack on the Capitol was the worst day of my life. I was inside the besieged building, and there was no telling how it would end.

January 6 was the best day of former President Donald Trump's life.

The man enjoyed every moment of the storming violence done in his name. He incited the throng of 30,000, directing them to the Capitol while Congress was captive inside. They marauded and vandalized the precious temple of democracy for three hours.

None of that happened by chance. The first-ever assault on our peaceful transfer of power was carefully planned. Trump could not accept that he lost the 2020 election and tried to steal it with a raging, ragtag band from all corners of the country.

Now comes another momentous turning point in history. A Manhattan jury found it's not the first time he tried to rob the peo-

ple's verdict on the presidency.

Trump was convicted of interfering with the 2016 election, too, cheating the American people with a sordid, secret pay-off scheme. Hillary Clinton won the popular vote, and if not for Trump's ploy, she might be president today.

That is tragedy of Shakespearean proportions.

Trump refuses to show remorse as a convicted felon in a fair-and-square court of law.

Pushing 78, he's gotten away with treating people poorly all his life, in politics, business and social transactions. Women are known to be victims of his violations. His "social media" descended to vulgar lows never voiced by a president.

Trump never thought his naked malice and avarice would catch up to him.

The jury verdict, with its knell of "guilty ... guilty ... guilty" of 34 felonies, landed like sweet spring anew on the sidewalks here. "A blessing," said a passerby. "Glad we shared this auspicious moment," a friend said in Dupont Circle.

What a vindication.

It's up to us — the press and public — to keep "criminal felon" in front of us. Better yet, "convicted criminal." Trump deserves nothing less. So far, the media fails to grasp the gravity of the verdict. Republicans in

Congress circle wagons 'round his wrath.

Standing in his red, white and blue outfit after the verdict, Trump raved like a madman. He blurted out his best vocabulary words. Take away "witch hunt," "rigged," "unfair" and "disgrace," and he has nothing left to say.

Ask Trump the first words of the Constitution. He has no idea they are "We the People." He could not be more ignorant of the whole meaning of America, the world's oldest democracy. Because of one individual, it is more fragile than ever in living memory — where have you gone, Ike?

Our town squares, including the internet, are full of public "discoarse."

Trump's true gift is bringing out the worst in others. Have you noted a decline in our public manners since he came to power? He started offending heads of state on his very first day in office. Morals and manners are for suckers and losers, in his book. Not that he reads books.

Acting angry, bigoted and lawless, Trump gives mass permission to his base to run wild with base instincts in human nature.

President Joe Biden should seize the day and go on offense against a convicted felon who threatens more blood and revenge.

American presidents often show opti-

mism and cheer in their campaigns. Exuberant Teddy Roosevelt was a Republican, Democrat Jack Kennedy a bright visionary. Trump breaks that rule. His rules are, there are no rules.

His tearing rants and relentless self-pity are actually un-American. There is only one other president who won with mean-spirited attacks and nefarious plots, and that is Richard M. Nixon. He had a long enemies list, but in resigning, he told us *hating others ends in destroying yourself*.

A word about the Supreme Court: One member flies MAGA battle flags on his houses. Very nice.

New York state Judge Juan Merchan put the high court to shame by presiding over an orderly, prompt and fair trial.

The Supreme Court should have ruled on the Jan. 6 subverting-democracy case long ere now. The fateful Bush v. Gore decision was handed down in a night. Months of silence is justice delayed and denied — for all of us.

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.

Mrs. Alito's Performance Art, Again

By BARRY FRIEDMAN

We've seen this act before.

Samuel and Mary-Ann Alito — the Mark and Patricia McCloskey of the Supreme Court (Ginni and Clarence Thomas are more the Ferdinand and Imelda Marcos types) — have been choreographing their manufactured outrage, as best I can tell, since Jan. 11, 2016. Long before Mrs. Alito (the associate justice's term for her, not mine), who of late has been unfurling flags wherever she can find a pole, made her debut performance for the American people on the Senate floor.

Her act was both unconscionable and wildly successful.

On that day, more than 18 years ago, she was sitting behind her husband during his confirmation hearing for the Supreme Court. If you remember, Samuel Alito had been put forth by then-President George W. Bush after Bush withdrew the name of Harriet Miers. Alito's nomination was rocky. The ACLU had come out against him; 50 environmental and conservation groups came out against him. Even the American Library Association — and how awful do you have to be to irk librarians? — came out against him, for being against federal anti-discrimination laws, against protections for sexual harassment, against the Family and Medical Leave Act, to name just a few.

But that's not what caused Mrs. Alito's famous, cynical, and choreographed melt-down that day — nor was it the comments from the late Sen. Ted Kennedy, who found Alito's positions indefensibly cruel.

"If you are concerned and you want a justice that's going to stand for the working men and women in this country — it's not going to be Judge Alito," Kennedy said. "If you are concerned about women's privacy rights, about the opportunity for women to gain fair employment in America — it's not Judge Alito. If you care about the disabled ... the Disability Act that we have passed ... if you are looking for someone that is going to be a friend of the disabled — it's not going to be Judge Alito. And finally, if you are looking for someone that is going to be willing to stand up to the executive branch of government ... it's not going to be Judge Alito."

Strong, partisan words, but nothing that would make you break down in tears.

(Kennedy was also, as it turned out, correct.)

Alito was asked, "Are you a closet bigot?"

But it wasn't Kennedy who asked.

South Carolina Republican Lindsey Graham, a supporter of Alito's, posed it.

"No," answered Alito.

It was as if someone then yelled, "Action!"

Mrs. Alito stood up, tried to collect herself, and bolted from the Senate chamber, sobbing. As she was leaving, Graham answered his own question. "No, sir, you're not."

Here's what the *New York Post* wrote at the time. "As she sat right behind her husband, [Mrs. Alito] Bomgardner's lips trembled and she wiped away tears. Her sister-in-law Rosemary — herself a top lawyer — put a reassuring arm around her, but Bomgardner hastily fled the room."

"We have to find a better way to do this," said one senator in the aftermath.

That was Delaware Sen. Joe Biden.

Sen. John Cornyn of Texas, a member of the Judiciary Committee at the time, was shocked — shocked — by the outside influences in politics.

"It's not just people in the room," he said, "it's the outside groups paying a lot of money, spending a lot of time to smear a good man."

Even then-House Speaker Newt Gingrich (R-Ga.) got into the act, telling Fox News Channel that the opposition to Alito reminded him of the late Sen. Joseph McCarthy's bid to create guilt and the question posed to McCarthy by the chief counsel for the United States Army: "Have you no shame?"

(Newt Gingrich, who was having an affair on his cancer-stricken soon-to-be-second ex-wife, and no one to talk about shame, got the quote wrong. Joseph Welch actually asked McCarthy, "Have you no decency?" Which Gingrich also didn't have.) Later that day, Mrs. Alito came back to the hearing, holding her husband's hand, all smiles. She had the look of someone who had decided to forgive us.

And we sometimes ask ourselves why the electorate is cynical.

Which brings us to the latest controversies: her flying an upside-down American flag outside their home in Washington, and then an "Appeal to Heaven" flag she flew at their New Jersey beach home.

"She has made many sacrifices to accommodate my service on the Supreme Court," said Justice Alito, "including the insult of having to endure numerous, loud, obscene and personally insulting protests in front of our home that continue to this day and now threaten to escalate."

Luka Donic doesn't whine this much.

It's good to remember that the two biggest obstacles on the Supreme Court these days are brought to us not by a con-

quicted felon, the man leading in most presidential polls, but by the Bushes: George H.W. Bush, who offered up Clarence Thomas to replace Thurgood Marshall, and George W. Bush, who gave us, as mentioned, Alito, who was in line to replace retiring Justice Sandra Day O'Connor.

At the time of Alito's confirmation, Sen. Harry Reid, the Senate Minority Leader, said, "President Bush was not obligated to nominate a clone of Justice O'Connor, but this president has no mandate to move the Supreme Court and the American law in a radical rightward direction. That is precisely what replacing Justice O'Connor with Judge Alito will accomplish."

We should have listened to Ted Kennedy and Harry Reid when we had the chance.

One last thing: At one point, Alito said, "My wife and I own our Virginia home jointly. She, therefore, has the legal right to use the property as she sees fit, and there were no additional steps that I could have taken to have the flag taken down more promptly."

Imagine how wonderful it would be if women could get the same legal protection and keep Alito away from their wombs.

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.

Anyone Give A Rat's Ass about Antarctica?

By FRANK LINGO

For decades now we've read reports about Antarctica's ice sheets melting.

What's the big deal? It's way down there at the bottom of the world, home mostly to penguins. How could this possibly affect my leisurely life in middle America?

According to a Feb. 24 article in *The Guardian*, scientists say the last 3 years have had the lowest level of sea ice since 1979 when records began to be kept. That's not even counting the land ice. Yes, Antarctica is land, unlike the northern pole, the Arctic Ocean, which is all water and also melting. Antarctica is about 5.5 million square miles — bigger than the contiguous 48 United

States. It's covered by ice that is over a mile thick on average. The ice on and around Antarctica comprises about 61% of the Earth's fresh water.

Climatologists' theories vary wildly about how high our planet's sea level will rise if and when Antarctica melts. A common computer model projects it will be at least 10 feet higher than it is now, but it could be much more. Even a 10 foot rise is plenty to drown many coastal cities all over the world. Beach hotels will become fish bowls. New York City's Wall Street will go under, but the stock market goes down sometimes anyway. The main thing is Kansas will be safe, so no big whoop.

Well, if it's such a terrible scary problem, maybe we could try some radical approaches. We could stop burning coal to power our homes and gasoline to run our cars. That pollution warms the world and poisons the air as well. Instead, we could use the limitless energy of that big yellow

ball of fire in the sky. How about letting the wind turn some turbines and blow our troubles away? Ocean waves could provide power, if we're bold enough to use them. And all these alternatives will soon benefit from the coming tremendous improvements in battery technology to store the energy for when it's dark or not breezy.

On March 27, *The Economist*, not exactly an ecological outlet, called Antarctica the Earth's largest refrigerator, whose collapsing ice shelves, made more fragile from below by warming waters and jostled by turbulent seas, have hurried things along. Ya think maybe this problem is bad for business?

Simple and sustainable solutions are available if we, as a species, care to connect them. Let's take a hint from a great old Beatles song — "Here Comes The Sun." And also an old Bob Dylan song is apt — "The answer, my friend, is blowin' in the wind. The answer is blowin' in the wind."

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



No One Is Above the Law' – Really Mr. Biden?

After the jury came in with its verdict that Donald Trump was guilty of a scheme and coverup to illegally influence the 2016 election, the Biden campaign issued a statement saying that the judgment demonstrated that “no one is above the law,” not even a former President. The overwhelming truth is that the majority of criminal laws are not a deterrent to the serious violations of law committed by sitting presidents of the United States.

This includes the incumbent Joe Biden, especially with regard to foreign and military decisions.

At least five long-standing federal laws explicitly condition the shipment of weapons to foreign countries. It is legally impermissible for the U.S. government to provide weapons to countries that violate human rights or use these weapons offensively. Day

after day, Joe Biden has become a co-belligerent with Netanyahu's genocidal war crimes and mass slaughter of innocent children, women and men. He has violated all five of these federal laws. (See my Feb. 16, 2024 column: “Biden & Blinken – Rule of Illegal Power Over Rule of Law”).

As the military, diplomatic and political enabler of the Israeli government's siege, with the unconditional shipment of weapons of mass destruction, along with civilian bombardment and starvation of defenseless Palestinians in Gaza, Biden is violating the UN Charter and other treaties that past Administrations have signed and that have been ratified by the U.S. Senate. Biden and other presidents act like they are above these and other laws.

One president after another has spent monies not appropriated by Congress, has defied subpoenas issued by Congress, launched wars undeclared by Congress, sent deadly weapons to nations that obstruct the delivery of U.S. humanitarian aid, and that do not protect civilian populations under foreign military rule. All violations of federal law.

Donald Trump in 2019 brazenly stated

ical debate with their customer, for example – many employees get let go despite never having expressed a political opinion on the job. In most states, they can't sue.

Going after a person over their politics is unfair. But it's a much bigger problem than a violation of common decency. Because threatening a person's livelihood over their opinions has a chilling effect on the expression of other workers as well, allowing such thuggish behavior stifles the speech necessary for a vibrant political system and is thus profoundly undemocratic.

“Most important,” a 2022 *New York Times* editorial opined, “freedom of speech is the bedrock of democratic self-government. If people feel free to express their views in their communities, the democratic process can respond to and resolve competing ideas. Ideas that go unchallenged by opposing views risk becoming weak and brittle rather than being strengthened by tough scrutiny.” Most Americans, however, do not feel they live in a land of the free. Only a third of voters said they felt free to express their political views, according to a contemporaneous poll.

Nowhere is speech circumscribed more than at work – unless you're a government employee, where you're protected by the First Amendment, or you live in one of the handful of states that protect private-sector workers who express political opinions. Private employers are authoritarian dictatorships where it's best to keep your views to yourself. Your boss' harsh governance should end at the end of your work shift.

Yet it does not.

Employment discrimination in response to political expression is not limited to victims with fringe political views, like the pizza shop

the lawlessness in one sentence: “I have an Article II, where I have the right to do whatever I want as President.” Trump got away with defying over 125 Congressional subpoenas, and with violating the criminal statute known as the Hatch Act by using the White House and other federal property to promote his re-election campaign. Then of course there was the January 6 insurrection, and the likely delay of his trial until after the election, if at all.

Joe Biden shuffles around unappropriated monies, continues to allow the violation of a 1992 federal law requiring the Pentagon to provide Congress with an audited military budget, and is constantly sending unlawful armed incursions into other weaker countries with impunity.

To make matters easier for presidents, there is the Justice Department's Office of Legal Counsel memo, from decades ago, that asserts there can be no criminal prosecution initiated against a sitting president.

As attorney Bruce Fein, who worked in the Office of Legal Counsel, has said repeatedly, this baseless opinion has no legal force and should be rescinded. (See, “Letter to Attorney General Merrick Garland,” May 31, 2024).

The courts have shielded presidents from accountability for perpetuated crimes committed either by the White House or by the president's administration. For ex-

and hot dog joint workers who got fired after online sleuths discovered they had attended a far-right White nationalist rally in Charlottesville in 2017, or the white-collar workers canned for their presence at the Jan. 6 Capitol riot. To be clear, there was no evidence that the doxxed-and-dumped employees in these situations had expressed their views while on the job. They should not have been let go.

Citizens with vanilla affiliations within the duopoly are targeted, too.

An Alabama woman was famously fired from her job at an insulation company in 2004 for being a Democrat, specifically for the Kerry-Edwards bumper sticker on her car, which she parked in the employee parking lot. (Her boss, a Bush supporter, had passed out GOP flyers to his workers.) She had no right to sue.

In 2022 a woman who cofounded a nonprofit organization that provides financial stipends for congressional interns was fired by her own board after it learned she was a conservative Republican. She filed a long-shot federal lawsuit, which is pending.

More recently, antiwar activists who oppose Israel's war against Gaza have found themselves the victims of retaliation. People have been fired for personal social media posts supporting the Palestinians. Pro-Palestine college students have been doxxed, suspended, expelled and blacklisted by prospective employers. Google fired over 50 employees for staging a protest against the company's contracts with Israeli tech firms; the company said they lost their jobs for causing a disruption rather than their opinions. A baker's dozen federal judges went so far as to declare that they wouldn't hire *any* student

ample, citizens have no “standing to sue,” to challenge in court a variety of Executive Branch abuses says the Supreme Court, not even members of Congress. As for presidential violations of the Constitution and federal laws by launching illegal wars or armed attacks abroad, the courts dismiss such cases, saying they raise “political questions” outside the jurisdiction of the courts.

Being allowed to get away with crimes is what constitutional law specialist Bruce Fein calls “a way of life at the White House.” Obstruction of justice or deliberate non-enforcement of seriously violated laws marks every presidency. Trump just boasted about what he inherited and intensified it.

Again, presidents operate in a system of considerable sovereign immunity, and law that either can't or has not breached this shielded impunity. They really are above the criminal laws. Only the very difficult political penalty of impeachment by the House of Representatives and conviction by two-thirds of the Senate can only evict them from office, after which they are free to enjoy life, and receive huge lecture fees and large book advances.

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

who graduated from Columbia University – my alma mater and ground zero for a wave of campus encampment protests – regardless of their views, or lack thereof, about the Israel-Hamas War.

Corporations routinely discriminate based on politics. A 2019 study in the *Journal of Applied Psychology* found employers are less likely to hire a job applicant when they become aware that they favor different parties. And workers are well aware that they face political discrimination. A 2020 Cato Institute/YouGov poll found that 32% of workers were “personally are worried about missing out on career opportunities or losing their job if their political opinions became known.” Only 32%?

We have a choice. We can build a politically permissive society where a wide range of views and opinions may be freely expressed (with exceptions for defamation or calling for specific violence) without fear of being discriminated against, understanding that we will frequently take offense at what is being said. Or we can continue to push politics underground, keeping our views so secret that some “shy” voters won't even admit their party affiliation to pollsters. We may feel more comfortable in a seemingly politics-free zone but, as the *Times* editorial argued above, censorship and self-censorship will encourage the spreading of outlandish, stupid and demonstrably wrong ideas that occasionally become the law of the land.

Ted Rall, political cartoonist, columnist and graphic novelist, co-hosts the left-vs-right DMZ America podcast with fellow cartoonist Scott Stantis. Write him c/o his website (rall.com), Twitter @tedrall

TED RALL

Age. Race. Sexual Orientation. Should Political Expression Be a Protected Class, Too?

Your boss can't fire you because of the color of your skin. He can't get rid of you because he doesn't like your religion. Federal law protects you against employment discrimination based on your sex, race, pregnancy status, sexual orientation, gender identity, national origin, disability, genetic information or (if you are over 40) age.

Should he be able to deprive you of your ability to pay your rent because you're a Democrat? Or a Republican? Of course not – yet he can.

It's time to add another protected class to Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964: political expression.

Every year, especially during election years, American employers fire, demote and/or retaliate against loyal workers because they disagree with their constitutionally guaranteed right to hold a political opinion. While a company may well have a reasonable interest in keeping politics out of the workplace – the owner of a restaurant might not want a waiter to engage in a polit-

Affordable Child Care Helped My Family Out Of Deep Poverty. Can We Save It?

We need to fix our fraying safety net so other families get the same chance.

By PAMELA M. COVINGTON

On a good day in December 1983, I cooked Vienna sausages and grits on a borrowed kerosene heater that – in my poverty-stricken state – felt like another mouth to feed. Every day I had to buy fuel for it.

I'd vowed to lift myself and two boys out of destitution as soon as I could, either by getting a job or returning to school. But a severe lack of resources, primarily child care for my toddler, made it nearly impossible to envision either.

Our financial situation was far from secure compared to what it had been the year before. My partner and I both worked, and we enjoyed a comfortable life in a lovely neighborhood. However, his struggles with PTSD from his time in Vietnam led to unpredictable violent outbursts, prompting me to flee with the children for our safety.

With no concrete plan, we ended up briefly homeless, relying on a moving truck and strangers for shelter before ending up in a tiny, unequipped unit in a dilapidated cement tenement.

Sylvia, a friend at church, taught me about Pell Grants, Supplement Education Opportunity Grants (SEOG), and other tools to help me afford an education. Thanks to her, I decided to attend community college.

Sylvia also had the answer to my biggest looming concern – the availability of child care for my toddler. She said the cost could be covered by a government-subsidized program. And she was right.

Without that support, I couldn't have taken advantage of any of the other aid. Knowing my two-year-old would be properly looked after enabled me to not only attend

my classes, but focus on my studies with peace of mind.

During my second year of college, I completed two unpaid internships: one in a television newsroom, and another at a city lifestyle magazine. That experience helped me get a piece published in a major newspaper, which led to opportunities with local publications. My income increased and stabilized when I became a newspaper staff writer.

Affordable child care was the key. To this day, nearly 40 years later, I'm still grateful for having received that support and the opportunities for professional growth that came my way. Affordable child care is bound to be the answer to others' success, as well.

Accessible child care offers long-term benefits for children, families, and society, including improved educational outcomes, greater workforce participation, and reduced dependence on the social safety net. But unfortunately, the cost of child care has skyrocketed since I had young kids. Some families pay up to 30% of their income towards child care, making it unaffordable almost everywhere in the United States.

I urge members of Congress to fund, sup-

port, and expand child care initiatives. The pandemic-era stabilization funds that saved up to 10 million child care slots ended last fall, threatening the child care sector as well as the families, children, and businesses that depend on it. And we're facing another cliff this fall.

This spring, Community Community Change Action organized the third Annual National Day Without Child Care, which gave a glimpse of what would happen if providers were all forced to close their doors for good. As a parent and grandparent, I stand in solidarity with them.

If we don't make a change, all of us will pay the price.

Pamela Covington is a writer and journalist living in Atlanta. This op-ed was adapted from a longer version published by ChangeWire.org and distributed for syndication by OtherWords.org.

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In Small Towns, Bookstores are Thriving

By JOHN CLAYTON

“I love to spend my day in a bookstore,” said Amy Sweet. She lives in Red Lodge, Montana, and was explaining why she and her husband Brian opened Beartooth Books in her town of 2,300.

“It was part of the life we wanted—to live in a small town, walk to work, and enjoy outdoor adventures and wonderful people.”

She’s not alone. For many of the same reasons, bookstores have been opening in small Western towns, said Heather Duncan, executive director of the Mountains & Plains Independent Booksellers Association.

Since 2020, more than 100 bookstores have opened in her region, which extends across 14 states ranging from Texas to Montana and from Nebraska to Nevada.

One reason for the phenomenon, said Amy Sweet, is that “people are proud of their town, our local history. It’s all a package, and the bookstore gets to be part of that.”

The success of such a low-tech enterprise might surprise people. “Lots of first-time customers come in and say, ‘I thought bookstores were dying,’” Brian Sweet said.

But he believes that a bookstore is a

perfect complement to today’s culture. “A bookstore is quiet, peaceful, and yet mentally stimulating,” he said. “It’s not our devices and incessant TV news.”

Bookstores opening in towns, as opposed to cities, is a trend throughout the West, Duncan said. Of her 60 member stores in Colorado, just 17 are in large cities. The rest are in small towns, smaller cities, or suburbs. In the Western Slope town of Paonia, population 1,500, Emily Sinclair opened Paonia Books a year ago. She said she likes exercising her own as well as local taste, and also enjoys inviting Western writers to give talks and sign their new books.

These days, said Duncan, bookstores are becoming more diverse in both ownership and retail model.

“We now have online-only stores, pop-up stores, book buses and bookmobiles,” she said. And new store owners are often Black, Indigenous, Hispanic/Latino, or LGBTQ+. “Diverse-owned stores are approximately 20% of our membership. In the past it would have been around 10%.”

Locating a bookstore in a rural community is arguably another aspect of diversity—and a surprising strength.

“Small-town stores had a much better success rate during the pandemic,” Duncan said, “due mostly to the support of their communities, as well as lower overhead costs.”

The strong connection to community, however, requires work. “We pick the books

one by one,” Brian Sweet said. “People are surprised to hear that—some think we just sell whatever shows up. But I pore over publisher catalogs, and in a small store, for every book that I choose, probably 200 don’t make the cut.”

Bookstores in tourist destinations, such as Back of Beyond in Moab, Utah, have always thrived on deep community connections. But the current trend highlights how community is something best appreciated by full-time residents rather than visitors.

Like farmers’ markets, microbreweries, bakeries and outdoor-gear stores, bookstores are places to gather in person with like-minded neighbors, Amy Sweet said.

“Customers in a bookstore are friendly and inquisitive,” she said. “They come in to browse and talk about books.”

While tech companies are always looking to “scale up” to provide growth, the challenge for many small towns is finding business models that “scale down” to smaller populations. Bookselling provides that model.

But booksellers agree that they’re doing a job: “It’s business—it’s not reading books all day,” said Brian Sweet. “But it’s a business where people want to support you. Every day,” he added, “people thank us for being open.”

Here’s a sampling of much-loved bookstores in Western towns under 10,000 people:

Back of Beyond Books, Moab, Utah, pop. 5,300. backofbeyondbooks.com/,

The Mad Dog and the Pilgrim book-sellers, Sweetwater Station, Wyoming, population too small to count, <https://www.facebook.com/MadDogandthePilgrimBooks/>

Elk River Books, Livingston, Montana, population 8,300, elkriverbooks.com/

Townie Books, Crested Butte, Colorado, population 1,681, <https://towniebooks.in.dielite.org/>

Reader’s Oasis Books, Quartzsite, Arizona, population 2,413, no website

And here’s a sampling of bookstores in Western towns under 10,000 that opened in the last three years:

Mountain Shire Books, Winter Park, Colorado, population 1,033, <https://mountainshirebooks.com/>

CuriosiTea Bookshop, Fairview, Utah, population pop. 1,203, bookshop.org/shop/CuriosiTeaBookshop

Page Turners, Fairview, Montana, population 844, bookshop.org/shop/pageturnersmt

Beartooth Books, Red Lodge, Montana, population 2,300, <https://www.beartooth-bookstore.com/>

Cobb’s Book Nook, Vernal, Utah, population 10,000, cobbbook-nook.company.site/

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Taylor Swift is in a Class of Her Own

By ROB PATTERSON

In my-not-so-humble opinion, in every way that counts as a human soul and creative fountain, Taylor Swift is either an angel or a goddess, maybe both. Her presence in this temporal world of ours at this juncture feels like a gift from whatever God(s) there may be. I admire and adore her to the heavens.

And that esteem doesn’t even factor in the bonus points she wins by being deeply hated by many on the right (but so abominably wrong) wing, a loathing so undeserved for being everything they are not: kind, generous of spirit and with the billionaire’s bounty her talents have earned her, genuinely kind, honorable and principled. In short, a damned good soul.

Swift is also a strong-willed woman, which gets up the noses of misogynists. After a radio DJ groped her from behind during a meet-and-greet photo session, she sued the classless sleazebag for damages of a single dollar. It was litigation not as a cudgel but a

moral lesson: treat all women with respect!

She is, fittingly, a gal who grew up on a Christmas tree farm in east-central Pennsylvania. Taylor found her calling at a young age, was a country music star by her teens. Then her music bloomed into a loamy pop chart-bound garden in which she has strummed, sang and danced her way through various genres, permutations and stylistic variations, weaving it all into a fine, bold and colorful tapestry of musicality that is beloved by millions. That is no small feat. And she’s done it with keen determination and aplomb.

I’ve been dipping in for some time, always impressed, damn the snobs, MAGA haters, etc. who diss her. She really won me over with her NPR Tiny Desk concert, a good place to start if you haven’t yet explored her music.

Then, as I was writing this, I came across a Swiftian rave on Facebook by a fellow Leftist journalist, far more accomplished than your humble correspondent: Paul Slansky, humor and politics writer for *The New Yorker*, *Esquire*, *New Times* and other publications and the bestselling author of “The Clothes Have No Emperor,” about the Reagan presidency, as well as other books. He’s another oldster who’s sold on Taylor.

Slansky pointed out another of her feats: “In less than five years she’s put out 135 songs, with not even a dozen less than good ones, and most of them excellent. And if you count the re-records it’s 204. IN LESS THAN FIVE YEARS. No one has ever done this before. No one else comes close. She is so brilliant on so many levels. We’ve really never seen anyone like her.” No kidding. . . .

I keep groping for a musical comparison from the music of my younger years. The only one that comes to mind in the singer-songwriter realm that approaches on a worldwide musical fame and impact level is Elton John. Who Swift has far outpaced and exceeded.

I’ve listened to her latest 16 song double-album release, *The Tortured Poets Department*, and it’s a fine work. And ignored the blizzard of media speculation chaff about which song may be written about which ex-lover — no matter to me. I’m just glad for her that current boyfriend Travis Kelce is well aware of how lucky he is to have such an amazing woman in his life.

She may not make music aimed at people like Slansky and me, but she’s always a pleasure to listen to. Most men don’t know, but the millions little girls who’ve grown up with her music understand, to adapt the line

from Howlin’ Wolf. And so do a few of us canny codgers.

She has integrity, class and character. Songs just pour out of her. She treats her fans like gold (many famed musical acts should heed her example. Her politics are in the smart and correct place, and she and the fans that adore her just might help make a critical difference come November.

Populist Picks

MUSICAL ALBUM: *Cowboy Carter* by Beyoncé — Presented as the R&B superstar’s country record, this 27-song set blasts away the increasingly tired Nashville clichés to deliver a genre-expanding vision that’s a vocal tour de force.

MUSICAL ALBUM: *Rockstar* by Dolly Parton — Another flip of the stylistic script on which the C&W legend strides her way through some of rock music’s best-known songs with her trademark potent pipes and brio, joined by a murderers’ row of noted guest stars.

Rob Patterson is a music and entertainment writer in Austin, Texas. Email robpatterson054@gmail.com.

After Trump Conviction, Bragg Becomes the Target

By ELWOOD WATSON

Manhattan District Attorney Alvin Bragg deserves to take a bow following his undeniable victory.

A New York jury delivered a guilty verdict in a trial largely devoid of political theater and media upheaval, at least in the courtroom. That’s thanks to a judge who, during the multiple-week trial, managed to maintain civility and order and ensure the rights of all parties were upheld fairly.

Former President Donald Trump was convicted on not one, not two, but 34 felony counts. Supporters are outraged. Detractors are pleased.

From the moment he brought a criminal case against the former president, Bragg himself was put on trial by many of Trump’s supporters. His legal case was also arrogantly dismissed by network political analysts and columnists, who thought it was weak, flimsy, and overly complex, and that he was misguided for bringing it forward. It was as if Bragg himself was guilty of incompetence.

The truth is Bragg possesses stealth political acumen and experience in dealing with public corruption and white-collar crime. As

Manhattan district attorney, he successfully secured the conviction of Allen Weisselberg, the Trump Organization’s chief financial officer, on 15 felony counts. He was victorious in winning a six-count indictment against Trump’s former strategist, Steve Bannon, on money laundering and conspiracy charges in a case that is still pending. During his tenure at the New York State attorney general’s office, Bragg spearheaded the investigation into the Trump Foundation, which was dismantled by court order to settle accusations of misuse of donors’ charitable funds.

The verdict confirms Trump committed numerous crimes to disguise crucial information about himself from the American people for the purpose of influencing the 2016 presidential election. It established even more facts about how far Trump was willing to go, including disregarding the law and pushing others to break the law for political gain. This sinister inclination — to overturn traditional democratic norms and misdirect the law to serve his own agenda — is at the heart of two other criminal cases against the former president for the much more serious charges of spreading scurrilous falsehoods and aiding and abetting a criminal conspiracy to overturn the 2020 election.

In addition, Trump has been further charged with mishandling highly classified

national security documents after leaving office and sharing classified documents with individuals who were not authorized to see them. His attorneys have been successful in delaying those three trials.

Trump brought his own case against Bragg, calling the 34 felony count indictment a case of “political persecution” and denouncing Bragg in racially coded language as a “thug” and a “degenerate psychopath.” He insulted Justice Juan Merchan, commenting that he “looks like an angel but he’s really a devil.” Trump also encouraged his largely unhinged supporters to attack and denounce the verdict, with sycophantic Senator Lindsey Graham (R-S.C.) calling Trump’s indictment a “shocking and dangerous day for the rule of law in America” and “one of the most irresponsible decisions in American history by any prosecutor.” Graham predicted Trump would win in court.

“Guilty on all counts,” Megyn Kelly tweeted. The country is disgraced. Alvin Bragg should be disbarred. They will rue the day they unleashed this lawfare to corrupt a presidential election.” Numerous other Republican politicians, from Tim Scott to speaker Mike Johnson to Marco Rubio, have deliriously rushed to the defense of Trump.

Such unalloyed support for the former president is hardly surprising. After all, this is the man who once bragged that he could stand in the middle of Fifth Avenue, shoot

somebody, and not lose a single vote. When he declared such a perverse prediction in January 2016, Trump was brash and arrogant. “It’s, like, incredible,” he said about the loyalty of his voters. After this verdict, he was less brash and more angry, less confident and more aggrieved. Lacking any degree of remorse, he cried about a “rigged trial by a conflicted judge” and predicted, “The real verdict is going to be Nov. 5 by the people, and they know what happened here.”

The bigger question is, after this verdict, will he retain such unprecedented loyalty from his political base? Sad to say, his die-hard supporters will remain dutiful, more loyal than ever.

One of the more positive outcomes of this verdict is the fact the rule of law applies to everyone, including a former president. Despite the extraordinary circumstances, the conduct of the trial was ordinary. Twelve average Americans sitting in judgment on a former president and rendering a verdict is classic democracy in action.

Now, it is up to those of us who desire to maintain our system to work feverishly. Too much is at stake.

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.

FILM REVIEW/*Ed Rampell*

'Power': Chronicling the History of Policing

Four years after the murder of George Floyd, a new documentary traces the long record of police abuses.

Oscar-nominated director Yance Ford's new documentary, "Power, which chronicles policing in America, was released just before the fourth anniversary of George Floyd's murder by a Minneapolis Police Department officer.

Unlike productions such as Colin Kaepernick's 2023 docuseries "Killing County," which spotlights the high rate of police killings in Kern County, California, "Power" zooms out to the historical role law enforcement has played in America. News clips, scenes from Hollywood movies, archival material, CCTV footage, images from police body and dash cameras, and cell phone videos are intricately woven together with commentary from a cast of scholars, historians, journalists, and police officers. Ford constructs a compelling counter-narrative to the depiction of cops as "peace officers" tasked with "public safety." This movie is the filmic equivalent of "the talk."

Conventional police propaganda, known as "copaganda," conditions viewers via the news, television, and movies to view law enforcement officers as, in the words of President Ronald Reagan, "manning the thin blue line that holds back a jungle." As Black Lives Matter organizer and independent vice presidential candidate Melina Abdullah told *The Progressive* in 2022, "When Black people are killed or harmed by police, the first thing we're trained [and]

socialized to do is say, 'What did he or she do?' Next is the argument, 'If she or he had just complied' ... Copaganda is used to train us to think about Black people as automatically guilty, and police as automatically right in their actions."

But "Power" cuts through the veil of copaganda to expose the true purpose of policing, which began before the United States was even established as a nation. Julian Go, a sociology professor at the University of Chicago, notes in the documentary that the term "patrolman" is derived from slave patrols originating in 1704 in South Carolina. According to New York University Professor Nikhil Pal Singh, today's police force evolved out of Western frontier militias that enforced Manifest Destiny and White encroachment on Indigenous land.

"Power" highlights how police were also used, as Go says, "to regulate the White working class"—including immigrants from Ireland, Italy, and Eastern Europe—and to violently bust labor strikes. Police, Singh adds, enforced the law for "those who have property, against those who don't."

The film explores the role of police in the rebellions and civil unrest that occurred in the late 20th century in the United States, such as the urban uprisings in cities like Newark and Detroit during the "Long, Hot Summer of 1967." In one clip, Black Panther Party leader Huey P. Newton declares: "The police are not in our community to protect us, but to contain and brutalize us. The police deny us due process of law."

"Power" also details the insidious role of August Vollmer in the U.S. occupation of foreign lands such as the Philippines, dubbing him "the father of modern policing." A Spanish-American War veteran, Vollmer brought the military enforcement tactics used in the Philippines back to the United States, where he became the first police chief of Berkeley, California. In 1916, Vollmer headed a new criminal justice department at the University of California-Berkeley.

Stuart Schrader, author of "Badges Without Borders: How Global Counterinsurgency Transformed American Policing," asserts in the film: "Police understood communism and Black Power [were] similar to liberation move-

ments around the globe." Police and authorities try to explain these movements away, contending that protesters are "dupes of the Soviet Union, [which has] convinced Blacks to rebel." Of course, like the old "outside agitator" myth, this denies that people are responding to real societal problems that must be dealt with.

This analytical, thoughtful, and accessible documentary includes glimpses of some of the most infamous acts of police abuse of power, including Rodney King's 1991 beating in Los Angeles, Eric Garner's 2014 killing on Staten Island, and the 2020 murder of George Floyd in Minneapolis.

This powerful documentary asks the audience, where are we now, four years after Floyd's murder and, as Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist Wesley Lowery reminds us, "a decade after Trayvon Martin and Michael Brown"? Ex-prosecutor Paul Butler, a Georgetown University Law Center professor and frequent MSNBC commentator, chillingly states, "It's hard to prosecute police killings of Black [people] because it's usually legal."

Christy Lopez, Butler's Georgetown colleague, echoes this point: "Most of the harm police cause is perfectly legal ... It's scary, right?"

There are, according to the film, currently 18,000 police departments in the United States—lavishly funded in 2023 with \$129 billion taxpayer dollars.

Go insists that "one of the first things fascists do is increase police power"—an especially unsettling thought as pro-Palestine protests encampments across America's college campuses are torn down by campus and municipal police forces. The police are, Go says, "the fourth branch of government."

"Power" is available on Netflix.

Ed Rampell is a film historian and critic based in Los Angeles. Rampell is the author of "Progressive Hollywood, A People's Film History of the United States" and he co-authored "The Hawaii Movie and Television Book," now in its third edition. This review originally appeared at Progressive.org.

EDGE OF SPORTS/*Dave Zirin*

Counting the Negro League Records Is About More Than Numbers

One player in particular is laying waste to the Major League record book: Josh Gibson.

In 1962, legendary South African activist Dennis Brutus helped launch the South African Non-Racial Olympic Committee (SAN-ROC). One of its aims was to relentlessly point out the hypocrisy of apartheid officials speaking about "South African" sporting records when the only marks being counted and feted were those by White athletes. Government forces jailed, tortured, and exiled SAN-ROC members for speaking this truth. But they could not be crushed and kept organizing international sports boycotts until the fall of apartheid. It has taken until 2024 for Major League Baseball to achieve what South Africa did in the early 1990s.

At long last, the records set in the Negro Leagues prior to 1948 will be integrated into the official MLB ledgers. No longer will the incredible baseball feats of the Negro Leagues be relegated to a separate and unequal category. No longer

will the accomplishments of legendary players like Leroy "Satchel" Paige, Oscar Charleston, and James "Cool Papa" Bell be dusted off only during Major League Baseball's thirgruel salutes to Black History Month.

It has taken a shockingly long time for MLB to arrive at this point—a delay that falsely gives the impression that competition in the Negro Leagues was somehow below that of the Major League. But thanks to the tireless work of historians, activists, and organizations like the Negro Leagues Baseball Museum in Kansas City, the MLB has finally entered the mid-20th century.

One player in particular is laying waste to the baseball record book: Josh Gibson. No longer is baseball's all-time leader in batting average Ty Cobb and his mark of .367. It's now Gibson, who in his remarkable career hit .372. No longer is the single-season record for batting average held by Rogers Hornsby and his .424. It's now Gibson and his staggering .466. The Pittsburgh Crawfords and Homestead Grays catcher now is also the all-time leader in career slugging percentage (over Babe Ruth) and slugging in a single season (over Barry Bonds). That Gibson was able to accomplish these hitting feats as a catcher—a position that wears down great hitters with the stress it puts on the knees and back—makes his prowess even more remarkable. What would Gibson have batted as a designated hitter if such a position had existed in yesteryear? It boggles the mind.

In announcing this long-overdue move, Major League Baseball Commissioner Rob Manfred said, "We are proud that the official historical record now includes the players of the Negro Leagues. This initiative is focused on ensuring that future generations of fans have access to the statistics and milestones of all those who made the Negro Leagues possible. Their accomplishments on the field will be a gateway to broader learning about this triumph in American his-

tory and the path that led to Jackie Robinson's 1947 Dodger debut."

Manfred did not add that the debut of Robinson was also the first step toward MLB's destruction of the Negro Leagues, strip-mined for talent. Teams were left without their main attractions, like young hitters Willie Mays and Henry Aaron. Crowds dwindled. And just like that, the grand possibility that entire Negro League teams could be integrated into Major League Baseball, including Black ownership, Black management, and Black laborers, was dashed. To this day, there has never been a Black team owner in Major League Baseball, and the paucity of Black front-office leaders and managers remains an embarrassment. How different the future may have looked if, on the eve of the civil rights movement, a group of Black executives were given a well-earned seat as part of the power structure in America's pastime. Instead, Major League Baseball harpooned what could have been among the largest Black-owned businesses. Manfred shouldn't skip over this part of baseball history.

If Dennis Brutus were still with us, the brilliant South African poet and sports activist would relish the thought of over 2,300 Black players getting their due in the official record books. He would see it as a great victory for everyone who would not let the Negro Leagues be erased. And in acknowledging the debt to those who kept the flame lit, he would insist we never forget an inequitable past that Major League Baseball first created and then—as flowers bloomed through the concrete—ruthlessly destroyed.

Dave Zirin is the sports editor at The Nation. He is the author of 11 books on the politics of sports. He is also the coproducer and writer of the new documentary "Behind the Shield: The Power and Politics of the NFL." Email edgeofsports@gmail.com.

SATIRE/*Rosie Sorenson*

My Kingdom for a Wife

Supreme Court Justice, Elena Kagan, has been overheard talking to her law clerk, Mary, about how she envies Justice Samuel Alito and Senator Bob Menendez.

Mary cocks an eye toward the Justice. "I mean," Kagan says, "look at Sammy—that's what I call him when no one's around—he doesn't like it very much, but it's fun to see his face turn red—look at the way he blames Martha for the flag caper. My God, can you imagine if Sonia or Kentanji or I had pulled that stunt? He would have sicced his goons on us and had us impeached."

Mary laughs at Justice Kagan's frankness.

Kagan continues, "They have wives! When confronted, the boys are all, 'Who me, no, no, not my fault; Martha is out of control with that upside down flag thing and that other flag, whatever it was; I don't know, it's not my house, she bought it with her inheritance, she owns it, not me. She is perfectly free to do as she wants; I have nothing to do with what she does, I really don't. I didn't even know about the flags, I swear, I'm a judge, you can bank on that; in fact, I barely know her ...'"

Mary laughs and says, "Wow, if he could hear you now!"

Justice Kagan gets out of her chair and starts pacing, tossing up her hands.

"And Menendez? Ha! He and Alito must have taken the same Correspondence Course for "How to Snag A Wife You Can Blame for All Your Troubles." His suit jacket alone should send him to prison for years, but what does he say? 'I don't know anything about those gold bricks, she must have sewn them into my jacket when I wasn't looking, I don't even own a needle, yes it was heavy, but I thought she just bought

a heavier brand of fabric, never occurred to me there were gold bricks hidden in the lining. Well, whaddya know about that, my God, what will the bitch think of next?'"

Mary leaves and returns with a pot of tea. She sets it before the Justice, who pours herself a cup.

"You know, Mary," she says and takes a sip. "I'm kinda cheesed off that I don't have a wife to throw under the bus so I can blame her for things I've done wrong. I need a wife! Do my laundry, fuss over me, tell me I'm right when I'm clearly wrong, tell me I'm smart when I'm clearly stupid, tell me she loves me when she clearly doesn't, just hangs around, basking in my celebrity. Ahh, the good old, new bad days, Mary. We all need wives. They can act with impunity."

"Ah, but what about Ann Boleyn?" says Mary. "Wife number two of Henry the 8th? Remember when she got fed up with Henry blaming her for all his problems and then lost her head on the chopping block?"

"Right. I forgot about that."

Mary continues, "When I went out to

get your tea, I ran into Brad, Alito's clerk. He mentioned that Martha was out of town for an extended vacation. No one knows where she went, who she went with or when she will return. People are talking."

"Oh, dear," said Kagan.

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



AMY GOODMAN



All 2.3 million Palestinians trapped in what the ICJ deemed a plausible genocide have a story to tell. One talked to us about his desperation.

A Gaza Twin's Desperate Fight for Survival

Gaza, the most densely-populated place on Earth, described as “the world’s largest open-air prison,” has become a hellish cauldron of human suffering. Palestinians in the Gaza Strip are entering their ninth month of an unprecedented military onslaught that has killed over 36,500 people, including at least 15,000 children – believed to be a gross underestimate. Israel, with its constantly replenished arsenal of US arms, has defied the international community and the World Court, intensifying rather than halting its ground invasion of Rafah. The civilian slaughter predicted by many to follow a

Rafah invasion is now happening, day and night, by land, sea and air, relayed to the rest of the world through social media posts when internet is available and via the remaining journalists able to transmit from Gaza. Israel has barred international reporters from entering.

All 2.3 million Palestinians trapped in what the International Court of Justice has deemed a plausible genocide have a story to tell. June 5, one remarkable 19-year-old, Helmi Hirez, talked about his desperation on the *Democracy Now!* news hour. Helmi spoke amidst the chaos of Deir Al Balah in the Gaza Strip:

“I’m Helmi Hirez, 19 years old ... Me and my family got out of Gaza City on November 11th. After Al-Shifa Hospital and the entire Rimal neighborhood got invaded, we went into Rafah city, walking on foot, while the Israeli army was pointing guns at us. Sometimes we needed to jump over dead bodies ... bodies left intentionally to create this horrifying mental effect. After one week of our departure, our house got bombed with two rockets, on November 18th, and 14 beloved family members were killed there. On that day, Israel killed over 1,000 Palestinians.”

As Helmi spoke from a crowded street not far from the barely functioning al-Aqsa Hospital, a shrouded body was unloaded from a vehicle and carried away. A stream of people passed by, many carrying empty containers in a perpetual search for food and water. Helmi remained focused:

“We spent three months in Rafah city. On February 12th, the building next to us

got bombed ... with four rockets. We got buried with the rubble. I was able to get myself out of the rubble, and my twin brother and my father, and start digging over my mother. We dug over one meter of rubble, and we got our mother breathing, and some guys took her to the hospital as fast as possible. And we kept digging for our sister. We got our sister awake. She was vomiting blood. We went to a nearby house, and we hid there. And unfortunately, my mother suffered from internal bleeding, and she didn’t make it.

“After that, we went to al-Mawasi area, living in a tent. After two months in al-Mawasi area, a place less than 200 meters from our camp was bombed with two rockets, which destroyed our entire camp.”

Helmi was talking about Israel’s bombing of the tent camp in Rafah that killed over 45 people, just two days after the International Court of Justice ordered Israel to immediately stop its assault on Rafah. CNN reported US weapons made by Boeing were used in the attack.

Helmi has set up a GoFundMe page titled, “Help a Twin in Gaza who lost their Mother & Home.” It bears a photo of him and his twin brother at their high school graduation last year, on either side of their late mother, all three with beaming smiles. Helmi and Mohammed were born in 2004, two years before Israel imposed its siege on Gaza. They have lived their entire lives under occupation, with significant Israeli assaults on Gaza occurring every couple of years – an Israeli military strategy often referred to as “mowing the lawn.”

Now, at 19, Helmi and his remaining family members are fighting for survival.

“This is my continuous journey of displacement from one place to another, my continuous journey of loss from one place to another. We now live in al-Mawasi area, less than two kilometers from the Israeli army ... Whenever you walk in al-Mawasi, people are always looking towards the south, where the fire and the flames are coming out of Rafah city. We can hear the sounds of the shelling and the bombing all day and all night long.

“We really don’t know where we can go. It’s very hard to know where the safe place is.”

In a grim punctuation to Helmi Hirez’s words, the following day, Israeli forces struck a school-turned-shelter run by UNRWA, the United Nations Palestinian relief organization, in Nuseirat refugee camp in central Gaza. Six-thousand were sheltering there; 35 people were killed, including women and children. CNN again confirmed a US weapon was used.

Helmi Hirez has much to offer the world. The world owes him a permanent ceasefire, an end to the weapons flow to the Israeli military and to the occupation that has dominated his young life.

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.”

It Takes Courage To Write in the Digital Age

By BONNIE JEAN FELDKAMP

Erma Bombeck was right when she said, “It takes a lot of courage to show your dreams to someone else.” I thought of this quote when my friend Gina Barreca recently asked on social media, “Writers: Why is it hard to hit ‘send’ even after all these years?”

Barreca has written or edited about 20 books, has written countless columns and she’s Board of Trustees Distinguished Professor of English at the University of Connecticut. If clicking send was going to be easy for anyone, it would be easy for her. But when it comes to writing in the digital age, the courage Bombeck spoke of requires a double dose.

To write means to solidify one’s

thoughts, insights and ideas and offer them to the world for contemplation. It’s not easy to bleed on the page with every draft, but that’s the job. We say the inside parts out loud, in writing, and the goal is to do so in a way that resonates with our readers.

The problem is this: Every reader brings their baggage to the page, and baggage has no grace. Baggage is raw, emotional and rarely has the wherewithal to take a deep breath before assigning ill intent and unloading on the writer.

My current job as an opinion editor is the only job I’ve ever had that listed “thick skin” as a required skill in the job description when I applied. But the job also requires an open mind and heart in order to observe and shine lights in dark corners of humanity. It all boils down to knowing who you are, understanding why you write and as Bombeck says, having courage.

We live in a divisive world where social media and smartphones are our weapons of choice. Instead of getting curious and asking questions, readers type contemptuous rants from behind a screen. This is why my

TED talk is called “Contempt Versus Connection in Online Communication.” I truly believe there’s a better way. Productive discourse is at the core of the work I do, and I champion these principles as a human being.

In a column I wrote for the National Society of Newspaper Columnists, Barreca also brilliantly explained that the whole point of writing is to help others find their own voices. “You’re not there to have the last word or the best solution,” she said; “you’re there to open up the conversation.”

To start that conversation requires intentionality and purpose. Not every writer in the world holds to this ideal, but the ones I most admire do. Conscientious writers draft, ponder, rewrite and refine. We ask ourselves, “what is the purpose of my commentary?” We fall asleep at night turning words over in our heads, mentally picking through the turns of phrases in our drafts. We want to make sure our words match our intended message. But that doesn’t mean we always hit the mark, and the world is ready to tell us exactly how we’ve failed.

Writers not only stare down the proverbial blank page, but we also stand naked, stripped clean for public scrutiny in a digital world where backlash is immediate. Technology is not built to encourage readers to strike when the iron is cold. A smartphone is always ready when to fire off hateful comments with no pause to consider the humanity on the receiving end.

All of this is precisely why it takes even more courage than ever these days to show someone your dreams and why it is still so hard to click that send button on a draft intended for the masses. But we are writers. We have ink in our blood. We find courage in the coven, and camaraderie with our fellow dreamers. Trolls be damned.

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 ...

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TRUMP’S LOSING STREAK CONTINUES WITH NEW JERSEY LIQUOR LICENSE IN JEOPARDY.

Donald Trump’s terrible, horrible, no good, very bad days continue, as *Forbes* reports that New Jersey’s attorney general is “weighing” whether or not he will revoke the liquor licenses of three of Trump’s golf clubs due to his conviction of 34 felonies. Trump is the sole owner of all three New Jersey golf clubs: Bedminster, Colts Neck, and Philadelphia, Walter Eiminkel noted at DailyKos (6/10).

“New Jersey law prohibits issuing a liquor license to anyone who has been convicted of a crime ‘involving moral turpitude.’ A state handbook explains that those sorts of crimes typically involve ‘dishonesty, fraud or depravity’ severe enough to typically be punishable by more than a year in prison,” *Forbes* reported.

In 2019, New Jersey officials threatened Trump’s Colts Neck golf club with revocation of its liquor license after multiple infractions, including an incident in 2015 where the club allegedly overserved someone who was subsequently involved in a fatal car accident.

CNN reported (6/5) that the New York Police Department will revoke Trump’s license to carry a firearm now that he is a convicted felon. Trump reportedly had one of his three licensed guns “lawfully moved to Florida,” but the Sunshine State has similar prohibitions for felons owning firearms.

According to an overview of Florida’s

clemency board’s rules regarding felony convictions, it “will not consider requests for firearm authority from individuals convicted in federal or out-of-state courts.”

Additionally, Trump’s conviction could prohibit him from traveling to 37 countries that ban convicted felons from entering, including Canada, the United Kingdom and Australia.

HOUSE R’S AMP UP THEIR REVENGE AGAINST ATTORNEY GENERAL.

House Republicans are expected to pursue their revenge agenda on behalf of convicted felon Donald Trump, voting to hold Attorney General Merrick Garland in contempt of Congress. This is part of the mounting campaign among Republicans to enact retribution on President Biden, his administration officials, congressional Democrats and anyone else Trump puts on his enemies list. It’s a precursor to what they’ll do if they maintain the House, win the Senate, and Trump wins, Joan McCarter noted at DailyKos (6/10).

The House will send the resolution against Garland to the Justice Department for criminal referral if it passes. Which essentially means it’s going nowhere. The referral would go to the U.S. attorney in D.C., who would determine whether a crime was committed by Garland in refusing to turn over audio recordings of the interviews special counsel Robert Hur conducted with Biden in a classified documents inquiry, and if charges should be brought.

The U.S. attorney for D.C. is highly unlikely to find criminal action on Garland’s part, which would likely send the case to federal

courts, and there wouldn’t be an outcome before the election. But if the election favors Republicans, Garland is going to be high on their list for locking up.

House Democrats have done a bang-up job of humiliating Republicans on this goose chase and are continuing to do so, but a little humiliation isn’t enough to deter them from doing Trump’s bidding.

“Desperate to blame someone—anyone—for the utter failure of this impeachment inquiry, Republicans have contrived an allegation that Attorney General Merrick Garland has impeded their impeachment inquiry by preventing them from hearing President Biden’s interview with Special Counsel Hur by withholding the audio recording,” Democrats on the Oversight Committee said in a statement.

“In fact, Republicans, and the American public, can already read the full content of that interview.”

That’s absolutely true—Garland released the transcripts when Hur testified before Congress, a hearing that turned out to be a flop for Republicans. They want that audio, though, to use to show Biden unfavorably in their televised hearings. This is why the Justice Department is refusing to cede to the demand. It’s also why Biden claimed executive privilege to block release of the tapes.

White House Counsel Ed Siskel blasted GOP lawmakers’ attempts to get the tapes, insisting that they have no legitimate purpose for acquiring them, only a political one “to chop them up, distort them, and use them for partisan political purposes.”

TRUMP ACHIEVES ANOTHER FIRST: MEETING WITH A PROBATION OFFICER.

Donald Trump met with an important new woman in his life: his probation officer, Mark Sumner noted at DailyKos (6/10). The meeting was a requirement of Trump’s conviction on 34 felony counts, and it will provide information to help establish the severity of his sentence at a July 11 hearing. It will also help determine whether he’ll be allowed to carry on normally while awaiting sentencing, or if restrictions are needed.

Trump didn’t have to show up in person. In an unusual concession, he was allowed to attend the meeting remotely from Mar-a-Lago.

While convenient for Trump, there’s another reason why he’s not being summoned to the 10th floor of the Manhattan Criminal Court Building, where others are required to appear. As the former commissioner of the New York City Department of Corrections and Probation told NBC News, Trump’s presence, along with his entourage of Secret Service agents and reporters, would be “very disruptive” to the other defendants.

The purpose of this initial meeting was to prepare a report for Justice Juan Merchan to help determine Trump’s sentence.

The probation officer typically asks questions to learn more about the defendant’s personal history, employment record, obligations, and past criminal behavior. It’s hard to imagine that his past behavior—from money laundering at casinos to stealing from charities—is going to look good in that report. Neither will his many outstanding indictments.

Continued on next page

Another Committee to Confirm Our Conspiracy Theories comes up short

By DANA MILBANK

Old conspiracy theories never die. They just fade into the congressional record.

Last fall, Rep. Brad Wenstrup (R-Ohio), chairman of the Select Subcommittee on the Coronavirus Pandemic, made an incendiary public accusation that, “according to information gathered by the select subcommittee,” Anthony Fauci “was escorted into Central Intelligence Agency Headquarters — without a record of entry — and participated in the analysis to ‘influence’ the agency’s review” to say that COVID-19 did not originate from a lab leak. “Wenstrup reveals new allegations,” his news release boasted.

Another Republican on the panel, Rep. Richard McCormick (R-Ga.) declared definitively: “We now know that Fauci had a secret meeting with the CIA.”

Fox News, the *New York Post* and the rest of the right-wing conspiracy machine ran with it. And then — nothing. The subcommittee came up with no evidence to support the claim, supposedly made by a whistleblower, and nothing to challenge Fauci’s testimony that he hadn’t been to the CIA in 20 years. Appearing before the panel in a public hearing on June 3, Fauci, now retired after decades leading the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, ridiculed the idea that “I was parachuted into the CIA like Jason Bourne and told the CIA that they should really not be talking about a lab leak.”

So what did committee Republicans do after their Fauci-to-CIA conspiracy theory collapsed? They pretended it never happened. The Republican staff director, Mitch Benzine, during his time to question Fauci at the hearing, announced:

“That was not an allegation made by the committee.”

Why would anyone have thought otherwise?

This follows a pattern. The Select Subcommittee on the Weaponization of the Federal Government, after holding several hearings that failed to produce anything other than warmed-over allegations about the so-called deep state, was panned even by right-wing media. The Oversight Committee investigation of Joe Biden’s “corruption” failed so thoroughly to find even a trace of wrongdoing by the president that Republicans have had to quietly shelve their impeachment ambitions.

On the COVID panel, Republican House members had promised many a bombshell over the last year and a half.

“Evidence is mounting that American tax dollars helped develop COVID & Dr. Fauci purposely suppressed the lab leak theory to cover it up,” alleged Nicole Malliotakis (R-N.Y.).

“While many lost their loved ones, their businesses, and livelihoods, Dr. Fauci made millions,” Michael Cloud (Texas) accused.

COVID “was manufactured in a lab funded by Fauci,” asserted Marjorie Taylor Greene (R-Ga.).

Yeah, no.

Documents and testimony the panel gathered over 18 months, while finding misbehavior by a grant recipient and by an adviser to Fauci, produced nothing to substantiate these wild allegations. The United States did not fund research that created the pathogen. Fauci didn’t lie about the U.S. role in “gain of function” research at the laboratory in Wuhan, China. He didn’t try to suppress the lab leak theory, or bribe people to reject it. He didn’t get rich off the pandemic, either — although he testified that he earned about \$120 a year from an antibody he developed years ago.

And, so, when Fauci appeared before Congress on June 3, Republicans on the panel hit him with whatever else they could come up with.

Malliotakis scolded him for “cruel, horrific animal re-

search” at NIH on beagles, piglets and rabbits.

“I’m puzzled as to what that has to do with the origins of COVID,” Fauci replied.

Greene didn’t care what it had to do with COVID. “As a dog lover, I want to tell you this is disgusting and evil,” she said, recommending “prison” for Fauci. She further informed the scientist that she would address him as “Mr. Fauci, because you’re not Doctor.” Democrats objected, and the committee spent several minutes bickering over proper decorum.

The dispute about Fauci’s honorific (he’s an M.D.) was all the more absurd because the chairman, Wenstrup, made a point in his opening statement of stating that “I am a physician” who during COVID was “researching with another physician in Ohio to try and understand the pathology.”

Wenstrup did not mention that he is a podiatrist. Was he researching COVID’s impact on the metatarsals?

But the constant repetition of the conspiracy theories is anything but amusing for, as Fauci testified, it has caused endless harassment of him and his family, including the arrests of two people “on their way to kill me.” He said he needs full-time security.

Yet Republicans on the panel, rather than focusing on lessons about masks, vaccines, and school and business closures that could save lives in the future, kept returning to the same conspiracy theories that are endangering Fauci’s life in the present. And Fauci kept batting them down.

He informed Debbie Lesko (R-Ariz.) that “you said about four or five things ... that were just not true.”

He advised Jim Jordan (R-Ohio) to “look at the facts.”

And to Benzine, the staff director, Fauci offered a chuckle and a simple critique: “I know where you’re going, and you’re not going to get there.”

They never do.

Dana Milbank is a political columnist for the Washington Post, where this appeared. Follow him on Twitter @Milbank. Email dana.milbank@washpost.com

Donald Trump Needs YOUR HELP to Get Vengeance on the Evil RULE OF LAW

Any little bit helps toward freeing this nation from the iron thumb of the justice system!

By ALEXANDRA PETRI

Subject: Donald Trump, Political Prisoner

Dear Fellow American, THE RULE OF LAW IS OUT OF CONTROL AND MUST BE STOPPED!

Have you heard the news? A so-called JURY OF HIS PEERS (absurd! the man is peerless!) dared to pass judgment on Donald J. Trump as though he were an ORDINARY CITIZEN, SUBJECT TO LAWS, and not the GOD-KING OF AMERICA THAT HE WAS AND SHALL BE!

The corrupt, wicked courthouse even had “EQUAL AND EXACT JUSTICE TO ALL MEN OF WHATEVER STATE OR PERSUASION” carved on the outside! AS THOUGH IT APPLIED TO DONALD J. TRUMP!

IF THIS IS THE WAY WE ARE GOING TO TREAT DONALD TRUMP, WE DON’T DESERVE TO BE A DEMOCRACY! PLEASE DONATE NOW SO THIS CAN STOP!

Juries, acting as if they had the right to pass judgment! Judges, judging! Laws, binding!

WE CAN’T HAVE THAT! WE CAN’T — AND WITH YOUR HELP, WE WON’T!

Donald Trump has wisely opted to ignore the verdict and call for another trial in the court of public opinion (a real place where we will get much better justice).

If he can be duly convicted by a jury of his peers on 34 counts of tampering with business records, then none of us is safe, assuming we also tampered with 34 business records to influence an election! This means the system is hopelessly broken! Donald Trump is not just anybody! He’s supposed to be one of those the system protects but does not bind! But the system is saying that if he was suspected of breaking the law, he needed to be put on trial, and because he was found guilty, he should face consequences — AS THOUGH THEY DON’T KNOW WHO HE IS AND THE LAW DOESN’T CARE?

WE CAN’T STAND BACK AND LET THIS HAPPEN!

Some say Democrats did this to Donald Trump, but that misses the point. As long as we exist in a system where laws are bind-

ing and anyone can face trial for breaking them, Donald Trump is not safe! That’s why we have to END THE TYRANNY OF THE RULE OF LAW NOW! As long as we have the rule of law and the right to vote means something, it is possible that Democrats, or even Traitor Republicans, can stand in the way of Donald Trump! We must fight like hell to end these conditions.

LAW-HAVING IS OUT OF CONTROL. YOU CAN’T FALSIFY BUSINESS RECORDS NOW? YOU CAN’T INTERFERE WITH AN ELECTION NOW? WHAT’S NEXT, NO COUPS?

Why is it that when Joe Biden walks into the White House and says, “I am President now,” it is fine, but when Donald Trump does that, it’s a coup? Sounds like a double standard to me. Sounds like maybe Joe isn’t below the law after all!

(Some law is fine, like whatever we can use to put HUNTER BIDEN IN A GULAG! And anybody who can get pregnant! Maximum law for them! But no laws for Donald Trump or his family members or that nice man with the pillows.)

If being a country of laws means that Donald Trump can be charged, tried and convicted in a court of law, then maybe being a country of laws is the enemy! And you know what Donald Trump wants to do to his enemies!

PLEASE SUPPORT DONALD TRUMP! ANY LITTLE BIT HELPS TO-

WARD OUR GOAL OF FREEING THIS NATION FROM THE IRON THUMB OF THE JUSTICE SYSTEM! OUR ONE NATION SHOULD BE UNDER GOD (TRUMP’S BIGGEST FAN) AND THAT’S IT! DONALD TRUMP WAS NOT ELECTED PRESIDENT (TWICE, IF HE IS READING THIS) TO BE UNDER THE “LAW” LIKE EVERYBODY ELSE.

We just thought that if you were president even once, it meant you got to do crimes, and if that’s not true, we’re going to respond by making this place unlivable and issuing WEIRD THREATS!

LAW AND JUSTICE IN AMERICA HAVE HAD THEIR DAY LONG ENOUGH. SEND MONEY TODAY, AND WE CAN MAKE SURE THAT THIS RIGGED SYSTEM THAT INSISTS ON TREATING ALL DEFENDANTS ALIKE WILL END RIGHT NOW!

If you support Donald Trump, we absolutely can destroy that system. Look what we’ve already done to the Supreme Court and people’s faith in institutions!

PLEASE GIVE NOW! NEVER SURRENDER!

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

In addition to meeting remotely, Trump also got to have his attorney Todd Blanche present during the interview, another deviation from how these things are usually handled. But it’s probably good to have someone on the call who can stay awake for the duration of the meeting.

Trump must have been asked during his interview whether he has been associating with anyone else who has a criminal record, which would violate the conditions of his parole and could result in his being forced to return to court or even being sent to jail.

Trump certainly has plenty of criminal associates to choose from: Steve Bannon, Roger Stone, Michael Flynn and at least 10 other members of Trump’s past campaign teams are already convicted felons. Others, like Sidney Powell, have only pled guilty to misdemeanors but are still off limits to Trump.

Parole officers usually also interview family members and associates, which means that some people around Trump could have a chance to share what they really think of him in a non-public forum for the first time.

If Melania is ever going to give an interview that has an impact, this is her chance.

REPUBS ‘SALIVATING’ TO RAM THROUGH ANOTHER CORPORATE TAX GIVEAWAY IF TRUMP WINS. The crowning legislative achievement of Donald Trump’s first term in the White House was the passage of an unpopular tax bill that gave big corporations a massive windfall, disproportionately rewarded wealthy individuals despite being pitched as a boon for workers, and contributed trillions to the national debt.

With Trump running for another four years in power this November, Republicans are gearing up for a repeat, Jake Johnson noted at CommonDreams (6/10).

The *Washington Post* reported (6/10) that “Republicans in Congress are preparing to not just extend former President Donald Trump’s 2017 tax cuts if they win control of Washington in November’s elections, but also lower rates even more for corporations.”

“Now GOP lawmakers and some of Trump’s economic advisers are considering more corporate tax breaks—which could expand the national debt by roughly \$1 trillion over the next decade, according to researchers at Stanford University and MIT,” the *Post* added.

The report on Republicans’ plans comes a month after the Congressional Budget Office estimated that extending provisions of the 2017 tax cut law that are set to expire next year would add \$4.6 trillion to the U.S. deficit.

“GOP is salivating at more handout tax cuts to their corporate bosses and billionaires that will balloon the debt,” Rep. Chris Deluzio (D-Pa.) wrote on social media (6/10). “Fiscal irresponsibility by the guys bought and paid for by huge corporations.”

During his 2020 campaign against Trump, President Joe Biden pledged to “get rid of the bulk of” the 2017 Tax Cuts and Jobs Act (TCJA), but he and his party have thus far failed to do so.

Slashing corporate taxes even further than the 2017 law—which cut the business rate from 35% to 21%—would reward many of the same corporations that have pushed up prices for consumers in recent years in a shameless attempt to pad their bottom lines. A recent analysis by the Groundwork Collaborative found that between April and September of last year, corporate profits drove more than half of U.S. inflation.

“Big corporations raised prices higher and faster than inflation, squeezing working families to rake in record profits,” Rep. Bonnie

Watson Coleman (D-N.J.) wrote on social media in response to the *Post*’s reporting. “So what’s the GOP’s plan? Even more corporate tax cuts and another \$1 trillion to the debt. You can’t make this stuff up.”

Sen. Elizabeth Warren (D-Mass.) similarly criticized the GOP’s plan to reward the corporations that have pushed costs onto consumers to boost their profit margins.

“The same corporations that have been price-gouging the American consumer at the grocery store, at the gas pump, and everywhere else are now spending their money loading up these Republican political action committees with the plan that the Republicans will deliver even more tax cuts,” Warren told the *Post*. “It’s obscene.”

ECONOMY GENERATES 272,000 JOBS IN MAY, UNEMPLOYMENT EDGES UP TO NEARLY 4%.

The economy added 272,000 new jobs in May, again exceeding expectations. This is somewhat above its average of 230,000 per month over the last year. We still are not seeing a slowing of job growth, Dean Baker noted at the Center for Economic and Policy Research (6/7).

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