



Healing Amidst Divisions: How a Small Town Fights for Its Library

Regional library systems provide vital services for small and under-resourced communities. But what happens when political divisions threaten to dismantle them?

By SARAH MELOTTE
The Daily Yonder

After a year of controversy over LGBTQ book displays, county commissioners in a small North Carolina town began proceedings to withdraw their public library from the regional system, a move that threatens vital services and state funding. But some residents are organizing to prevent the change.

On June 26, giving only 48 hours' notice about a public meeting, the clerk of the Yancey County Board of Commissioners sent an agenda that contained just one item: discussing the AMY (Avery, Mitchell, and Yancey counties) Regional Library contract.

This agenda item spread concern among Yancey County residents who had been worried about the health of their library since last summer, when the county commissioners almost withdrew from the regional library system after a complaint about an LGBTQ book display sparked debates.

The past year has been fraught with debate about book selections and displays, which made the notification about the public meeting in June 2024 a source of panic for some locals.

A Community Mourns

On June 28 of this year, two days after the county clerk sent out the meeting agenda, the Yancey County Board of Commissioners hosted their public meeting about the regional library contract in downtown Burnsville, N.C., the county seat. Yancey is a rural county of about 18,000 residents in the Blue Ridge Mountains about 35 miles north of the city of Asheville.

A crowd packed into the courtroom on the humid top floor of the Yancey County Courthouse. I arrived with my recorder, ready to capture whatever debate was about to ensue. But the only audio I snagged was the sound of a disgruntled crowd as the commissioners packed up their belongings and filed out the door.

The commissioners passed a motion to

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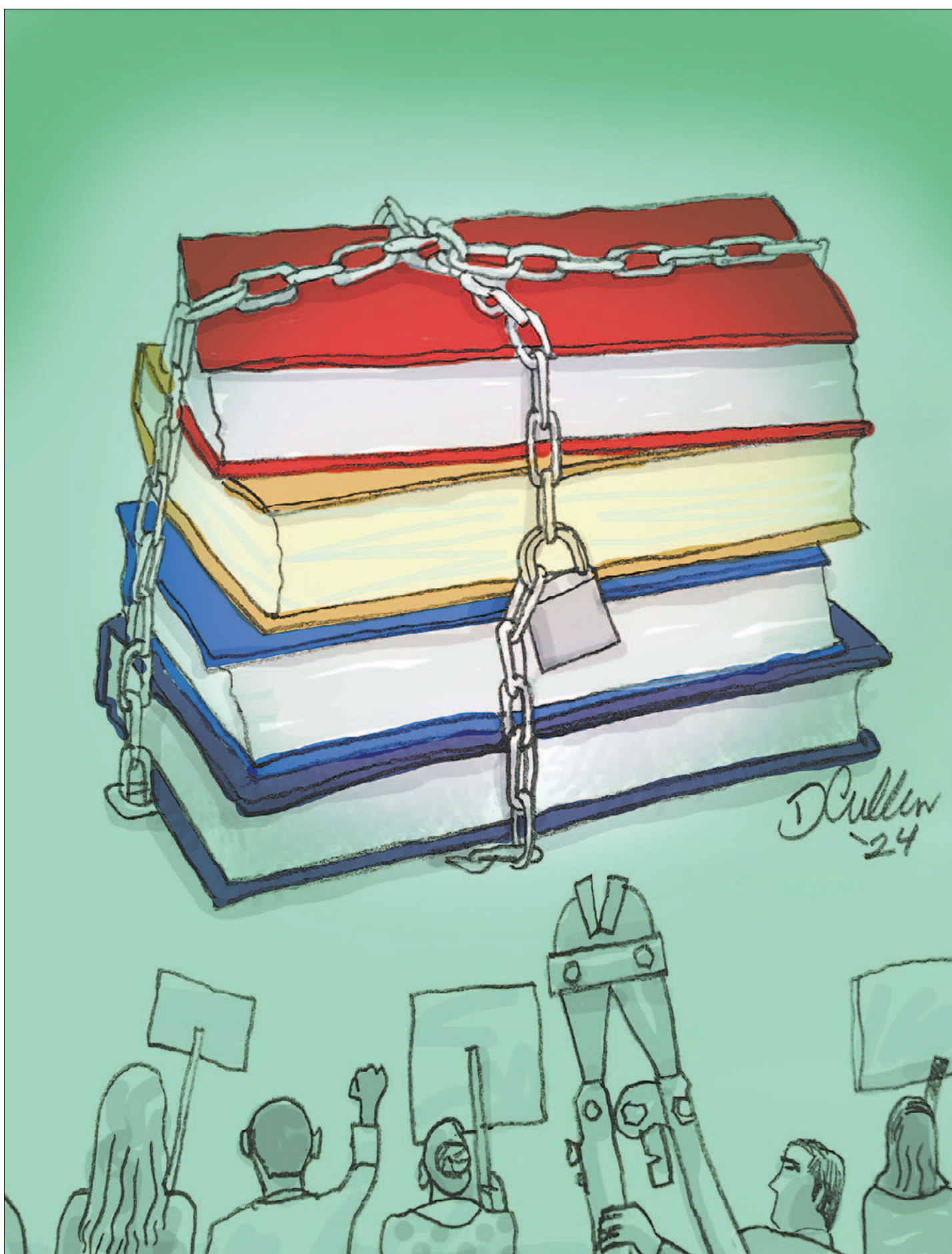


Illustration by DOLORES CULLEN

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AN EDITORIAL

The Big Lie is GOP's Brand

There is no bottom to Donald Trump's Republican Party. And his running mate is digging further.

Sen. J.D. Vance picked up a baseless rumor, which had been batted around social media for about a month, that Haitian immigrants in Springfield, Ohio, were abducting their neighbors' pets and eating them. Vance wrote on X (formerly Twitter) Sept. 9, "Reports now show that people have had their pets abducted and eaten by people who shouldn't be in this country. Where is our border czar?"

Less than 30 minutes after Vance's post, NPR noted, the *Springfield News-Sun* reported that local police said incidents of pets being stolen or eaten were "not something that's on our radar right now" The newspaper said the unsubstantiated claim seems to have started with a post in a Springfield Facebook group that was widely shared across social media.

After Vance posted it on X, an advocate for the Haitian community in Springfield reported receiving a wave of harassment.

Then Trump supercharged the claim during his nationally televised debate on ABC with Vice President Kamala Harris the evening of Sept. 10, when he brought up the pet-eating hoax in an attack on the Biden-Harris administration's immigration policy.

"In Springfield, they're eating the dogs. The people that came in. They're eating the cats. They're eating—the pets of the people that live there and this is what's happening in our country," Trump said.

Debate moderator David Muir debunked Trump's claim, noting that local officials said the story was untrue. Trump refused to accept the correction and insisted he had seen "people on television" verifying the story.

Immediately following the debate, Vance told CNN that he had "heard from a number of constituents" on the issue and had "both first-hand and second-hand reports saying this stuff is happening."

After the story became national and international news, the city received bomb threats to Springfield schools, hospitals, city hall and threats were made against city officials.

But Trump refused to denounce the bomb threats at Springfield. "I don't know what happened with the bomb threats," he told reporters in Las Vegas, Nevada, on Sept. 14. When a reporter asked him if he denounced the bomb threats, Trump replied, "I know that it's been taken over by illegal migrants and that's a terrible thing that happened."

Sept. 15 on CNN, Vance rejected claims that he was to blame for bomb threats, school cancellations and harassment of Haitians. He justified his statements about the rumors, saying he was just trying to bring attention to the problems in Springfield and other places impacted by immigrants. "If I have to create stories so that the American media actually pays attention to the sufferings of the American people, then that's what I'm going to do," he said.

It should be a no-brainer for Trump and Vance to denounce bomb threats, but here we are. Instead, Vance on Sept. 16 complained after a gunman was found set up on Trump's golf course in Florida, "no one has tried to kill Kamala Harris in the last couple of months, and two people now have tried to kill Donald Trump in the last couple of months."

This is merely one more episode demonstrating why neither Trump nor Vance belong anywhere near the White House. And a vote in a swing state for anybody but Kamala Harris empowers Trump.

Electing Kamala Harris and Tim Walz at the top of the ballot is merely the first step in keeping our democracy. Vote blue down the ballot. Democrats have a good chance of regaining the House majority, but they face a challenge in keeping a Senate majority, which will be crucial in restoring balance to federal courts.

Democrats have a narrow 51-49 majority in the Senate, but that includes four independent senators who usually vote with the Democrats. Joe Manchin (W.Va), one of the independents, is not seeking re-election and is expected to be succeeded by Republican Gov. Jim Justice.

Democrats need to win open seats in Arizona, Michigan and Maryland and protect targeted incumbent Democrats in Montana, Nevada, Ohio, Pennsylvania and Wisconsin. They can't lose another seat.

Among targeted Democrats, Sen. Jon Tester is seeking his fourth term in Montana, but the state has gotten a lot redder in the past 20 years, as Trump won it by 16 points in 2020. Tester faces a tough challenge from newcomer Tim Sheehy (R), a former Navy SEAL and businessman with the wealth to finance his campaign, as well as Trump's backing. The *Cook Political Report* rates it leaning Republican.

Sen. Sherrod Brown, a progressive supporter of working-class voters, is seeking a fourth term in Ohio against Bernie Moreno, a former car dealer and immigrant from Colombia who grew up in Florida and has amassed a fortune that can self-fund his campaign. He was not the Ohio GOP establishment's choice but had Trump's support (and agrees with Trump's anti-immigrant rhetoric). *CPR* rates the race a tossup.

In Nevada, Sen. Jacky Rosen (D) faces a challenge from Sam Brown (R), a West Point graduate who was burned and left scarred by a roadside bomb in Afghanistan in 2008. Brown lost a Republican primary for the Texas House in 1914. He lost a Republican primary for the Senate in 2022. *CPR* rates the race as leaning Democratic.

In Pennsylvania, David McCormick, former hedge fund CEO, is challenging Sen. Bob Casey. McCormick ran for the Senate in 2022 but lost the Republican primary to Dr. Ehmet Oz. McCormick is stressing that he grew up in Pennsylvania and has a house in Pittsburgh, and is trying to tie Casey to the Biden-Harris administration on the border and inflation, but Sen. Casey is an institution and will be hard to beat. *Cook Political Report* rates the race as leaning Democratic.

In Arizona, where Sen. Kyrsten Sinema is departing, Rep. Ruben Gallego, a progressive Democrat with Marine combat experience and a Harvard degree, faces Kari Lake, a former TV news anchor who now mocks the "fake news media" and is a favorite of Trump's MAGA movement, who lost her race for governor in 2022 and claims the Democrat, now Gov. Katie Hobbs, stole the election. The race is rated leaning Democratic.

In Wisconsin, Sen. Tammy Baldwin (D) faces a challenge from Eric Hovde, the chairman and chief executive of Sunwest Bank, a \$2.8 billion commercial lender based in Utah. Hovde has a \$7 million home in Laguna Beach, Calif. The race is rated leaning Democratic.

Maryland normally is reliably blue but Larry Hogan, a moderate Republican former governor, is running against Angela Alsobrooks, the Prince George's County executive, in the race to succeed retiring Sen. Ben Cardin (D). The race is rated likely Democratic.

In Michigan, with retirement of Debbie Stabenow (D), Rep. Elissa Slotkin (D), faces former Rep. Mike Rogers (R). The race is rated a tossup.

Democrats also hope to upset incumbents in Florida, where former Rep. Debbie Mucarsel-Powell (D) is taking on Sen. Rick Scott, and Texas, where Rep. Colin Allred (D) is challenging Ted Cruz. Polls show both races tightening. Keep hope alive. —JMC

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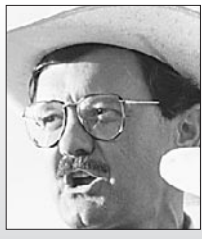
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Another political court delivers for Trump

Cover illustration by Dolores Cullen

JIM HIGHTOWER



Health care profiteers trying to privatize county-owned nursing homes faced local opposition, so they joined with right-wing county officials.

The Battle of Baraboo — Privatizer Greed v. Seniors' Health Care

Baraboo, Wisconsin, is known as the former home of the Ringling Bros. Circus' headquarters. But even that extravaganza of acrobats and clowns could not surpass the dazzling tent show playing out in Baraboo in September, starring the Sauk County Board of Supervisors. Only ... you couldn't have seen it, because the tent was zipped tight to keep the public out.

The Baraboo spectacle is one of several now playing across the Badger State, produced by health care profiteers trying to privatize county-owned nursing homes. These locally controlled public entities get 5-star ratings and are treasured by families in rural Wisconsin — so people overwhelmingly oppose privatization. Thus, to somersault over local democracy, corporate tricksters have joined with right-wing county officials to impose autocratic control.

Back in Baraboo, for example, people lined up to speak against any move by supervisors to sell the Sauk County Health Care Center. But terms of the sale had already been negotiated in secret, supervisors had decreed that the buyer would not be revealed until after the sale was approved, and the board's discussion about the sale was held in closed session.

Adding to the mayhem, Wisconsin's Republican nominee for U.S. Senate astonished people by declaring that old people in nursing homes should not even be allowed to vote, since they "only have five, six months life expectancy."

Crazy, yet the right-wing's Baraboo sell-out succeeded, right? Not so fast. One, any maneuver affecting the county budget requires a two-thirds vote of supervisors — not the bare majority this clown trick got. And two, while devious supervisors arrogantly blocked the democratic will of the people, feisty locals are not surrendering to corporate greed and devious politicians. The Battle of Baraboo continues! Stay tuned!

How 'Wonderful' is Pom, Fiji Water and the Wonderful Company?

If you name your \$4 billion food conglomerate "The Wonderful Company," you probably should strive extra hard not to let it become the horrible company.

This outfit spends a fortune painting itself as an environmentally sensitive purveyor of healthy products — like its "POM" brand of pomegranate juice and its bottled "Fiji Water." Moreover, its billionaire owners, Stewart and Lynda Resnick, have marketed themselves as generous philanthropists and powerhouse donors to the Democratic Party.

Wonderful. But the corporation's rap sheet includes false advertising, hogging of the public's scarce water supplies, massive fossil fuel pollution and — most abhorrent — exploitation of the low-paid farmworkers who produce the crops that enrich the Resnicks.

Stewart, hailed as "the wealthiest farmer in the US," has been spending lavishly on high-dollar lawyers and lobbyists, furiously fighting the United Farm Workers, who're seeking fair wages, decent treatment and simple respect from him. Worse, the politically connected land baron is going all out to bust the entire union by pushing activist

judges to outlaw California's "card check" system. This is a democratic process enabling widely dispersed farm laborers to vote in unionization elections.

By trying to kill it, Stewart is engaged in a massive voter suppression effort to deny a smidgeon of justice to poorly paid oppressed workers. It's a raw power play by Stewart and his brotherhood of billionaire agribusiness barons to further enrich themselves by taking away hard-won fair labor laws — and re-subjugating workers to the autocratic whims of owners.

What's wrong with the Resnicks? They're fabulously rich and their company is enormously profitable. Yet they're trying to nickel and dime one of the hardest-working and poorly treated groups of workers in America. Nothing wonderful about that ... or them.

Why Are We Letting Corporate Profiteers Write America's Farm and Food Policy?

A farmer was asked what he'd do if he won a million-dollar lottery. "Well," he said, "I guess I'd just keep farming 'til the money runs out."

Trying to make a living as a farmer is not for the fainthearted. You have to take out high-interest loans from cold-eyed bankers to put in a crop and buy supplies. Then you're also at the mercy of everything from bugs to monopolistic middlemen. And here's a cruel twist: If you defy the odds and produce a great crop, you lose money!

This is happening right now. With unusually good weather this year, corn and soybean harvests are expected to set records. But this abundance creates a market glut, allowing middlemen to knock down prices paid to farmers. A bushel of Illinois corn, for example, costs farmers \$4.30 to produce, but they're only getting \$3.70 for it.

Meanwhile, the cost of such basics as seed, fertilizer and tractors is skyrocketing. High costs coupled with low crop prices means farmers' income is expected to drop by 25% this year.

You might call this good-crop, bad-price phenomenon "ironic." But it's deliberate — an inevitable product of America's perverse agricultural policy that pushes farmers to overproduce in order to keep commodity prices low for giant processors and retailers. Little known fact: Our national "farm policy" is not written by farmers but by corporate lobbyists, lawyers and economists — people who couldn't run a watermelon stand if we gave them the melons and had the highway patrol flag down the customers for them.

That has got to change. To join an effort to demand a farm bill written by and for farmers, consumers, workers and our environment, go to: FarmAid.org/Take-Action.

Why Is It That Big Shot Leaders Never Look Around To See If Anyone's Following?

It never ceases to amaze me that corporate, political, media, religious and other power elites routinely speak and act in the name of the masses — without ever consulting us hoi polloi.

This disconnect is the source of a lot of the arrogance, stupidity and inequality afflicting our society.

Consider the huge, very troubling takeover of U.S. Steel by the Japanese conglomerate Nippon. This buyout was being quietly hustled to conclusion by both giants. But — Boom! — suddenly the deal hit a steel wall, specifically the furious opposition of America's United Steelworkers union. The corporate elites had smugly cut a backroom deal without ever mentioning it to the union! Thousands of workers had their livelihoods arrogantly treated as irrelevant. So, the union just said uh-uh, and the executive boneheads' big buyout went from done to life support.

The stupidity gene has also embedded itself in the brains of Christian authoritarians. They are hellbent on forcing their

holier-than-thou church dogma on all of us — without, of course, asking whether we want to be "saved" by them. So here comes one Ryan Walters, Oklahoma's hyper-Christian superintendent of public schools. In a Burning Bush moment, Ryan felt God ordained him to decree that every classroom must henceforth display a Bible, and all teachers must alter their lesson plans to teach from it — even math teachers!

But a funny thing happened to this unelected flaming theocrat: Local school boards and teachers simply ignored him. Ryan, brimming with ego, had not bothered to consult parents, school boards, teachers

Trump's Voters Deserve Demeaning

By FRANK LINGO

New York Times columnist Nicholas Kristof is a two-time Pulitzer Prize winner and has written eloquently on human rights for many years.

But recently Kristof said Democrats shouldn't demean Trump voters. Sorry, Nick, I disagree. My view is also at odds with former Presidents Barack Obama and Bill Clinton, who said we should meet voters where they are.

No, thanks, I don't want to go there. And I ain't no elite limousine liberal — I work for a living, even in my old age. Kristof criticizes the Dem elites for demeaning the Trumpers over their grievance of being economically disadvantaged. But aren't the majority of Trump voters White American men, the world's most privileged socio-economic demographic?

Trump's rise to fame is telling about how he gained his fanatical following. He first got popular with his hit TV show, "The Apprentice," where he was an obnoxious boss. It was entertaining for some to watch a billionaire bully belittle folks.

Next, Trump launched his huge birther hoax, using Fox News and Twitter to claim he was about to uncover that Obama was not an American citizen. Trump didn't originate it but he promoted that racist lie relentlessly. The lies about Obama had been spread by conspiracist 9/11 "truthers" during the 2008 campaign and then debunked. Trump's insistent skill at skullduggery showed millions of racists he was on their side, the White side.

If we thought America moved beyond racism with Obama's election, the 2010 midterms jerked us back to reality because Tea Party Republicans won control of Congress.

That's when Trump turned to discrediting Obama. Let's underscore the meaning of the word trump. The Random House Dictionary defines it (after a card-game reference) as trump — verb. To devise deceitfully.

Devising deceitfully is Donald's life work, but I bet even he was surprised at the devotion of his cult. In 2015, after four years of the Birther BS, Trump had a prefab base of voters as he ran for the presidency. His popularity derived mostly from bullying on "The Apprentice" and lying about Obama's citizenship.

So, was that when Trump introduced plans to bring back manufacturing jobs for White Americans? Not really. He mostly attacked illegal immigrants, calling Mexicans rapists and murderers. He railed how he would build a wall and make Mexico pay for it.

Trump's doubled-down racism caused his campaign to catch fire. He soon led all Republican candidates by 20 to 30 percentage points, and he swept the nomination. His Republican rivals knew exactly what kind of person he was. Senator Marco Rubio called him a con man and a fraud. Senator Lindsay Gra-

ham called him a kook. Senator Ted Cruz called Trump a pathological liar and said morality does not exist for him. Those things are true but almost all those rivals would eventually bow before him.

However, his dictatorial theatrics did get the attention of one major group: Oklahoma's GOP lawmakers are now investigating his "rogue behavior."

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ham called him a kook. Senator Ted Cruz called Trump a pathological liar and said morality does not exist for him. Those things are true but almost all those rivals would eventually bow before him.

In the 2016 election, Trump offered some phantasmagorical plans for the economy, complete with grievance pandering that apparently appealed to his now colossal cult. These plans had no relation to reality but that wasn't their purpose. The economic theories Trump told were tall tales harking back to days of yore, supposedly to make America great again. Such nostalgic lies lured traditional Republicans who weren't really racist but wouldn't vote for Democrats.

It worked. Now after a Trump presidency when he committed crimes by the dozens and avoided accountability, most of his voters are sticking with him. They believe the 2020 election was stolen, which was just another lie he made up. His voters don't seem to mind that he incited a mob to attack the United States Congress, causing deaths to several people and injuries to at least 140 police officers.

Some think Trump handled the economy well, despite the Covid recession with millions of jobs lost. He caused it with his rabid ranting that prevented the CDC experts from guiding the nation to trust the vaccine. This dereliction of duty contributed to the deaths of over a million Americans.

How is it possible to show respect to Trump's voters? Most of them believe any crazy lies he conjures up. Most of them know he's racist and they like it. Most of them don't mind that he's promising to be a dictator.

This year Trump has quadrupled down on his racist rhetoric with Nazi phrases. He called his political opponents vermin. He said the immigrants are poisoning our blood and he'll deport millions of them. His language is nakedly hateful toward people of color. In the face of such cruelty, no one with a conscience can claim the economy as an excuse to vote for him.

This election is not a debate about different styles of governing, like traditional Democratic and Republican policies. It's about whether we have any decency in our society or any democracy at all.

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Voter Fraud Claims Are Fraudulent

MAGA Christian Nationalist House Speaker Mike Johnson is trying to hold up the federal budget by demanding an amendment requiring that only US citizens can vote in elections.

Really, Mike? Straight out of the Department of Needless Duplication and Inherent Redundancy. Johnson's political stunt ignores the fact that such legislation is already on the books. The Illegal Immigration Reform and Responsibility Act of 1996 clearly prohibits noncitizens from casting ballots in federal elections. In addition, no state allows noncitizens to vote.

There is very limited noncitizen voting in local elections. The District of Columbia allows it in non-federal elections. San Francisco permits parents and guardians to cast ballots in school board elections. Maryland and Vermont give a few towns municipal elections privileges. That's all, folks.

Illegal noncitizen voting in federal elections carries fines and up to one year in prison with possible deportation. In Florida, any voter fraud is a third degree felony punishable by a \$5,000 fine and up to five years in prison. These regulations are printed at the sign-in desk and in the voter instructions for mail-in ballots.

The ultra-right wing Heritage Foundation, author of the Trump-inspired Project 2025, conducted its own investigation of noncitizen voting between 2003-23 in an attempt to uncover massive noncitizen voting. All they came up with were 24 cases nationwide, a paltry number compared to the millions of votes cast, hardly a reason for further crackdown on voter fraud that is itself a fraud.

Threats of fines, incarceration, and deportation are ample deterrence to insure compliance with current federal and state noncitizen voting laws. Johnson's combination photo-ops and sound bites are nothing more than MAGA grandstanding to sow further seeds of discord with their Unwashed Masses about the fantasy deep state conspiracy propaganda claiming Trump won in 2020. His 63 court cases then resulted in 62 defeats, with the one win overturned on appeal. Even the 2024 Chicago White Sox beat that.

Mr. Johnson, your chicanery makes you as big a loser as Trump. Do your homework and act like you represent the GOP of "Honest Abe," Teddy Roosevelt, and "Ike" instead of their polar opposite. Our country deserves better leadership than your "fake news."

Main source—Bipartisan Policy Center (2024)
ED ENGLER, *Sebring, Fla.*

Vance's Kin Won't Stand for Disrespecting Mamas

I was curious to see what was in the book, "Hillbilly Elegy," after J.D. Vance won his election. Watching the 2022 election returns, I was pleased to see the Democrats winning seats. I was disappointed to see Marjorie T. Greene and Lauren Boebert win their campaigns. But what on Earth was in that book that got J.D. Vance elected? I ordered it from Powell's City of Books (Portland, Ore.).

Mostly, it impressed me as just White privilege pity pot. He complains again and again about his poverty as a child. But at one point he states that his mother's and his step-father's combined income was \$100,000 a year. He also relates that one or both of his uncles, his mother's brothers, are business owners. Now get this: One uncle, Uncle Pet, I think (not going back to look but the rest I remember pretty well), Uncle Pet is a business owner. One day a delivery truck arrives at Uncle Pet's place of business with a deliv-

ery. Uncle Pet accepts the delivery and then tells the driver to unload the delivery.

Here, the delivery man says, "Unload it yourself, son of a b*tch."

Now we say "son of a b*tch" every day, all the time, here in modern day America.

But Uncle Pet takes offense, tells the driver again to unload the truck, and the driver replies again, "Unload it yourself, son of a b*tch."

Now Uncle Pet does "what any rational businessman would do..." He yanks the driver from the delivery truck, beats him unconscious, then runs an electric saw up and down his body. The driver was hospitalized (ya think?) but didn't die.

J.D. Vance excused his uncle's ill-bred behavior by saying, "You just don't disrespect a man's mother" in the hills.

And this is the book that won J.D. Vance his election in Ohio, I think.

XAVIER SMALL, *Linn County, Ore.*

Hillbilly Nightmare

Now that Trump has chosen "hillbilly" JD Vance as his running mate, I can't help thinking of a quote from Roseanne Barr when she and then-husband Tom Arnold were popular in the 1990s: "We're your worst nightmare. White trash with money."

WILLIAM AMEEN, *Greensboro, N.C.*

Pray for Kamala Harris

We have to pray for Kamala Harris to save us and our country (a true "Joan of Arc"). She has picked a worthy V.P.

Trump voters are voting for an idiot. What does it say about them? He is planning a despotic totalitarian regime, not our democracy!

If it wasn't for Joe Biden, Trump would have taken over our government, but he was reduced to lying about losing and annoying the judiciary, filing over 50 claims. They did not appeal, but who knows with his puppet SCOTUS.

Talk about older, he fits that category, also. If his voters put him in the White House, they will pay the price.

RICHARD B. HYMAN, *Stillwater, N.J.*

Reformers Must Think Strategically

Re: Ralph Nader's review of Public Citizen's 10-Point Reform Plan ["Public Citizen's Robert Weissman Calls for Ten Crucial Public Congressional Hearings," 9/15/24 *TPP*], the first point, getting the big money out of American elections, only requires a Democratic Congress and settling the Supreme Court's hash. A tall order, but it can be done.

The other nine points will be trickier, because they all involve doing things that big companies and billionaires do not want to do. So what will they do? They will put up stakes and go to some other countries that will let

them get away with what they are doing. Therefore, reformers must think strategically and get ahead of this problem. First, you have to close off the boltholes.

As for the problem of companies who "move production" to other countries, you will have to revise all trade treaties (they are treaties, not "deals") so as to make it more difficult, not easier, to do this. You do this by shifting the focus to the condition of manufacturing bench workers and garment workers in those other countries. You have to demand that this scandalous abuse be regulated and cleaned up, and you revise trade treaties to reflect these new requirements.

Americans constantly complain about jobs going to other countries, but Americans show a marked lack of any concern or awareness about the workers in those other countries. If you are going to be ignorant and selfish, then you are going to get what you get.

MARIA ROSE, *Indianapolis, Ind.*

Shaggy Burger Story in Springfield

You know, my wife, myself and our dog, Petey, recently took a trip to Springfield, Ohio, to visit some of our friends. Unfortunately, on our second day there, our dog went missing. We tried for the next several days to find him but were unsuccessful and had to leave without him.

On our way out of town, we stopped at a local Haitian restaurant to get some hamburgers for the trip home. Then, a couple miles down the road, I bit into my hamburger and felt a sharp pain on one of my back molars. I then spit out my food and found my dog's metal rabies vaccination tag sitting amongst the pieces of burger, lettuce and tomato and bun that I had spit out onto my hand.

Shocked by what had happened, we drove back to the restaurant but found it had been closed by the city health department.

Perplexed, I went to the office of the City Health Department and talked to a gentleman named Ray Bees, who said he could not comment until the investigation of the restaurant was completed.

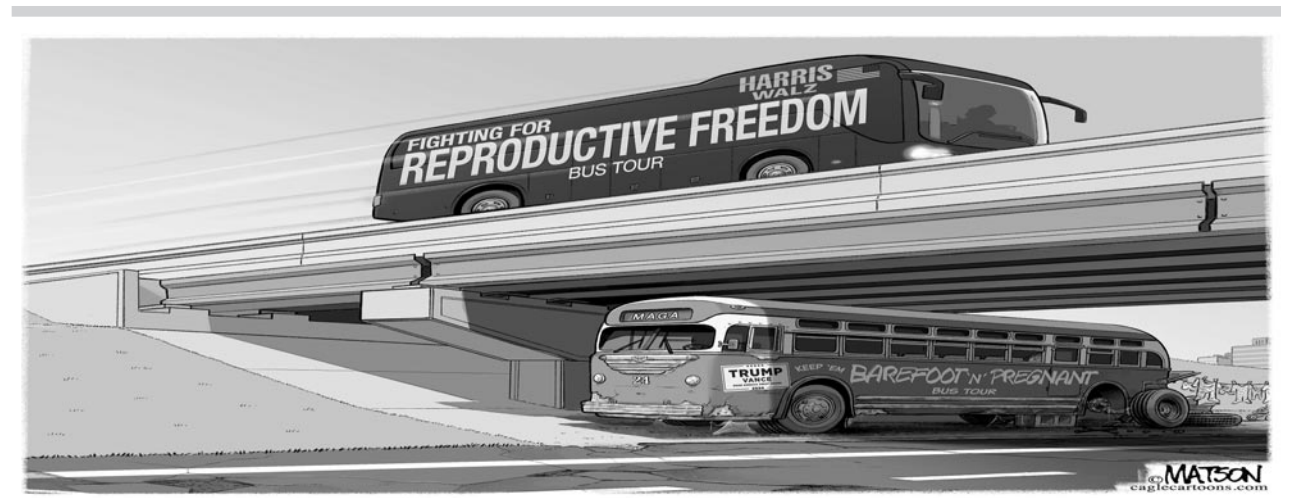
Then, sadly, we drove back home and the next morning I had surgery to repair my tooth, which cost me \$2,187.66.

One last thought. If you believed this letter, vote for Trump. He's your guy and you're going to hear another constant stream of his B.S. for the next four years of his presidency, as you did for the four years of his last presidency.

Good luck!
MIKE EKLUND, *LaPorte, Ind.*

[Editor's Note: As far as we can tell, no pets were injured in the production of this letter.]

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Of Violence and Betrayal in Ohio

By DON ROLLINS

As with every state in the union, Ohio has been scene to tragic violence. From historic attempts to erase indigenous peoples, to deadly race riots, to the unprovoked murders of four Kent State students, physical violence is part of my home state's complicated narrative.

But as is also the case with the other 49 states, not every sin against Ohio's greater good has been manifested with a bullet or a hanging tree. More - exponentially more - have been systemic acts of violence brought to bear by compromised executives, legislatures and high courts. (Read the incessant Republican attempts to redraw district maps, and disenfranchise mi-

nority voters.)

Yet sometimes Ohio's violence is inflicted from without, as evidenced by Donald Trump's otherworldly presidential debate performance Sept. 10. Melting down midway through the debacle, the former leader of the free world cut loose with a now infamous meme-rant about Haitian immigrants feasting on respectable folks' kitties up in Springfield.

The fallout for Springfield's 59,000 inhabitants was almost instant. Within hours local law enforcement and city officials were swamped with bomb and mass shooting threats, some allegedly from foreign sources. Unable to distinguish the empty from the truly ominous messages, schools, hospitals, government buildings and a university were closed. Nearly every sector of the city's infrastructure was impacted or interrupted, costing Springfield millions in unnecessary spending. One longtime resident likened the scene to COVID 19's onset, frightening and

confusing. But with the threat of bombs.

All because the Republicans' unmoored, unrestrained candidate for president regurgitated a loony internet quip in front of 67.1 million viewers.

But credit is due to at least one Ohio Republican willing to call out Trump's calousness, Gov. Mike DeWine. Although not the moderate progressives often describe (he's given full throated support for the Republican-friendly gerrymandering described above) DeWine responded with \$2.5 million in immediate relief, dispatched dozens of state troopers trained in sweeping for explosives, and is actively lobbying for federal funding to address the longer-term consequences.

Still, there is no silver lining here on the ground, only the specter of one of our own - vice presidential pick, J.D. Vance - selling us out in the service of a second Trump presidency, and his own political future.

When offered the chance for a partial

pivot, Vance had no love for the city less than an hour from his boyhood home. What he had was a cold justification for the violence rained down on his own constituents:

"The media didn't care about the carnage wrought by these policies until we turned it into a meme about cats, and that speaks to the media's failure to care about what's going on in these communities. If we have to meme about it to get the media to care, we're going to keep on doing it..."

Trump's verbal violence toward Springfield is both shameful and harmful. Shameful, that a would-be president's party continues to adore him despite this episode; harmful, that the verbal violence he and his Ohioan running mate espouse only raises the stakes for something far worse.

Don Rollins is a retired Unitarian Universalist minister in Jackson, Ohio.
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Getting Rid of Trump Is One Thing. But Don't Forget the Downballot Races



A few elections ago, social media had little if any impact on our voting behavior. Today, the barrier between the Internet and real life is disappearing.

Well, here we are—Crunch Time! It's become a drag to think about/listen to/research/opine on the distance between Rs and Ds, and how massive the differences have become. If I have to read the words "we are a divided nation" again in an Op-Ed I'll scream and my poor suffering husband will put his headphones back on and dive into TV drama.

As always, it's up to us, and the polls are moving. I'm not seeing nearly the number of Trump flags that I saw in 2020. Back in February, during the lead-up to the Super Bowl, I wrote about the effect that a Taylor Swift endorsement could have. Swift has 184 million followers on Instagram, and I have no idea how many on other apps. One friend we'll call A said my column was a waste of time (!) and I just laughed. And, yes, A and I remain friends on Facebook.

And friends in real life also, I might add. A few elections ago — or even in the last election—social media had little if any impact on our voting behavior. Today, the barrier between internet and real life is disappearing. We must hope that fact check experts are given a place at future debate tables. Any candidate that repeats internet rumors should get an instant "You're fired!" Both sides are fighting for oxygen and the sane among us need to think about how we got here and how we can avoid it in the future. It is, as I said, up to us. My county is a good example of how government can swing over: For decades voters filled our courthouse and statehouse with people who called themselves "public servants." The first (and so far, only) female speaker of the Missouri House of Representatives in Jefferson City was a Democrat from our county. She retired in 2001 without having mentored a successor. What happened to her party? Rs had people running for office that didn't deserve to win. But the old Democ-

rat guard didn't replace themselves with credible choices. Today, this sounds like business as usual, when the powerful refuse to step down and let new generations have a chance. In the case of my county, old candidates ran unopposed in primaries but they didn't have anything to offer; if they retired, they didn't help new folks learn the ropes.

At the same time, the Rs gained power by aligning themselves with the new mega churches that were growing by leaps and bounds. Traditional small churches with their Hammond organs and 200-year-old music lost population as the mega-churches added rock 'n' roll, coffee shops and gymnasiums. Their messages became competitive. If you joined the right church, they seemed to say, you'll be one of the souls swept up in the rapture. There was no more community building.

And, then, almost imperceptibly, the born-again message morphed into the MAGA message. My charismatic friends left off speaking in tongues and slipped into Donald Trump's shiny world. The change was incremental at first and it's possible that nobody really noticed it happening. It was easy to go with the flow. How many millions of tiny social changes could we point to that grow into similar massive landslides?

Now the pendulum is swinging back. First notice, for me, was when I volunteered to sit at the D booth during one of our county's many summer street fairs. To the surprise of all us, there was no R booth at all. At the same time, our local newspaper kept publishing pro-Trump op-eds. Joe Biden was still running, remember, and the D's two an-

swers to the op-eds were (1) Trump's a liar, a felon and (2) Biden has experience. Those were not winning arguments, and kind of lame, but it's all we had. We could see how old both candidates are and we didn't have much more to say. No energy.

Then came Kamala. Nobody thinks she's exactly what the country needs, but we agree she has promise. We know that women and minorities will be better off with Kamala in the White House and that's a plus. And Kamala realizes Benjamin Netanyahu is off the rails but at this time she can't leave Biden's team. It's an impossible situation but at least she realizes the complexity. Old Joe and Old Donald were simply reactive, leaping to the side of Israel like mice after cheese. No clue that the trap was spring-loaded.

Joan Walsh, writing for *The Nation*, observed, "On climate, trade, free college, student debt and the filibuster, she pressed for better policies before Biden and in many cases she calls for going farther..." So, now, if we want to see possibility, it's up to us. And Taylor Swift. But mostly us.

Perhaps the main thing about the next election is where the down-ballot races go. That's where the future is hanging out. To give those kids a boost, well, as I said, it's up to us.

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

DISPATCHES

STUDY: DEBUNKING TRUMP LIES MAKES HIS BASE BELIEVE HIM MORE.

A new study published in the Harvard Kennedy School's *Misinformation Review* (9/11) found that fact-checks of lies from Donald Trump are more likely to make his diehard supporters believe in his falsehoods, Oliver Willis noted at DailyKos (9/23). Researchers showed people Twitter (now X) posts from Trump that feature lies about election fraud, along with a note that said his claims were "disputed."

"Trump voters with high political knowledge judged election misinformation as more truthful when Trump's claims included Twitter's disputed tags compared to a control condition," the report revealed.

The study, conducted by University of Minnesota Duluth professor John Blanchar and Swarthmore College professor Catherine Norris, surveyed 1,078 Americans in late 2020.

Blanchar told *The Guardian*, "Instead of having no impact, the tags seemed counterproductive, reinforcing misinformation among this group."

Lies and misinformation are central to Trump's 2024 campaign. He has painted what the *Washington Post* described as an "imaginary and frightening world," touching on several conservative obsessions.

Some of Trump's go-to falsehoods:

- Democrats support "executing" babies after birth.
- Crime is so high that people "can't walk across the street to get a loaf of bread. You get shot. You get mugged. You get raped."
- Haitian migrants are "eating the dogs... eating the cats."

In a story on Trump's fake allegations, a 59-year-old Trump supporter told the *Post*, "I don't think he does stretch the truth," and said the stories about eating pets was "an absolute truth."

Many of Trump's fantastical claims can be traced back to right-wing media, particularly Fox News. Right-wing media has promoted election lies, falsehoods about LGBTQ+ people, and health care misinformation, among many other topics, while also running interference for Trump and the Republican Party on issues like immigration, guns and abortion.

Much of the audience for this distorted coverage also constitutes the core of Trump's political support.

The study showed different results for people who didn't support Trump in 2020.

"Although [Joe] Biden voters were largely unaffected by these soft moderation tags, third-party and non-voters were slightly less likely to judge election misinformation as true," the report's authors wrote.

The disparity in perceptions echo findings from a September poll from Civiqs for DailyKos. A majority of registered voters (54%) said they thought Trump was "weird," as did 51% of those assessing his running mate, Ohio Sen. J.D. Vance. Most voters did not think Vice President Kamala Harris or her running mate, Minnesota Gov. Tim Walz, were "weird."

While majorities of Democrats and independents found the Republican ticket to be "weird," Republican respondents were the outliers, with 87% percent saying Trump was not weird and 83% saying the same of Vance.

Despite Trump's behavior during the campaign and since he became a public figure, his voters continue to stand by their man.

CONGRESSIONAL LEADERS ANNOUNCE SHORT-TERM SPENDING DEAL AFTER SPEAKER DROPS KEY MAGA DEMAND.

Congressional leaders Sept. 22 said they reached an agreement on legislation to fund the federal government for three more months, averting a shutdown and stoking right-wing ire and allegations that Republican House Speaker Mike Johnson "caved" to Democrats by dropping a key demand by his far-right colleagues, Brett Wilkins noted at CommonDreams (9/23).

According to *The New York Times*, the deal, which extends federal appropriations through Dec. 20, includes an additional \$231 million to help the beleaguered Secret Service protect candidates during the upcoming presidential election and into next year. According to the Treasury Department, the United States has spent about \$6.3 trillion in fiscal 2024, which ends Sept. 30.

The timeline of the deal allows Congress to sidestep a government shutdown during the campaign season, but it all but ensures that spending disputes will dominate the lame-duck period between the election and the inauguration of a new Congress in January.

"While I am pleased bipartisan negotiations quickly led to a government funding agreement free of cuts and poison pills, this same agreement could have been done two weeks ago," Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer (D-N.Y.) said in a statement applauding the continuing resolution. "Instead, Speaker Johnson chose to follow the MAGA way and wasted precious time."

Far-right Republican lawmakers had pushed Johnson to demand a proof-of-citizenship requirement for voter registration as part of any deal. However, Johnson dropped his demand in order to secure an agreement, drawing attacks from MAGA Republicans—some of whom called on the speaker to resign or face an ouster similar to that of former Speaker Kevin McCarthy (R-Calif.) nearly a year ago.

Meanwhile, some more moderate Republicans praised Johnson.

son. David Frum, a commentator and former speechwriter for then-President George W. Bush, said on social media that Johnson "bested" former President Trump, the 2024 GOP nominee.

Democrats also raked Johnson. MeidasTouch Network editor-in-chief Ron Filipkowski said, "Just as I predicted, weak, feckless, and incompetent Mike Johnson has just surrendered again to the Democrats after Trump forced him into a public humiliation." "Republicans can't govern," he added.

UNDER REPUBLICAN STATE LAWS, US BOOK BANS NEARLY TRIPLED LAST SCHOOL YEAR.

As Banned Books Week kicked off Sept. 23, a leading free expression group in the U.S. announced that the number of books that were pulled from shelves or "challenged" by right-wing groups and Republican lawmakers skyrocketed to at least 10,000 over the last year with state legislatures passing new censorship laws, Julia Conley noted at CommonDreams (9/23).

PEN America found that the number of banned books tripled from the 2022-23 school year, when it had been 3,362.

New laws passed in Iowa and Florida were major drivers of censorship in libraries and public schools in the last school year, with 8,000 instances of book bans in the two states.

Under Iowa's S.F. 496, which took effect in July 2023, all materials containing descriptions or depictions of a "sex act" were determined to not be "age-appropriate" for K-12 students. The state banned 14 books from 2021-23, but the strict censorship law—which also bans classroom discussions of LGBTQ+ issues and gender identity—"led to thousands of book bans during the 2023-2024 school year," said PEN.

Florida's H.B. 1069 also focuses heavily on books that contain "sexual conduct," and its statutory review process requires that books be pulled from shelves while the titles are

Continued on page 22



FROMA HARROP



Trump can bully House Republicans to do as he wants and he claims to support IVF. But he let the House kill a bill that would guarantee access to IVF.

Trump Probably Doesn't Give a Damn About IVF

Donald Trump said he wants the government or insurers to pay for in vitro fertilization treatments. For those lacking coverage, the American taxpayer would presumably pick up the entire cost.

Then, in mid-September, House Republicans blocked a bill that would have guaranteed a basic right — never mind who's paying — to IVF treatments across the nation. Seems like we have a bit of confusion here.

Trump can bully House Republicans to do as he wants. He got them to reject a bipartisan immigration bill that would have immediately brought order to the Southern border. The bill was so conservative, it offered Democrats no concessions on legalizing anyone.

Trump obviously wanted the border to remain chaotic as a campaign issue. And perhaps frustrated that President Joe Biden's subsequent executive order stopped the stampede, he's flogging the lie about pet-eating migrants.

On the issue of reproductive rights, Trump wants peak ambiguity.

His idea of socialized IVF treatments followed the public outcry over efforts in some states to ban them after the Dobbs decision left the matter of abortion to the states. While helping infertile couples have children, IVF also involves the destruction of embryos, thousands and thousands of them.

There is no inherent difference between an embryo formed the old-fashioned way and an embryo created through IVF.

And so those who hold that an embryo is a human being and destroying one is murder are being consistent in opposing IVF.

The political problem for Trump is twofold: One is that IVF is a popular solution for infertile couples, and the prospect of banning it is most unpopular. The other is that he is responsible for ending the constitutional right to an abortion, which is how we got here.

Trump may have thought that getting rid of *Roe v. Wade* — that is, making abortion a state-level issue — would be an elegant way of pleasing his “pro-life” supporters while leaving abortion accessible in the more liberal states. What it did, however, was energize anti-abortion activists.

Rather than regard the overturn of *Roe* as the finish line, many are treating it as the starting gate to ban abortion pills, certain contraceptives and IVF treatments. Some would restrict women's travel across state lines to end a pregnancy. (Nearly one in five women seeking an abortion are now going out of state for such care.)

Trump's game plan is to frustrate any intelligent guess on what access to reproductive care would look like in a second term. Hence, his proposal for socialized IVF. Hence, his letting the Republican House kill a bill guaranteeing access to IVF that he just said government should pay for.

A resident of Florida, Trump said he opposes his state's ban on abortion after six weeks, which is now being challenged in a ballot measure. He said six weeks is “too short.” The pro-life side exploded, as you would expect it to, so now Trump says he is voting to keep the six-week ban.

There's been much speculation about how Trump really feels about abortion or IVF. In all likelihood, he doesn't give a damn one way or another.

Such conversations are useless anyway. For Trump, keeping promises is not a high priority. His beleaguered Vice President Mike Pence has called Trump's whiffing and waffling a “slap in the face” to the millions of pro-life Americans who voted for him.

Trump's strategy is to change the subject to pet-eating and let his nasty sidekick Laura Loomer make ethnic slurs that move the headlines away from reproductive rights. And when he can't wriggle out of stating a position on abortion, he diverts attention into crazy lies about killing newborns.

The presidential campaign of 2024 will never be forgotten.

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

No Sir, We Slaughter Lots of Hogs But No Cats

By ART CULLEN

The debate camera zoomed in and cropped around Donald Trump's jowels, angry eyes and puckered lips: “They're eating the dogs! They're eating the cats!” Later, at a rally: “They're eating the geese! From the parks!”

Immigrants. Criminals. From insane asylums and such. Invading and preying.

Then bomb threats are made in Springfield, Ohio. The hate flies, the mayor pleads for mercy and understanding: The Haitian refugees, now a quarter of Springfield's 60,000 population, work hard and fill jobs vital to reviving a Rust Belt city. They're mortified.

It could have been Storm Lake. We've taken our share of abuse from distortions of *The City Beautiful* by outside interest groups over the years. Back in 1996, national TV ads using images from Flint, Mich., portrayed Storm Lake as a rotted-out haven for criminal aliens. Reality was that we were building new schools to accommodate immigrant families and remodeling city hall. We know what it's like to be the subject of false propaganda.

So here we go again: A fellow called from out of town Sept. 12. He said he heard from a friend that cats were being slaughtered in Storm Lake. He was serious.

Well look here. Storm Lake has an army of stray cats patrolling the lakeshore and pooping on the ballfields. This is also a town that is predominantly immigrant. What gives?

Geese? We got geese. Scout Park festers with gaggles. Fecal coli levels must be a fright at the beach. They leave their mark along the Lake Trail. The hunters are not good enough. We hired a man and a dog for awhile to try to keep the honkers off land and in the water. Noting can stop them now that we banned DDT. Thin the flock and feed the poor, I say.

We are in the throes of building a shelter for stray cats and dogs. A generous gift of \$400,000 has been received. Lake Animal Hospital has been overwhelmed with stray and neglected animals. The city council has been consumed of late discussing a trap, neuter and release program for the felines.

I wish somebody would eat my neighbor's dog when it barks non-stop all day long. It is lean and rangy but might work well in a soup. I hate the idea of cats killing gold finches at Sleepy Hollow by the lake.

The French eat horses. You might be cool with pork, but Muslims and Jews aren't. Hindus won't eat a cow. I can imagine that cat tastes like sheep so I will stay away. If you can eat a hog you can eat a dog.

Except, nobody is eating cats or dogs or geese in Springfield, Ohio, according to the police chief and mayor.

But there are Black people in town. Haitians.

J.D. Vance got Trump going with urban myth — actually, a pack of lies cooked up by a White supremacy group, and spread on social media — that Haitians in Springfield were hunting cats and dogs.

Trump doubled down on it during the debate, like a madman, and tripled down on it afterwards. He thinks that it's working because the base is eating it up.

No, I explained to the caller, we are inundated with cats. We do slaughter hogs and turkeys, I told the guy. The

people doing the hard work are immigrants. They eat well. Storm Lake has some of the best Mexican and Asian food you will find anywhere. Some of it is weird: tongue, stomach, tripe and stuff like that, everything but the squeal we like to say. Head cheese is weird, but people like it.

We've heard first-hand from Lao people of eating rats in refugee camps. Been there, done that, they say. They are not about to go for feral in Storm Lake when they can buy a pork loin pretty cheap.

The problem with racists is that they want you to think that Haitians with full-time jobs in Springfield would rather eat your cat than grill hamburgers with you. They want to set you against your Latino neighbor. The lies are told to keep Black people afraid and in their place, to keep the Latinos from joining a union, and to make people think that Asians are subversive. The whole notion is about consolidating power among the vested. Places like Springfield and Storm Lake are kept from reaching their potential so long as people are divided by a narrative of lies.

Truth is, nobody is eating cats in Storm Lake. I wish that nice lady would quit feeding them. I wish the neighbor dogs would quit barking. I wish that our neighbors could be citizens. I wish that those Haitians know that they are welcome here. Dominicans and Cubans, too. Tai Dam and Hmong. We're all Americans in Springfield and Storm Lake. I'll just have what they're eating.

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.

'Come Now, Let Us Reason Together'

By ALAN GUEBERT

It's easy to see why Eligio “Kika” de la Garza was elected to 16 consecutive terms in the House of Representatives (1965 to 1997) and served his final seven (1981 through 1994) as chairman of the wide-sweeping and often unruly House Ag Committee.

“I'm a reasonable person,” the south Texan, born just two miles from Mexico, liked to say, “I can get along with anyone.”

And he mostly did, I once heard him explain to a crowd of farm leaders in a packed Washington, D.C. meeting, because his guiding legislative principle was “from the Good Book itself, Isaiah 1:18: ‘Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord.’”

It was a fitting code for the easy-going but tough-as-nails de la Garza. In the last 90 years, there have been 18 Farm Bills written and passed by Congress. Kika had a role in seven and chaired the process on three: the 1981, 1985, and 1990 bills.

He was a legislative plow horse — he got things done — and, for a Democrat, was

decidedly middle of the road, even conservative. For example, while he fought for food stamps, voting rights, and sugar price supports, he also favored balanced budgets, free trade, and prayer in classrooms.

Most of these positions would not win any Democrat a House leadership post today.

And yet he went unchallenged as Ag Committee chairman for 14 years and three tough Farm Bill negotiations because he was “reasonable.” Politics, he said at that same farmer meeting, “is the art of the possible. The nation succeeds when politics succeed.”

And most everyone—farmers, the nation, Congress—did succeed under his leadership. *The New York Times* headline for his March 15, 2017, obituary would have met with his approval: “Kika de la Garza, Texas Congressman and Farmers' Ally, Dies at 89.”

Few on today's House Ag Committee stand out as “let's-sit-down-and-reason” leaders like Kika. Part of it is the blood-spilling tenor of today's winner-take-all politics; the goal is to win without compromise.

Another key part of it is that most committee members don't know beans from buttermilk when it comes to farm and food policy. Farm visits are for a selfie on a combine or to tout Big Ag fantasies like manure digesters and carbon pipelines.

That means most are easily swayed by special interests pushing special projects and by AgBiz's never-ending lament of too much regulation and too little income support.

The result often is legislation written by the permanent, unelected government—the farm and commodity groups and agbiz lobbyists—and not the elected government.

In the past five years, recently noted Karen Perry Stillerman, the deputy director of the Food and Environment Program at the Union of Concerned Scientists, “Agribusiness interests have spent a huge sum of money—\$523 million—lobbying Congress...”

And the money has bought what it wanted and what most American eaters and taxpayers don't want: a heavily-subsidized, commodity-driven farm policy focused on fading export markets, a slowly drying up ethanol market, and gazillion-dollar carbon schemes that won't save the environment in a million years.

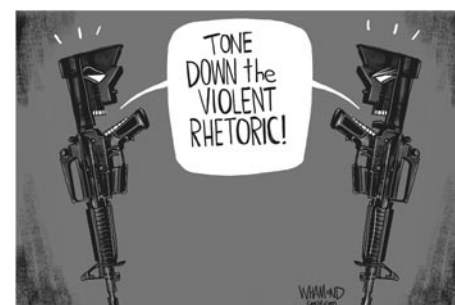
Now Big Ag's big dogs are whimpering again, worried that today's Farm Bill — already extended one-year and facing another extension — will hang fire through November's general election. The delay risks the Republicans losing control of the House and with it, the big dogs their influence on any 2025 Farm Bill.

If so, their failure is emblematic of a

Congress that bloviates more than legislates; where committees hold hearings and no one listens; where it can't pass a bill, let alone an annual budget, on time and within its means.

In short, Congress is broken and only good will and reasonable people will fix it.

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



GENE LYONS



The Trump cult has gone downright medieval on undocumented immigrants. Trump himself calls them 'vermin' poisoning the blood of Americans.

Trump Campaign's Newest Nonsense Constitutes a Blood Libel

The formal term for what the Trump Cult has visited upon the Haitian residents of Springfield, Ohio, is "blood libel." Although foreigners and outsiders have doubtless been blamed for everything from droughts and floods to outbreaks of disease throughout human history, conspiracists have traditionally blamed Jews.

Historians generally trace the term to the year 1144 in Norwich, England, when the corpse of a 12-year-old child was found. As part of a campaign to establish the dead boy as a martyr and the church where he

was buried as a (profitable) pilgrimage site, an enterprising monk wrote a series of tracts blaming local Jews for his ritual murder.

Supposedly, Jews needed the blood of innocent Christian children to leaven their Passover matzahs. Corrupt government authorities bribed by Jewish money were alleged to have covered up the crime.

And so it has gone for centuries: a totally imaginary slander kept alive by bigots and crackpots from Russia to Southern California.

"You are not forgotten, Simon of Trent," wrote a gunman who shot up a synagogue near San Diego in 2019, referencing a slain toddler allegedly martyred in 1475. "The horror that you and countless children have endured at the hands of the Jews will never be forgiven."

Events in Ohio, however, demonstrate that antisemitism is far from the only form of racist scapegoating in America today. The Trump Cult has gone downright medieval on undocumented immigrants. Donald Trump himself calls them "vermin" who are "poisoning the blood" of (White) Americans. During his catastrophically bad debate with Kamala Harris, the former president charged Haitian immigrants in Springfield with unspeakable crimes.

"In Springfield, they are eating the dogs," Trump said as the split screen broadcast showed Harris looking on incredulously. "They're eating the cats," Trump continued, repeating an internet conspiracy theory that local police call totally unsubstantiated. They attribute the rumors to a Facebook post citing its source as a "neighbor's daughter's friend."

The author has herself admitted that she has no idea if it's true, and regrets post-

ing it online.

Challenged by debate moderator David Muir, Trump doubled down. "But the people on television say their dog was eaten by the people that went there."

Would it shock you to learn that no such firsthand accounts exist? Not even on Fox News, presumably because nobody in Ohio can be found who's willing to endorse so crazy a story, even for the sake of the orange messiah. It would turn their lives upside down.

For most Americans, kidnapping and cooking a family pet would be a more shocking crime than, well, pretty much anything I can imagine. That's what makes it a blood libel: a false accusation that seeks to render its targets subhuman. Beneath contempt.

It follows that anybody who would endorse it deserves nothing but scorn. For all the predictable whining of his supporters about how terribly unfair it was of ABC moderators to correct this grotesque lie, the simple truth is that Trump hurt himself.

"You stupid mf'ers just got Trump to repeat your lie about the pets," right-wing talk radio host Erick Erickson wrote on X. "Congrats on setting the news stories tomorrow by lying so Trump picks it up."

Yeah, well, nobody made him do it. The combination of Trump's own ignorance, credulousness and bigotry caused him serious political harm.

So, it's only fitting that the worst vice-presidential candidate in recent American history not only doubled down on the libel, but went on national TV and bragged about it.

Seriously, what is wrong with J.D. Vance? The reason he endorsed the anti-

Haitian scare stories, he said, wasn't that they are true, he admitted to CNN's Dana Bash, but to correct news media bias.

"If I have to create stories so that the American media actually pays attention to the suffering of the American people," Vance said, "then that's what I'm going to do, Dana, because you guys are completely letting Kamala Harris coast."

The normally unflappable Bash emphasized that Vance had just admitted the whole pet-eating business was a made-up story.

The candidate didn't deny it. "I say that we're creating a story, meaning we're creating the American media focusing on it," he insisted.

Meanwhile, the kinds of MAGA cranks who appear to see Trump as semi-divine and incapable of error sprang into action. The small city of Springfield was besieged by bomb threats and warnings of impending violence that led to school, hospital and university closings. Predictions of mayhem caused panic among the Haitian community.

They are legal immigrants actively recruited to the community to fill factory jobs that had gone begging, as local authorities, business leaders and Ohio's Republican Gov. Mike DeWine emphasized. It's all nonsense, a classic blood libel blaming the Haitians for the panic some benighted Ohioans feel at their black faces and Creole-accented voices. To Trumpers, poor deluded fools, that makes them frightening and evil.

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

Project 2025 is a Blueprint to End the American Dream

Six ways the right-wing playbook hurts children, families, and our communities — all to make the wealthy a little wealthier

By KAREN DOLAN

Maybe you've heard some of the buzz about "Project 2025." What is it — and what would it mean for you and your family?

Project 2025 is a proposed "transition plan for a new Republican administration" put together by the Heritage Foundation, a right-wing think tank. It's an in-depth list of what conservative groups will push for in the event of a Trump victory in the fall.

And it poses serious dangers to families and the middle class. It would drastically defund social programs that millions rely on, including Medicaid, Medicare, and the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Pro-

gram (SNAP). It would defund public schools, roll back housing assistance, and cut regulations that protect consumers and the environment.

It's a dense document, but here are six key takeaways on this pending catastrophe for working people.

1. Millions of Americans will lose health care.

Project 2025 not only slashes Medicaid but would entirely eliminate the Affordable Care Act, the popular healthcare program that helps Americans afford care and guarantees coverage to customers with pre-existing medical conditions. This would cause millions to lose their coverage.

The plan also rolls back the Inflation Reduction Act provision allowing Medicare to negotiate lower prescription drug prices. Currently, the law caps life-saving insulin at \$35 per month and caps out-of-pocket Medicare costs at \$2,000 annually. Care for seniors will get a lot more expensive if those protections are taken away.

2. Children will be sicker, poorer, and hungrier.

Children, especially those in low-income households, would be harmed the most. Their reduced access to health care could lead to higher rates of illnesses, developmental delays, long-term inequities in opportunities, and even preventable deaths.

Proposed cuts to food assistance pro-

grams, such as free school meals and SNAP, would increase food insecurity for millions of Americans — especially children. And children who experience hunger and malnutrition are at a greater risk of long-term cognitive and physical developmental challenges, which can poorly affect their life outcomes.

3. Public schools will suffer.

Project 2025 calls to eliminate the Department of Education, which funds programs for students with disabilities and meals for hungry kids, helps parents get before care and after care, enforces civil rights protections, and helps people pursue post-secondary education.

This extremist agenda would also eliminate Head Start. The subsidized preschool program, which has served over 40 million kids, promotes early childhood development and provides childcare to parents who are working or studying to escape poverty.

Instead, public funding would be funneled into wasteful private school vouchers and charter schools.

4. Millions of families will be criminalized.

Mixed-status families, which include both citizens and undocumented immigrants, face the unthinkable reality of a loved one being deported under Project 2025. And families that include LGBTQ+ members face the dystopian reality of dis-

crimination and criminalization.

5. Food, water, and air will be poisoned.

Project 2025 also drastically reduces or eliminates regulations that protect our communities, workplaces, and environment. This is especially dangerous for people in low-income areas and communities of color, which are more often located near industrial areas and exposed to pollution and environmental hazards.

6. Only the wealthy win.

Project 2025's other main goal is yet more tax cuts for the wealthy and corporations, which would starve public investments and codify inequality by only helping those who need it the least.

This dangerous, sweeping takeover of a society that's made huge strides toward equality over many decades threatens to take us back to a "Gilded Age," where only the very wealthiest white families and corporations benefit from government policy.

Though we have yet to fully realize the dream of equality and justice for all, we can only achieve it by expanding the hard-won, effective social progress we've achieved so far. Project 2025 is a blueprint to end that American Dream.

Karen Dolan directs the Criminalization of Race and Poverty Project at the Institute for Policy Studies. Distributed by OtherWords.org.

In Debate Mismatch, Trump Couldn't Elude 'F' Word

By JOHN YOUNG

(With apologies to George Thorogood and the Destroyers)
On the day I was born/ the nurses all gathered 'round
And they gazed in wide wonder/ at the joy they had found
The head nurse spoke up/ said, "Leave this one alone."
She could tell right away/ I was a fraud to the bone.
Fraud to the bone. Fraud to the bone
F-f-f-f-fraud.
F-f-f-f-fraud.
F-f-f-f-fraud.
Fraud to the bone.

Donald Trump is a fraud. From the "concepts" he has up in that golden noodle for replacing the Affordable Care Act, to the "Infrastructure Week" that never was under his visionary-ness.

He's a fraud who runs from the chaos and suffering his Supreme Court bequeathed upon women in 27 states.

He's a fraud who lies about his affairs, his finances, his self-dealing for cash while telling voters he'd be self-funded.

He's the same fraud who decades ago phoned media outlets in New York using an alias to tip them on Donald Trump stories.

He's the fraud who hired an expert in internet bots to drive up his score in two online magazine polls rating business leaders.

He's a fraud from his gold-plated complexion to the "branding" that he touts as building. From his long tie to his long plane, he is 100 percent facade.

F-f-f-f-facade.

Two juries have found him guilty of defrauding New York. Three grand juries have indicted him for defrauding the United States with his Big Lie after, as Kamala Harris said, the voters of America said, "You're fired."

F-f-f-f-fired.

It was fitting when, in announcing her endorsement of Harris, Taylor Swift denounced a fake meme Trump shared on social media announcing that she supported him, along with one showing a boisterous "Swifties for Trump" throng, which Trump spokesman Steven Cheung said represented, "A massive movement that grows every day."

Massive.

F-f-f-f-fakers.

To see fakery in action, all one had to observe was Mr. Indomitable being dominated in debate by his "dumb as a rock" foe.

My 30-something son compared the Harris-Trump debate to a tennis pro rocketing serves past a foe without arms.

His handlers said the problem was that he hadn't prepared sufficiently for an aggressive and guileful foe. They are wrong. Trump could have prepared and prepared and still have had nothing. He stands for naught except his own quest for power. He knows little about what he speaks, getting most of his information with his TV wand. This is why he can't offer a cogent position on reproductive rights or health care, or . . .

For Trump supporters: How many close Trump associates does it take to convince you this man shouldn't be anywhere near presidential power?

"Unfit." Military and intelligence officials despaired in trying to get him to read briefs and heed their advice — aka truth. As a leader, he earned failing grades from his top general, two former national security advisers, his former chief of staff, his first defense secretary, his transportation

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Cover Story..

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begin proceedings to withdraw from the AMY Regional Library contract. And they immediately adjourned after the motion passed with no time for public comment.

A few attendees shouted at the commissioners, then sat back down on wooden seats, their heads down. A few others silently wiped tears from their cheeks.

"There are a lot of people who will miss the services that are available now, especially the Bookmobile," said Yancey County resident and county commissioner candidate Jim Parlier, whose campaign is built partially on his support for the library.

Divisions Hurt a Small Town

Since last summer, when the commissioners first entertained the idea of withdrawing, they appointed a slew of new members to the Yancey County Public Library Board, including several county commissioners themselves, such as Jeff Whitson, the county's board chair.

Some of the newly appointed board members disparaged the library and its staff, according to an August, 2024 public statement made by AMY Regional Director Amber Westall Briggs.

"I've never seen such nastiness and ill-will from board members," Briggs wrote in her statement. "Disparaging staff and the library as board members are generally grounds for dismissal from a board, but the commissioners who appointed them were silent."

Briggs said a few residents have called library staff groomers and pedophiles because the library contains an LGBTQ book selection.

Although the commissioners have not stated that their desire to withdraw from the regional system is due to book selection and display censorship—since doing so would be an admission of violating the First Amendment—locals suspect this is the true motive.

The new chair of the Yancey County Public Library, who was appointed by the commissioners, said the reason she joined was because she didn't agree with the LGBTQ book display that the library staff organizes once every June to celebrate Pride Month. Sheila Poehler, the Yancey resident who made the original complaint about the displays, was also appointed by the commissioners to the library board.

Briggs told the Daily Yonder that the AMY Regional Library system recently secured legal counsel.

The newly appointed library board also passed a policy that there shall be "no flags, no decorations, only minimal signage and book displays to be in appropriate areas."

According to Briggs, the library complied with the commissioners' requests by placing the LGBTQ book display in the adult fiction section, a less noticeable area of the library.

At a public meeting in July 2023, Yancey County board chair Jeff Whitson told the public that, after considering withdrawal, they had determined it would not be financially feasible for the county to fund the library without the support of the AMY Regional Library system, which provides resources and state aid that the county could not offer on its own.

Briggs feels left in the dark as to why the commissioners changed their minds and have decided not to compromise with her to save the library.

"The people deserve an answer," Briggs wrote in her public statement. "What I imagine is that [they] can't give it, because it is discriminatory in nature."

Yancey County board chair Jeff Whitson did not respond to the Daily Yonder's multiple requests for comment.

What Is a Regional Library?

The AMY Regional Library system is a tri-county organization with four public library locations in rural Western North Carolina. As a part of a regional library system, the Yancey County Public Library has access to extra grants and state aid that libraries run by local governments do not.

Under the regional system model, each participating county receives block grants from the state. In the AMY Regional System, for instance, Avery, Mitchell, and Yancey counties each received about \$80,000 in annual funds from state sponsored block grants during the 2023-2024 fiscal year, according to the library's public financial documents.

The state also provides AMY with an additional pool of funds, known as an equalization grant, to support their work with under-resourced and lower-income populations. In the 2023-2024 fiscal year, AMY as a system received an additional grant of \$51,600. Yancey County's share of that grant was \$18,500.

If the commissioners succeed in withdrawing Yancey County Public Library from the regional system, Yancey will lose its share of the block grant and the remaining two counties would see their funding reduced.

AMY regional Director Amber Westall Briggs told the Daily Yonder in a phone interview that this was a terrible time for the county commissioners to withdraw from the regional system, considering the substantial increase in state funds the system just received. It was the greatest increase in state aid that they've received in over 20 years.

The county commissioners reassured Yancey County residents that withdrawing from the regional system won't threaten the library they know and love, but Briggs disagrees. In her public statement Briggs listed all of the services at stake in the withdrawal process. Included in the list were resources like the bookmobile, materials, technology, grant writing experience, region-wide partnerships, and the digital Libby system, among other things.

The public library also helps people file taxes, access high speed internet, and apply for government benefits, among a host of other things.

President of the American Library Association (ALA) Cindy Hohl said such library services promote equality in communities. The presence of a thriving library is an indicator of community health, according to Hohl.

"Librarians have the understanding that we're here to defend everyone's first amendment rights and it's very important work," Hohl said in an interview with the Daily Yonder. "We feel that we're on the front lines of democracy and making sure that everyone understands that the role of the library is to be this community equalizer."

The Community Organizes and Heals Around Queer Solidarity

On Aug. 10, community organizer Nicole Rogers staffed a table at Burnsville's Gather Market, a summer pop-up market for artists outside of a glass blow-

ing studio downtown. Rogers came to educate the public about what's at stake if the town loses its library.

On the table were voter registration sheets and infographics explaining the gritty details about library funding. Some residents approached Rogers to thank them for their efforts.

In response to the contentious debates about LGBTQ books last year, Rogers created the Queer Solidarity Group, an organization meant to support queer residents of the tri-county area. Rogers said Queer Solidarity supports the local community in a variety of ways, some of which include sending email newsletters about local events and hosting social gatherings.

Over the past year, members of Queer Solidarity have been getting together at a local bar after library board meetings to vent and offer each other support.

Queer Solidarity has also kept meticulous records of library board meetings over the past year, including audio recordings, transcripts, timelines of board member appointments, and spreadsheets of library budgetary information, among other things.

"I think a lot of people are being misled about what is in the library," Rogers told the Daily Yonder.

In coordination with Queer Solidarity members, Rogers organized a Library Solidarity Walk that started in downtown Burnsville at the town square and ended at the county commissioners offices. The march was meant to show support for library staff and let public officials know that residents want to keep the library's services.

A conservative political organization called the North Carolina Alliance of Families organized a counter protest, meanwhile. Residents who showed up to march in support of the library vastly outnumbered the counter protesters. Between 30 and 40 people supported the counter protest, while over 300 people marched to support the library, according to Rogers.

People from all walks of life attended the march, not just queer residents and their allies. Some Yancey County residents were concerned about the health of their local library, regardless of their views on gender and sexual orientation.

"We don't all have to agree about every single thing and we can all still work together across differences," Rogers said.

The Queer Solidarity Group also created a fund to offer free produce boxes to library staff and organize letter writing campaigns to tell library staff how much the broader community appreciates their work.

"If we have each other, we can survive a whole lot," Rogers said.

Yancey County organizers and political candidates who support the library have until July 2025 to try to halt the withdrawal process.

Three of the county commissioners who appointed themselves to the board of the Yancey County Public Library are up for reelection this November, including Chairman Jeff Whitson, who has been vocal about his disdain for the library staff.

"The library is an asset to the community. I think the present board of commissioners don't really care if we have a library or not," Parlier said.

Sarah Melotte of Bakersville, N.C., is a correspondent for the Daily Yonder, where this story was originally published. For more rural reporting and small-town stories visit dailyyonder.com.

Commentary: What Freedom Means in Rural North Carolina

It's time that we push back against stereotypes and show what rural folks really stand for: the freedom to pursue the lives we want, on our own terms.

By DREAMA CALDWELL
We Are Down Home

Watching political TV, it would be easy to think we live in an extremely polarized society. But the North Carolina I live and work in doesn't feel that way. For years, I have worked with Down Home North Carolina — first as a member, then on staff, and now as the leader. At Down Home, we organize in our state's small towns and rural communities. Our work shows us that nothing is black and white. This complexity is captured perfectly in our small towns.

Right now, Down Home members are knocking on doors throughout rural North

Carolina. We've knocked on over 72,000 doors and had over 13,000 conversations across region, gender, race, and party lines. We are having deep, inquisitive conversations with our neighbors about one of the most divisive and politicized issues of our time: Abortion. What we have learned is rural folks cannot and should not be quickly stereotyped.

North Carolina has the second largest — and second largest growing — rural population in the country: 3.5 million people with different perspectives from all backgrounds and walks of life. Our rural door-knocking conversations are telling us that, contrary to popular belief, the majority of us support abortion access.

We have found that rural North Carolinians of all ages support abortion — not just young folks. They do so in dramatic numbers: Young adults under 25 are nearly four times more likely to support access to abortion than not (236 to 63), and those over age 41 are almost three times as likely (1,467 to 582) to do the same.

We've also found that rural North Carolinians of all genders support access to abortion care. More than twice as many men (881 versus 367) oppose abortion bans, while three times as many women oppose bans as support them (1,245 versus 407).

Then there's religion. Another stereotype is that rural folks are extremely religious and oppose abortion. While many of us are deeply religious, we find that people of faith not only support abortion access, but they

also have abortions. I'm Christian and find that my faith calls on me to have care and compassion for all of our neighbors, including those who need an abortion. I'm tired of my faith being used by politicians in Raleigh to push their unpopular and unsafe abortion bans.

Another myth is that rural North Carolina is all White and extremely conservative. Growing up in Alamance County and working at Down Home, I've gotten to know rural North Carolina pretty well. Our communities are made up of people from every background under the sun: Black, Latino, White, Indigenous, gay, straight. In fact, there are nearly 14 million rural folks in North Carolina that identify as Black Hispanic or Latino, Native, Asian or multiracial — that's more people than New York City and Los Angeles combined. North Carolina's abortion ban is part of an effort to harm and control people of color by preventing them from accessing abortion, and it disproportionately hurts these communities.

As diverse as rural North Carolina is, there's one thing we all share: we value freedom. We care about having the freedom to make our own decisions for our families — including getting an abortion — without lawmakers in Raleigh making those decisions for us.

I know that abortion is hard. As a birth mother, I know that adoption is hard. I've raised children, and know that's hard. There is no easy choice, but women should have the right to decide which path is best for

them.

Misconceptions about our rural communities and how we view abortion and reproductive freedom distort a diverse group of people into a single stereotype. And that's just plain wrong.

We might come from different backgrounds and our small towns might each have their own character, but in North Carolina, most of us believe in the freedom to decide what's best for our families. Our state's abortion ban is taking away that freedom and harming our neighbors, families, and futures. It's time that we push back against stereotypes and show what rural folks really stand for: the freedom to pursue the lives we want, on our own terms.

Dreama Caldwell is executive co-director of We Are Down Home. This story was originally published in the Daily Yonder. For more rural reporting and small-town stories visit dailyyonder.com.



Racist Domestic Terrorist J. D. Vance: “If I have to create stories ... then that’s what I’m going to do.”

By DICK POLMAN

I spent a week in Springfield, Ohio way back in 1992, when it was reputed to be a swing-voting city in a swing state. I wrote that “it was built by the calloused hands of the working man — a place where cigarettes are ‘smokes,’ where the men who belly up to the lunch counter are called ‘babycakes,’ where the dress code is a flannel shirt and dungarees, where most everyone speaks with the twang brought north from Kentucky by their forebears.”

And in that bygone era, none of Ohio’s Republican leaders were racist whackos; none would ever have even imagined waging war against their own constituents, wreaking havoc in their own communities. How quaint they all seem now, when contrasted with the likes of veep aspirant J. D. Vance, MAGA’s demon spawn.

Vance’s guest gig Sunday morning, Sept. 15, on CNN was a master class in mendacity — insisting yet again without a shred of a proof (because none exists) that Haitian migrants in Springfield are eating people’s pets; that he heard about the pet thing “first hand” from a

few people (Republican Gov. Mike DeWine dismisses Vance’s pet thing as “a piece of garbage”); that the Haitians are living there illegally (DeWine says “they’re here legally”); and that “there are 911 calls” about Haitians eating geese from “the local park pond” (the county sheriff and the Ohio Department of Resources reviewed nearly a year of 911 calls and found no such evidence).

Vance also insisted that he bears no responsibility for the resulting bomb threats, school cancellations, and attacks on Haitians’ cars and property. Springfield’s mayor disagrees. He says that Vance and Trump “need to know they are hurting our city. It was their words that did it ... Any political leader that takes the national stage and has the national spotlight needs to understand the gravity of the words” they use.

Speaking of words, Vance himself supplied the most revealing quote Sept. 15:

“If I have to create stories so that the American media actually pays attention to the sufferings of the American people, then that’s what I’m going to do.”

Permit me to translate: “We’ll say and do whatever it takes — even whipping up some domestic terrorism — if we think it can help us win.”

Racism, xenophobia, and cruelty have always been core staples of the MAGA agenda, but right now Vance and his partner are amping them up in a desperate attempt to distract attention from their latest slide in the polls. The calculus, depraved as it may be, is that if people focus disproportio-

nately on their batsh*ttery du jour, perhaps people will pay less attention to what happened on debate night, when Kamala Harris put the old hog on a slab and carved him into little pieces.

And if people hear enough about Haitian migrants — thanks to the story Vance has “created” — then maybe that’ll remind them of the immigration issue writ large. For MAGA’s, that issue is their comfort zone. If they can leverage that issue to close the gap with Harris, then what do they care if Haitians and Springfield, Ohio suffer collateral damage?

As one Trump adviser told a reporter, “We talk about abortion, we lose. We talk about immigration, we win.” And when asked about the morality of spreading incendiary lies, the adviser said: “We’ll take the hit to prove the bigger point.”

Cynical MAGA’s couldn’t care less what White employers in Springfield are saying — for instance, Jaime McGregor, owner of McGregor Metals, where 10% of the workforce is Haitian: “I wish I had 30 more. Our Haitian associates come to work every day, stay focused on their tasks, and consistently meet their targets. They are here to work, and their dedication is truly remarkable in our community.”

They couldn’t care less that Springfield’s Haitians are helping to bolster a city that’s been teetering economically ever since I reported a story there in 1992. They couldn’t care less that the person who originally posted the pet-eating lie on Facebook has

now apologized. They couldn’t care less that yet another Vance lie — that Haitians are causing “a massive rise in communicable diseases — has been trashed by the county’s health commissioner. (The Nazis said that Jews spread communicable diseases just like rats.)

MAGA’s don’t care about any of that. They’re hooked on J.D. Vance’s blood-and-soil nationalism, his demonization of The Other, and if “creating stories” can feed their hatred — and propel them to the ballot box — then all the better.

Hence the big question in this pivotal election: Are there more of us than there are of them?

Bonus exchange, from Vance’s CNN interview:

He groused to Dana Bash that she went easier on Kamala Harris and Tim Walz, in her recent interview with the Democratic nominees. He said that Bash never interrupted them, whereas she kept interrupting him.

Her reply: “If Kamala Harris and Tim Walz were making unsubstantiated claims that had racist undertones about people eating dogs and cats ... I would’ve had similar interactions with them.”

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.

‘Russia, Russia, Russia’ Is Not a Hoax

By JOE CONASON

Years before former President Donald Trump seized upon the Big Lie that the 2020 presidential election had been stolen, he insistently promoted another supersized falsehood — namely that charges of Russian interference in the 2016 election were “a hoax.” His minions in the media, from Fox News down to the lowliest web trolls, have incessantly parroted that lie despite the volumes of evidence uncovered by the Senate Intelligence Committee’s bipartisan investigation and the special counsel probe by Robert Mueller.

But now a fresh indictment released by the Justice Department on Sept. 4 shows that the Kremlin conspiracy to rig U.S. elections in favor of the Republican Party is not a liberal myth but a live threat — and that several of the most prominent MAGA media voices denouncing the “hoax” were themselves on the Russian payroll, taking big money. The charges lodged against Russia Today employees Kostiantyn Kalashnikov and Elena Afanasyeva include money laundering, conspiracy and violations of the Foreign Agents

Registration Act.

The indictment describes in detail, with supporting documents translated from Russian, how Kremlin consultants and employees of RT, the state media outlet, directed at least \$10 million in funding to a shadowy Tennessee firm known as Tenet Media.

Working under direct control of the Russians were Lauren Chen, a Canadian far-right YouTube “influencer” who also worked for Glenn Beck’s BlazeTV, and her husband Liam Donovan. Chen and Donovan launched Tenet and hired major right-wing personalities such as Tim Pool, host of “Timcast,” Dave Rubin, Benny Johnson, a former BuzzFeed reporter fired for plagiarism, and Lauren Southern, a White nationalist who is also from Canada.

The idea was to draw their millions of online followers into an audience for streaming Tenet videos — and the company paid them each hundreds of thousands of dollars. One of them, identified in the indictment as “Commentator-1” and most likely either Johnson or Pool, received \$400,000 per month for producing four videos.

Of far more significance than the gamy individuals who joined up with Tenet was the company’s deeper purpose, as outlined by the Russians in a document reproduced as part of the indictment. Their project’s top “objectives” as the election year approached were to target voters in swing states, Hispanic and Jewish voters, and “residents of conservative states” who usually vote Republican, and to

move them toward pro-Russian viewpoints about the war in Ukraine, while undermining confidence in President Joe Biden and promoting discontent over the economy and culture, especially among White Americans.

Its stated “goal” was to “secure victory of U.S. Political Party A candidate” — which meant to elect Trump as president.

In short, federal investigators caught “Russia, Russia, Russia” — as a mocking Trump likes to say — interfering yet again to prop up his campaign. And just as word of the indictment broke, the Republican presidential nominee reiterated his promise to sell out Ukraine for a “peace” plan as soon as he wins election, even before he enters the White House. What Russia spent on Tenet would be pocket change compared with that return on investment.

Although the indictment depicts Rubin and Pool as ignorant of their sponsorship by the Russian government, and presumably duped by the cover story of a “Belgian investor” who didn’t actually exist, none of them seemed too curious about who was financing this mysterious windfall. They apparently never imagined that spouting Russian propaganda against Ukraine, as all of them consistently did, might have attracted Kremlin sponsorship. Chen and Donovan evidently knew the venture was subsidized by Russian funds, routed through Mideast banks.

Indeed, Rubin, Johnson and Pool immediately declared they are innocent “victims” of the Russian scheme, defrauded into serving

as Kremlin stooges. But they have also suggested, along with a chorus of right-wing defenders on Fox and elsewhere, that the indictment is actually a conspiracy by the Justice Department to censor “conservatives” and frighten gullible voters with “dirty tricks.”

So which is it? The ugly truth is that the American Right, deeply compromised by the Kremlin connections of its leader Trump, doesn’t care that he or its own media networks have been penetrated by a hostile foreign power. They are happy to take Russian money, or at least are untroubled when others grab those rubles — just as “conservatives” were once content to secretly accept illicit millions from the Korean cult leader Sun Myung Moon or, for that matter, from agents of the German government during the years before World War II.

There are lots of terms to define these acts and attitudes — some legalistic, others defamatory. But none of those descriptions would include “patriotic.”

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. His new book is “The Longest Con: How Grifters, Swindlers, and Frauds Hijacked American Conservatism,” with a foreword by George T. Conway III.

Young People Will Save the World Because We’re the Last Generation That Can

From university campuses to the halls of power, young climate heroes are leading — and winning — the fight for a more sustainable future.

By KEARA SOSA

The past 20 years have been critical in the fight for bold and sustainable climate solutions. The next five years will be even more vital — and young people like me are fighting hard to make sure our leaders get it right.

Research shows we have about five years left to avert global warming beyond 1.5 degrees Celsius, the tipping point when

even more severe climate disruptions could exacerbate hunger, conflict and drought worldwide.

Climate change — long-term shifts in temperatures and weather patterns primarily due to the burning of fossil fuels like coal and oil — impacts our livelihoods and our lives. It harms our health and well-being and threatens our access to vital resources, from water to food to housing.

Communities on the front lines of the climate crisis are already paying the price for inadequate climate action. Pacific islands like Tuvalu are already sinking and expected to be completely submerged in coming years. Meanwhile, scientists predict that rising sea levels will leave 60% of Miami-Dade County under water by 2060.

While we can’t count on certain stubborn politicians to save our only planet, we can count on the young people at the heart of the climate movement.

The global youth-led climate movement has a long history of standing up to corporate giants and their political allies who exacerbate climate change. Despite failed attempts by some politicians to pa-

tronize, belittle, or discredit the teenagers and 20-somethings leading protests and driving policy demands, young climate activists are fueling hope — and winning change.

In June 2023, youth climate activists won a landmark lawsuit, *Held v. Montana*, when a judge ruled that the state’s failure to consider climate change when approving fossil fuel projects was unconstitutional. Similar suits are underway in many other states.

Universities also have a prime role to play in encouraging students to practice sustainability and foster social change. At my university, Virginia Tech, students can participate in a Climate Action Living Laboratory (CALL), where they work with faculty and staff on sustainability projects and research, using our campus and surrounding community networks to work towards the university’s climate action goals.

In my Virginia Tech coursework, I got to harvest food for our dining facilities at our campus farm, compost on an Indegenous farm, visit a local community garden, and tour a food sorting facility — all while working closely with campus partners I

wouldn’t have met otherwise.

Across the country, institutions like Colorado State, the University of California at Berkeley, Cornell, Dickinson College, Furman, and the University of Vermont have implemented living learning labs of their own. In addition to advancing sustainability initiatives, these labs combine disciplines and skills — and unite diverse groups of people — to incubate innovative climate solutions.

You can help us grow the movement, too. Consider supporting domestic climate activist youth movements in your local community and organizations like Sunrise DC, a local branch of the youth climate organization where activists in the nation’s capital get involved at both the local and national level.

We’re the last generation that can save the world from climate disaster — and we’re giving the fight for our lives and for a better future everything we’ve got. Join us.

Keara Sosa is a Henry A. Wallace Fellow at the Institute for Policy Studies. This op-ed was distributed by OtherWords.org.

Owning Our Security

By DAVID MCCALL

A knot formed in Sam Phillips' stomach a few months ago when he learned that corroded titanium—sold with faked documents—somehow made it into doors and other components on civilian airliners.

It was exactly the kind of nightmare scenario that Phillips and other members of the United Steelworkers (USW) warned of while trying to save the nation's last titanium sponge plant, located in Henderson, Nev.

TIMET closed the plant anyway in 2020, not only leaving America dependent on foreign supplies of a crucial industrial material but putting the nation's security at risk.

Only domestic ownership of manufacturing supply chains—from the sourcing of raw materials like titanium sponge to production of goods like airplane components—will keep the nation strong.

Fortunately, the Biden-Harris administration grasps what's at stake and delivered historic legislation like the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA) and the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) to revitalize the nation's manufacturing economy and preserve America's freedom.

It's essential for Americans to own supply chains across all industries, Phillips said, noting foreign companies can cut off shipments of goods at any time and for any rea-

son.

Even manufacturers in ostensibly friendly countries like Japan can encounter production delays or shift operations, affecting U.S. access to needed goods. Just as worrisome, as the airliner titanium scare shows, the long decline of domestic manufacturing capacity even left Americans at the mercy of rogue, corner-cutting producers operating in the shadows thousands of miles away.

"How did it get manufactured and actually put in a plane?" asked Phillips, former president of USW Local 4856.

"It doesn't make me want to get on airplanes anytime soon," added Phillips, who learned about the debacle while reading a *New York Times* article in June. "They should have U.S. titanium in them."

The Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) began an investigation after a parts supplier discovered holes, caused by corrosion, in airplane components made with titanium believed to have come from a Chinese company.

Adding to the uncertainty, authorities discovered that the Chinese firm falsified documents relating to the material it provided. The *Times* reported that the FAA was "investigating the scope of the problem and trying to determine the short- and long-term safety implications to planes" containing the suspect material.

It's the kind of turmoil that's easily avoided when union workers at U.S.-owned firms produce goods right here at home, said Phillips, emphasizing the trust he and his hundreds of co-workers built with TIMET customers over the years.

"They relied on us to give them a good, decent product," Phillips said, observing that

the plant supplied numerous civilian industries and the armed forces while providing middle-class livelihoods for generations of Henderson residents.

"I made a good living for 24 years," explained Phillips, who now works in the logistics field. "I didn't have to worry about paying my bills or putting food on the table. It was a good union job. The union took care of its members."

Before closing the plant, TIMET cited dumping and other unfair competition from some of the same countries that, ironically, gamed greater market opportunities and tightened their grip on the U.S. when the Henderson facility shut down.

Phillips, who tells his story to help others understand the danger of letting foreign companies seize control of U.S. supply chains, described shortages of face masks at the start of the pandemic and of semiconductors a couple of years after that as further proof of the need to bolster U.S.-owned manufacturing.

That's what's happening right now as President Joe Biden and Vice President Kamala Harris work with the USW and other unions to advance a new era of manufacturing power.

Those efforts include fighting foreign takeovers of essential American firms and standing up to trade cheaters that undercut U.S. producers and put jobs at risk.

And they include leveraging the job creation, Buy American requirements and manufacturing investments spurred by the IIJA, IRA and CHIPS and Science Act.

Among many other important projects, for example, the IIJA and IRA allocate up to \$500 million to help Century Aluminum construct a new energy- and cost-efficient

aluminum smelter in Kentucky or in another location in the Ohio River or Mississippi River basins.

It will be the nation's first new aluminum smelter in 45 years and will create 1,000 permanent union jobs, along with hundreds of construction jobs.

And it represents a critical step forward for the aluminum industry, which fills a vital role in economic and national security but has experienced a spate of smelter closures over the years because of high energy costs and other challenges. Today, only a handful remain in operation.

"They keep it open for a reason," said Todd Manning, president of USW Local 420A, citing the strategic importance of Alcoa's aluminum smelting operations in Massena, N.Y.

The world's oldest continuously operating smelter, it's a bedrock of American industry serving both civilian and defense needs. And like the new Century Aluminum smelter, to be operated with renewable energy, the Massena smelter benefits from an affordable, accessible energy source—hydropower.

That's helped to keep the facility open, said Manning, who looks forward to the stability the Century smelter will bring to American industry and decreasing reliance on foreign producers.

"It's very important not to have to deal with any of them," Manning said, referring to the higher-quality, more reliable work performed by America's union workers. "We need to be able to write our own checks."

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

Why Is Trump Still Clobbering Harris on the Economy?

Really, after watching Trump's debate meltdown, how is it possible for any sane human to believe he has the capability to improve anything at all? But still, Democrats must answer this key question—and turn things around—before it's too late.

By LES LEOPOLD

Despite the drubbing Trump took during the debate, he still holds a commanding 20 percent lead (55 to 35 percent) over Harris on the economy, according to the CNN post-debate poll. Democrats should be very concerned about this because economic issues are extremely salient in key swing states like Pennsylvania, Wisconsin, and Michigan.

But really, after watching Trump's debate meltdown, how is it possible for any sane human to believe he has the capability to improve anything at all?

The problem isn't Trump's crumbling abilities, nor is it a sure thing that abortion will 'trump' the economy this cycle, as many Democratic strategists are counting on.

The problem is that a significant segment of the electorate views the Democrats as part of the corporate elite that has grabbed unfair advantages. About 70% of Americans say that our economy "unfairly favors the powerful interests." That's also what we hear from workers in our political economy classes. They consistently tell us that "corporate greed" is the culprit.

As professor Jedediah Britton-Purdy wrote in *The New York Times*, "Compared to Mr. Trump's Republicans, the Democrats remain the party of protecting the system and making it work — the small-c conservative party of the liberal but comfortable coasts and other economic hubs."

In a twisted, demented way, Trump looked every bit the mega-disrupter during the debate Sept. 10, as he flailed away at everyone and everything. He was the picture of disorder and decidedly not part of

the established order.

However, shaking up the established order is what many voters want. About 15% of registered voters believe that the political and economic "system needs to be torn down entirely." Another 55% believe "the system needs major changes."

Harris and the Democrats try to address this anger through a myriad of reforms that do not come across as "major changes." Investing in new jobs for the future is certainly admirable, but the billions in subsidies for the greedy corporations involved in every "public-private" infrastructure investment look like the same-old, same-old. Tax breaks for childcare and new business startups are important, but they aren't major challenges to the established order. Going after oligopolistic price gouging is a start, but corporate mass layoffs and job insecurity are not mentioned.

Harris/Walz should be paying much closer attention to this: 70% of workers, right now, are preparing for job cuts, according to a MarketWatch survey.

There is a material basis for this fear. The Bureau of Labor Statistics reports that "from January 2021 through December 2023, there were 2.6 million workers displaced from jobs they held for at least three years." And an additional 3.7 million with fewer than three years tenure lost their jobs "because their plant closed or moved, there was insufficient work for them to do, or their position or shift was abolished." The research for my book, *Wall Street's War on Workers*, found that more than 30 million workers have suffered through mass layoffs since 1996.

The economy for working people has fundamentally changed since the deregulation of Wall Street starting in the 1980s. Now, in good times and in bad, mass layoffs are common as corporations pour more and more money into their outrageous pay packages and stock buybacks for their Wall Street investors. (A stock buyback is when a corporation uses its money or borrowed funds to repurchase its own shares in the stock market. This raises its share price without adding any value at all to the company. Stock buybacks were considered illegal stock manipulation until their deregulation in 1982. Please see *Wall Street's War on Workers* for all the sordid details.)

In their 2024 platform, the Democrats waved at this problem by promising to raise the tax on stock buybacks from 1% to 4%. But that won't put a dent in the more than

\$1 trillion in stock buybacks projected for 2025. Time and again those buybacks are funded by mass layoffs.

So why aren't the Democrats attacking mass layoffs?

The problem is that most elected officials, including virtually all Republicans, really believe that layoffs are a natural law, like gravity, the result of market fluctuations, global trade, and new technologies. It's all about unstoppable technological forces like A.I. and there's nothing much that can be done except help create new jobs in the future. Those left behind will have to scramble. That's the way of the world. That's the basis for free enterprise, and that's what freedom is all about. (Janis Joplin, thanks to Kris Kristofferson, cut through this BS: "Freedom's just another word for nothing left to lose," she sang.)

But that fatalism reflects how much politicians fear Wall Street. Already, we can see Harris back-peddle a bit on corporate taxes, and she's facing pressure to tone down her proposed wealth tax. I'm sure the Democrats worry that if they attack stock buybacks and mass layoffs, Wall Street will cry Marxism! Socialism!

But if the Democrats want to take back the economy from Trump, they must speak directly to the 70% who are worried about losing their jobs.

For starters, they should re-read their 2020 Democratic Party platform, which said: "Taxpayer money should not be used to pay out dividends, fund stock buybacks, or give raises to executives." Unfortunately, that plank only applied to COVID relief funds.

But, as I wrote here, it could easily be expanded to read: "No taxpayer money should be awarded to corporations that lay off taxpayers and conduct stock buybacks."

Harris/Walz could pledge to add that one line to the \$700 billion the federal government awards each year to corporations for goods and services. (It can probably be done without an act of Congress.)

When corporations scream that it will kill free enterprise if they can't lay off workers, the response is simple. 1) If you don't like the rule, don't take the federal money. 2) If you still want to lay off workers, you can do so but those layoffs have to be voluntary, not compulsory. Use some of your lavish stock buyback funds to offer workers ample severance so that they voluntarily leave your firm, something that is often done for management employees.

Would corporations be willing to play by these rules?

Trump's 2016 intervention in a Carrier air conditioning plant closing suggests they would. At that time, Carrier, under pressure from Trump, reversed its decision to move about 800 jobs to Mexico. Polling showed the intervention was wildly popular with the American people.

Why did the CEO give in? Why didn't he scream about socialism and the collapse of the free enterprise system? Here's what he said. "I was born at night, but it wasn't last night. I also know that about 10 percent of our revenue comes from the U.S. government." He was not about to bite the hand that feeds him.

Nor will Corporate America. They will not walk away from \$700 billion in taxpayer money even if they have to abandon compulsory layoffs.

Calling for this rule would show that the Democrats are willing to disrupt the established corporate order and attack the unconscionable greed that is costing working people their livelihoods.

As Bernie Sanders put it back in 1996, "No Payoffs for Layoffs."

Les Leopold is the executive director of the Labor Institute and author of "Wall Street's War on Workers: How Mass Layoffs and Greed Are Destroying the Working Class and What to Do About It." Read more of his work at substack.com/@lesleopold1. Follow him on Twitter: @les_leopold. This appeared at CommonDreams.org.

Both Presidential Candidates Agree: We Need to Stop Arresting People for Marijuana

Further proof that an issue once considered a political hot button has gone mainstream.

By PAUL ARMENTANO

At a time when voters and politicians are historically divided, there is one issue that Americans largely agree upon: It's time to legalize marijuana. Months ago, Vice President Kamala Harris tweeted that "Nobody should have to go to

Continued on next page

MARY SANCHEZ



The overarching offense Tyreek Hill committed was contempt of a police officer. The aggravation that law enforcement officials feel leads to overreaction.

The Reeducation of Tyreek Hill and the Lessons He's Giving Miami Police

Tyreek Hill, this go-round in a critical media lens, has the upper hand.

He knows it. In recent interviews, the Miami Dolphins wide receiver is the patient teacher, talking about turning his recent brush with law enforcement into a positive.

The football star might have sensed this moment coming, soon after the incident on his way to the season opener on September 8.

Hill has admitted to being reckless. Nearing Hard Rock Stadium in Miami Gardens, he was pulled over by a traffic officer. He subsequently sassed back at the

officer's orders.

Rather than complying quickly with the command to keep the driver's side window of his fancy sports car rolled down, Hill repeatedly insisted that the officer stop rapping on the dark glass window.

What happened next? Hill quickly found himself yanked from the car by another officer. He was then shoved face first to the pavement and handcuffed.

The whole thing is captured on a Miami-Dade police bodycam. The swiftness of the escalation is a chilling enactment of how fast car stops can go south, often with devastating and deadly results.

But let's be clear, the overarching offense Hill committed was being in contempt of a police officer. That charge refers to the aggravation that law enforcement officials feel, and then overreact to, when disrespected by civilians.

Other more specific charges for Hill came later: careless driving and driving without a seatbelt.

Hill didn't immediately comply with the officer's orders, certainly not with any humility or exaggerated obedience, signs that he was willing to bow to their authority. He regrets it. He admitted that in a subsequent interview with CNN: "At the end of the day, I wish I could go back and do things a bit differently."

But Hill's impatient disposition with the officers didn't justify the rough treatment he received.

News of the incident played a little differently for some in Kansas City. The Chiefs are the NFL team that first took a risk on Hill. The franchise signed him in 2016 with

the hope that his incredible speed would dominate the headlines. The team also hoped to move past his documented history of domestic violence.

As a city, we got both.

Widely known as "Cheetah," Hill became a valued member of the team. He supports the community through the Tyreek Hill Family Foundation.

But there was another alleged incident, in 2019, while Hill was a Chief.

His former fiancée, the mother of his son and twins, was also possibly involved. When their son was three, the police and other officials investigated the parents for possible child abuse, concerned about welts and bruising. Ultimately, no charges were ever filed against either parent.

This is the same woman who Hill pled guilty to choking while in college. That incident cost him his status as a team member for Oklahoma State, which dismissed him. She was also pregnant during the 2014 choking incident, for which Hill received three years probation, after which the case was expunged from his record.

Hill has gotten therapy. And as part of the plea deal, he agreed to domestic violence prevention classes.

It's difficult to think that a man who can choke a woman — an extremely serious act of violence — can fully turn his behavior around and become a model partner to another person. Hill's married now.

Yet he's done what we should expect of anyone who abuses others, whether it is a case of domestic violence or overreach in use of force by police.

The abuser does the time in service.

The person who did the victimizing should get the retraining, accept the punishment if necessary, and learn the skills to manage themselves better.

Too often, society expects the opposite. The blame is on the victim. We tell women all the ways they should steer clear of men who abuse, offering them a range of tips on how to spot signs of abusers — before they lash out.

How about men just stop abusing women?

How about more men receive therapy, as Hill did?

And police should stop overreacting when the issue isn't one of public or their own safety, but a mouthy civilian who's being belligerent.

Hill wants the officer in question to lose his job. But unless there are previous problems with his the officer's service, a recommitment to further training should suffice.

Because Hill's right, everyone could learn from this incident.

The real power to learn and change comes from admitting mistakes, dissecting our personal role and recommitting to doing better.

If we expect that and can accept it from highly compensated football stars on our favorite teams, we should expect it and receive it from the people we pay to ensure our public safety.

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It's the Guns, Stupid

Are we so inured to the premise that nothing can be done about mass ownership of military weapons that gun control has vanished from discourse and debate?

By ROBERT KUTTNER

Former President Trump has now survived two assassination attempts. The coverage of the first, on July 13 in Butler, Pennsylvania, where the would-be assassin was able to gain a clear sight line on a rooftop outside the Secret Service security perimeter, emphasized the failure of the Secret Service to coordinate with local law enforcement. The director of the Secret Service, Kimberly Cheatle, disgraced by the near miss, resigned. Investigations are still under way.

In the Sept. 15 assassination attempt, where a gunman was hiding in the bushes on the edge of one of Trump's golf courses, is described as more of a systemic failure. It's just not feasible for the Secret Service to monitor every inch of possible harm in large outdoor spaces. An agent, one hole ahead of the former president, got lucky and spotted a rifle sticking out of some bushes a few hun-

dred yards away. Had he not, the potential assassin could have gotten off shots from a semiautomatic at close range. The coverage has pointed to the fact that Trump's security detail is smaller than that of a sitting president and does not cover the entire golf course.

In both cases, President Joe Biden and Vice President Kamala Harris put out statements that they were thankful that Trump was safe and that there is no place for political violence in this country. Biden spoke of giving the Secret Service more resources.

Neither mentioned guns.

Indeed, guns have been weirdly missing from the national commentary. Obviously, if we want presidential candidates and schoolchildren safe from assassination attempts and mass classroom mayhem, the most direct route is not a more massive Secret Service or better duck-and-cover school drills, but ending mass ownership of assault weapons.

A similar script played out in the most recent classroom murders, in Winder, Georgia. The questions asked included why the father bought a 14-year-old an assault weapon and whether he should be charged with murder (he was); why communication between law enforcement, tipped to the child's violent social media posts, and the school failed; why the school had failed to respond in time to the mother's call half an hour before the shooting, and whether the school had adequate security.

Did somebody say, why are assault

weapons legal, least of all for kids? If so, I didn't hear it.

I get that J.D. Vance is capable of saying that school shootings are just "a fact of life," so just get used to it. "We've got to bolster [school] security," Vance added, "so if a psycho wants to walk through the front door and kill a bunch of children they're not able." Vance of course did not mention gun control.

But are Biden and Harris so fearful of the reaction by gun owners in, say, Montana or North Carolina that they won't touch the subject with a rake? And have commentators been so thoroughly trained by the NRA that gun control has ceased to be part of the conversation? After the attempt on Ronald Reagan's life in 1981, the national debate that followed was all about gun control.

In 1994, President Bill Clinton, with the support of both parties, signed into law a ban on assault weapons and large-capacity magazines. That ban was allowed to expire in 2004 after massive lobbying by the NRA. In the decade that followed, according to the Brady Campaign, mass shootings involving the deaths of six or more people increased by 347%.

Today, most gun control advocates are so intimidated that all they are willing to discuss is a feeble thing called "gun safety." Sorry, but would-be assassins and school shooters can be perfectly trained in gun safety, the better to kill people.

The fact is that about 61% of Ameri-

cans generally favor stronger gun control according to Pew, and almost two-thirds favor banning assault weapons.

Democratic vice-presidential candidate Tim Walz, a gun owner, is well positioned to say, "If you want to use assault weapons, you can join the military like I did. If you want a gun to hunt or for personal protection, I support you. But you don't need an assault weapon whose sole purpose is mass killing. They make all of us less safe."

But don't hold your breath.

And, yes, the Supreme Court keeps making it easier for anyone to own any sort of gun. That's the same debased Supreme Court that overturned *Roe v. Wade* and most of the Voting Rights Act, and pronounced that a sitting president is immune from most criminal prosecution.

Well, leading Democrats are talking adding term limits for justices, or expanding the Court, presumably so that *Roe v. Wade* and civil rights enforcement can be restored. Gun control needs to be added to that list.

Otherwise, we can expect more school shootings, more thoughts and prayers, more assassination attempts on presidents, and more perverse demands for better security, when the real solution is at point-blank range.

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Armentano...

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jail for weed." Despite her past opposition to marijuana legalization, she's since become the first major presidential nominee to endorse it.

In a more recent social media post, Republican presidential candidate Donald Trump opined, "We do not need to ruin lives and waste taxpayers' dollars arresting adults with personal amounts of it (marijuana) on them."

That's significant coming from Trump, who as president was on record supporting violent drug war crackdowns abroad and who appointed longtime anti-marijuana zealot Jeff Sessions to be his first Attorney General.

One look at recent polling data and it's clear why the two candidates are finding common ground on cannabis. According to Gallup, 70% of U.S. adults believe that "the use of marijuana should be legal."

That's an increase of 19 percentage points since 2014, when Colorado and Wash-

ington became the first states to implement adult-use cannabis legalization. Twenty-four states have now done so — and no state has ever repealed marijuana legalization.

The public's support is bipartisan. Nationwide, 87% of Democrats, 70% of independents, and 55% of Republicans support legalization. In important swing states like Michigan, Pennsylvania, and Wisconsin, legalizing marijuana similarly enjoys majority support.

It's easy to see why. The initial push for cannabis criminalization, which began in earnest in the early 1900s, had little to do with any legitimate concerns about public health or safety. Rather, the move to ban marijuana and to criminally prosecute those who consume it was based primarily upon myths and xenophobia.

Today, nearly half of all drug-related arrests nationwide are for marijuana. This is a tremendous waste of time and resources that most Americans believe ought to be reprioritized toward targeting more serious crimes.

In addition, those arrested and prosecuted for violating marijuana laws face a litany of lifelong consequences — including a criminal record and the lost opportunities that come with it. Those arrested are disproportionately young people and socioeconomically disadvantaged.

Criminalization, despite its longevity, has failed to disrupt the illicit market or discourage marijuana use. By contrast, teens' use of marijuana has plummeted since states have begun regulating marijuana sales. In addition, survey data finds that most cannabis consumers in legal states obtain their goods from licensed retailers, not from underground street dealers.

Legalization has also provided notable economic benefits for state governments. Since 2014, retail sales of adult-use cannabis products have generated more than \$15 billion in tax revenue, which has funded school construction, affordable housing, and other services.

Given the success of legalization and the

overt failures of marijuana prohibition, it's hardly surprising to see the presidential candidates weighing in.

It's notable, however, that it's taken this long for them to publicly tout the issue. Trump previously mused that statewide legalization resulted in "big problems" in states like Colorado, while Harris urged California voters to reject a 2010 legalization ballot question.

But times have changed, and politicians are adapting accordingly. In an election where every vote counts, both Trump and Harris wisely see advocating for marijuana policy reform as an opportunity to connect with a wide range of potential voters.

It's just further proof that an issue once considered to be a political hot button has since gone mainstream.

Paul Armentano is the Deputy Director for NORML, the National Organization for the Reform of Marijuana Laws (NORML). This op-ed was distributed by *OtherWords.org*.

Harris Can't Embrace Billionaires if She Wants to Win

By SONALI KOLHATKAR

The vast majority of Americans believe that the United States economy is unfairly rigged to benefit the rich. In the past few weeks, the Democratic nominee for president, Kamala Harris, has proven that this is an accurate assessment. She initially backed her own administration's initiative to increase top earners' total tax rate including on capital gains to nearly 45%. This was included in President Joe Biden's 2025 budget proposal. But soon after billionaire donors made it clear they preferred not to part with any fraction of their wealth, she pivoted, announcing in September that she backed a significantly lower capital gains tax rate of 33%.

Vermont Senator Bernie Sanders, who has made accusations of a "rigged economy" his signature phrase, explained Harris's pivot: "I think she's trying to be pragmatic and doing what she thinks is right in order to win the election."

Think about how hard it has been for climate justice activists to get Harris to stick to her original idea in 2019 to oppose fracking. In the recent debate with Donald Trump, days after scientists declared summer 2024 the hottest on record, she promised, "I will not ban fracking"—ostensibly to win over Pennsylvania's undecided voters.

It's been even harder for anti-genocide activists to win a commitment from Harris for an arms embargo against Israel in the face of mass ethnic cleansing of Palestinians in Gaza.

Whether it is the long-term fate of our species or the short-term existence of a people, Harris—at least while campaigning for President—will apparently not budge. But on taxing billionaires? They say "hell, no," and she asks, "How low?"

Capital gains taxes, which are taxes on the increased value of sold stocks, are currently capped at 20%. But what about the value of unsold stocks and other assets? Biden's proposal is to tax billionaires on all their wealth, including "unrealized capital gains" at the rate of 25%. And on that matter, thankfully, Harris has backed Biden's idea—for now.

The group Americans for Tax Fairness (ATF) estimates that "America's billionaires and centi-millionaires (those with at least \$100 million of wealth) collectively held at least \$8.5 trillion of 'unrealized capital gains' in 2022." These ultrarich people have lives that are completely foreign to the rest of us. ATF points out, "While most Americans predominantly live off the income they earn from a job—income that is taxed all year, every year—the very richest households live lavishly off capital gains that may never be taxed."

Predictably, rightwing ideologues have piled on Harris, with one opinionator calling the 25% wealth tax rate, "so dumb it's truly historic."

New York Times pundit Peter Coy was less gauche, and in his Sept. 6, 2024 column he began by calling unrealized capital gains "paper wealth," and "gains that exist only on paper." He revived the tired adage that higher taxes on the ultrarich could have a "potential negative effect on entrepreneurship," and "could strongly discourage investors from putting money into startups."

But the Center for Budget and Policy Priorities dispels the myth that it's not real money, explaining that "wealthy households can use [unrealized gains] to finance their (often lavish) lifestyles... They can do so by borrowing large sums against their unrealized capital gains, without generating taxable income." By borrowing money off this so-called paper wealth, they don't owe traditional income taxes because it's not seen as traditional income.

For years, the wealthiest Americans have held on to money that should have been extracted from them in the form of taxes. What could these taxes have paid for? Senator Ron Wyden, who chairs the Senate Finance Committee explained during a Budget committee hearing that, "The ultra-wealthy are avoiding nearly \$2 trillion in taxes every 10 years." That, he said, "is enough to keep Social Security whole till the end of this century."

Political pundits and economists repeatedly perpetuate a fantasy that taxing billionaires stifles innovation. The real link is that taxing billionaires funds government programs that we collectively benefit from. Conversely, allowing them to remain rich, stifles our wellbeing.

And, it could even help Harris win the election. Economic inequality is, unsurprisingly, top of mind for voters. Data for Progress has found that more than 70% of voters are in favor of increased taxes on the wealthy. This includes a majority of Republicans. Nearly two-thirds of those polled support Biden's and Harris's 25% tax rate on all wealth held by billionaires—including unrealized capital gains.

Harris is facing the grim reality that voters are tired of their hard-earned dollars not going far enough. Four years of inflation, of seeing prices of food, rent, and other basic necessities rise faster than wages is enough to drive the fantasy that someone else—in particular Donald Trump—might do better.

Trump has embraced the billionaire

agenda, promising that he would "make life good" for Musk and other wealthy people. He has promised oil executives he would do their bidding in exchange for campaign contributions. More billionaires are backing Trump than Harris. And yet, financially insecure people are more likely to support Trump than Harris.

So why isn't Harris going all in on higher taxes overall? Even when accounting for the electoral college, which forces presidential candidates to tack toward the center to win slivers of undecided voters in a handful of "swing states," Harris could win by leaning into higher taxes for billionaires. Data for Progress found that expanding the federally funded program of Medicare to cover dental, vision, and hearing, would help Harris the most in swing states. The second most important position backed by voters was raising taxes on the wealthy. What better way to expand Medicare than to tax the rich to pay for it?

It's going to take a lot on Harris's part to beat the faux populism that Trump exudes. Within such a context, it's not a good look that Harris is giving in to any pressure from billionaire donors—in spite of Senator Sanders's claim that it's an election ploy. Money is the best tool that billionaires have to protect their wealth, so it ought not to surprise us that they are harnessing it in their defense. It doesn't mean Harris should give in—not if she wants to win.

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

A Post-Debate Con Job in Real Time

Trump won the debate like he won the 2020 election, and he's handling it the same way.

By SABRINA HAAKE

Trump won the Sept. 10 debate like he won the 2020 election. And he's handling his debate loss the same way he handled his 2020 loss: by lying about it.

Trump's post debate spin alternates between "I won" and "the debate was rigged," as if people won't wonder why he'd say it was rigged if he's also saying he won it. Is he saying it was rigged so he won it? Or does he not understand basic logic, that winning a rigged contest isn't really winning at all and it's not in his best interest to claim it is?

To be fair, Trump was up against a master, intellectually unmatched from the jump. When Harris named Trump's military advisors who called Trump "a disgrace," a threat to democracy and the military, including General Mark Milley, who Trump wants to execute, she looked directly at him. She landed her punches unflinchingly, sometimes laughingly, clearly unafraid of the man who would follow his mentor and execute rivals. Mike Johnson and other GOP toadies should take note of how it's done.

Meanwhile, Trump kept his eyes down when Harris spoke and did not look directly at her throughout the debate, like the true beta bully he has always been.

Trump blames the moderators for fact checking him

Trump's self-indulgent, grievance-laden bloviation was so pathetic that even Fox News was reporting it.

House Republicans, according to Fox, have privately expressed "frustration" about how Harris repeatedly outsmarted him during the debate. "Several House GOP lawmakers ... acknowledged Trump 'missed' opportunities during the debate, and it is the 'prevailing sentiment of the House Repub-

lican Conference that Harris successfully baited him on multiple occasions" during the debate.

"It was terrible. I think you're seeing that comment from everybody," one senior House Republican told Fox News Digital. "He had so many opportunities to come after her and he didn't. He got bogged down on the hook she was dragging through the water." Another GOP lawmaker told Fox the debate was a "dumpster fire" for Trump. "It was one of the worst blood-lettings I've ever seen."

Still, choosing between his contradictory "I won" and "the debate was rigged" spin, Trump is now wailing that moderators factchecked several of his lies, but didn't do the same with Harris. His aides are probably afraid to tell him that Harris did not spew any bilious material on par with Trump's post-birth abortion and immigrants-are-eating-your-dog lies that would have merited an equal, quick and easy fact check.

It's not like moderators fact-checked his serial falsehoods on crime, abortion, or the broken economy he left for Biden post-covid; they only checked him when it was so painfully obvious he was lying they'd have lost credibility as journalists if they didn't.

Still, Trump is claiming to millions of voters that, "It was a rigged deal, as I assumed it would be, because when you looked at the fact that they were correcting everything (I said) and not correcting (Harris) ... It was a three-on-one ... They're dishonest. I think ABC took a big hit last night ... They ought to take away their license for the way they did that."

If Trump were a smarter man, he'd know not to follow his own ignorant admiration during the debate of Viktor Orban, Hungary's ruthless dictator who took control of the media, with threats about taking away ABC's media license.

Harris made Trump look stupid

Republican outrage over the debate, and Trump's ongoing, bad-faith sales pitch about what a great performance he gave, are tacit admissions that Harris outsmarted him.

She dangled the bait, and he went for it, even when it was sophomorically and plainly just a hook, like her crowd size comment. That he so obviously swallowed it spoke volumes about what matters in a president, including intellect. One of them has it, the other needs a guardian.

That Harris effectively baited Trump throughout the 90 minutes, trigger after trigger, left few viewers wondering which candidate could checkmate the world's authoritarians who would do harm to America. The other candidate demonstrated on live stream how easily he can be manipulated, angered, and triggered. No one should overlook the national security implications.

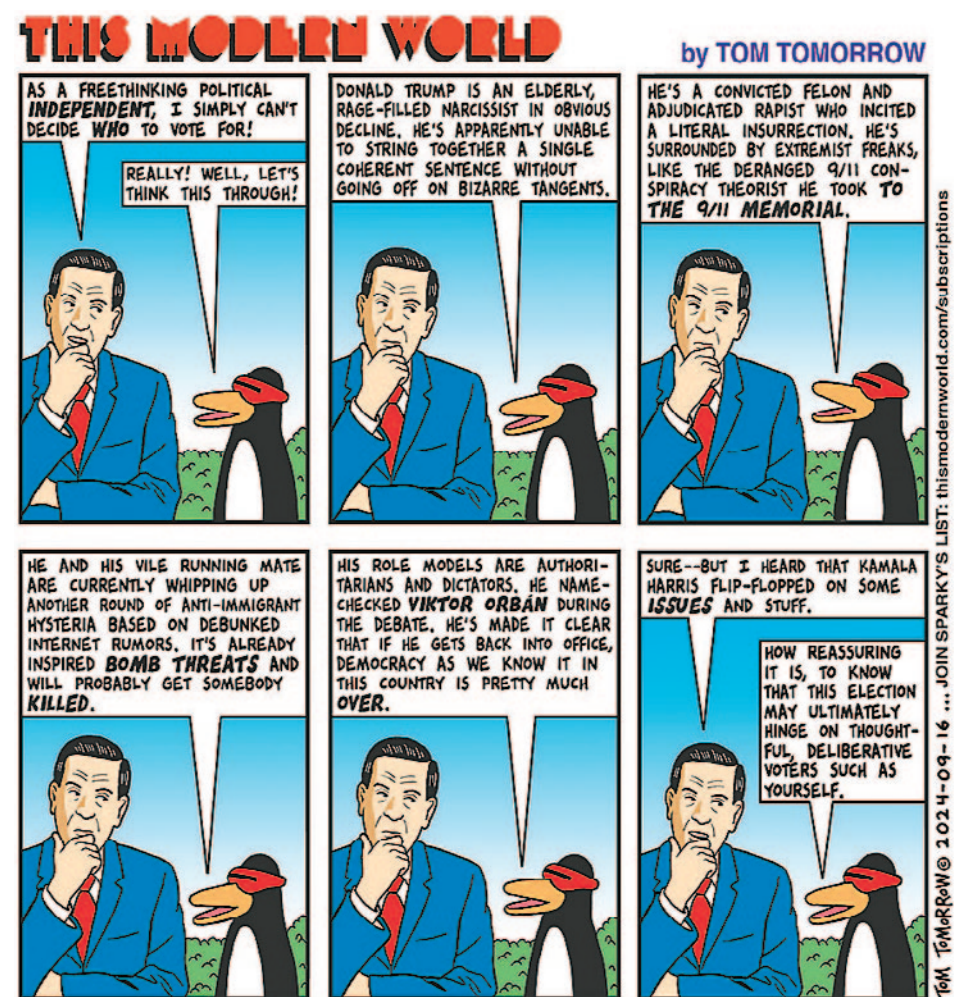
Trump has been lying about his disas-

trous debate ever since it ended, citing non-existent polls to Fox, citing made-up statistics in the spin room, and appearing on any news outlet that will have him, claiming both that the debate was "rigged" and that he outperformed Harris, overwhelmingly.

The opposite is so obviously and painfully true— even to Fox News and his sycophants in Congress— that his attempts to save face are an obvious con job in action, in real time, on national television.

Voters who haven't been paying attention got their first reveal, their first proof of the hoax Trump has been all along.

Sabrina Haake is a Chicago trial lawyer and left-of-center policy wonk. See sabinahaake.substack.com.



Big Pharma's GOP Cash Grab: How Republicans Are Selling Out America for Drug Money

Congressional Republicans push to keep drug prices sky-high, defying voters, and fueling corporate greed ...

By THOM HARTMANN

Congressional Republicans are enthusiastically doubling down on the corruption openings five Republicans on the Supreme Court gave them when they legalized political bribery with *Citizens United*. Their newest scam is trying to stop Medicare from negotiating drug prices.

A new study this year by the RAND Corporation found that Americans pay 4.22 times more for brand-name drugs than the citizens of any other developed country. That's a 422% markup against the (already profitable) prices people in other countries pay for the same drugs, with the entire burden borne by citizens of the U.S., directly or indirectly.

And that price-gouging has been on hyperdrive since the Bush administration got legislation passed in 2003 that forbade Medicare from negotiating drug prices like the Pentagon, big hospital chains, and drug store chains do routinely: Between that year and 2020, retail prescription drug spending exploded by 91% in the U.S.

Their lies to Congress aside, drug companies aren't using that money to develop new products; every genuinely new drug developed in the U.S. over the past decade was funded by our government. Instead, the senior executives in the industry are using

those profits they extracted from you and me to buy new corporate jets, luxury yachts, and palatial mansions all around the world.

For example, AbbVie CEO Richard Gonzalez reportedly earned around \$60 million annually in recent years, with total compensation from 2013 to 2018 reaching approximately \$334 million. Nice work if you can get it.

Similarly, Johnson & Johnson returned \$17 billion to shareholders and executives with stock buybacks in 2022; an amount that more than exceeded their total investment in R&D.

Nonetheless, when Axios reported on how Republican Congressman Buddy Carter (R-Ga.) and Republican Senators Thom Tillis (R-N.C.), Mike Crapo (R-Idaho), and John Cornyn (R-Texas) are enthusiastic about ending Medicare's ability to simply negotiate prices like any other major purchaser, they opened their story with the dubious line that those Republicans were concerned about our "heavy-handed government squelching pharmaceutical innovation."

What those Republicans are actually concerned about is the continuing flow of cash into their campaign accounts from the profits Big Pharma and other monopolistic industries squeeze out of so many of us. Not to mention all the fancy trips, junkets, "tips" now authorized by the Supreme Court, hookers, and other forms of political support that we used to call bribery.

As with so many other policies, from abortion to education to the climate emergency, Republicans don't give a damn what their voters or the larger American citizenry want. Fully 77% of Republican voters want Medicare to negotiate drug prices, for example, but these sleazy, bought-off politicians have learned that they can reliably send their voters off on a foaming-at-the-mouth frenzy by simply throwing a few racist tropes at them and they — and the

media — will quickly forget all about drug prices and other terrible corporate behavior.

When Clarence Thomas cast the deciding vote in *Citizens United* after taking millions in bribes ... er, tips ... from rightwing billionaires with business before the Court, he was merely reflecting the position the GOP has held since the Reagan administration embraced corruption as a way of life.

That began, you'll remember, with the Reagan campaign cutting a deal to hold the Iranian hostages to screw Jimmy Carter in 1980. Totally transactional.

Now it's barely news when Republicans sell out America's voters for the proverbial bag of silver.

They take literally billions in cash and support from the fossil fuel industry and its billionaires while denying climate change or hustling scams like carbon capture.

Their presidential candidate made over a billion dollars while in office, much of it by forcing our government officials to pay inflated prices to his properties.

Donald Trump's son-in-law sucking up to a billionaire dictator while in the White House resulted in him walking away with \$2 billion.

Instead of investigating these staggering levels of corruption, Republicans congratulate the Trump family grifters and want in on the scam. And America's rightwing billionaires — skeptical about democracy but enthusiastic about oligarchy — are more than happy to oblige them.

From the Texas power grid to Florida's private school voucher program to Georgia's vote vigilantes, the GOP is committed to remaking America in the image of Viktor Orbán's Hungary, where billionaires own every aspect of the nation's business and, in turn, make ordinary politicians into multimillionaires.

When President Joe Biden tried to reduce student loan debt, Republican politi-

cians rushed to Trump-appointed judges to block his efforts.

When Congress tried to clean up our CO2 pollution to mitigate climate change, Republicans on the Supreme Court gifted the fossil fuel industry by gutting the EPA's ability to regulate their pollution.

And now that Medicare is finally, in a very small way, negotiating drug prices and thus already saving Americans billions, these same Republicans are falling all over themselves to end that ability.

America is suffering from a corruption crisis that's almost never mentioned in our media. In large part that's because it's mostly Republicans who are on the take, and when that gets pointed out they charge media outlets with "partisan bias."

And in the case of Big Pharma, it's also because that industry hands billions every year in ad revenue to our TV industry. America is the only industrialized country in the world that allows pharmaceutical advertising on television (New Zealand does, too), but when the American Medical Association called on Congress to ban these ads back in 2015, the GOP laughed at them.

It's beyond time to put an end to the GOP's corrupt gravy train. The damage Republicans on the Supreme Court have done to our country by embracing and then legalizing corruption as a way of life is inestimable.

Cleaning it up must be a first priority when/if Democrats can recover control of the federal government this fall, and pointing it out should be part of every Democratic candidate's advertising ...

Thom Hartmann is a progressive radio talk-show host and the author of "The Hidden History of American Oligarchy" and more than 30 other books in print. He is a writing fellow at the Independent Media Institute. This appeared at hartmannreport.com.

ROBERT REICH



Trump's claim that Haitian immigrants were 'eating the dogs ... eating the cats' in Springfield, Ohio, has already provoked threats of violence.

Trump's Hate Is No Joke

The second apparent attempt on Donald Trump's life — Sept. 15 at his golf club in West Palm Beach, Florida — occurred just over two months after he was wounded during an attempt on his life at a rally in Butler, Pennsylvania. "They're not coming after me, they're coming after you," Trump said after the first attempt. "I'm just standing in the way."

"They" should not be coming after anyone. There is no place in our democracy for violence, nor for threats of violence.

Which brings me to Trump's claim in the Sept. 10 debate that Haitian immigrants in Springfield, Ohio, are "eating the dogs ... eating the cats. They're eating — they're eating the pets of the people that live there."

It quickly became a vast internet joke, fueling thousands of hilarious memes and songs. But it's no laughing matter. Trump's claim has already provoked threats of violence.

Over that weekend, two hospitals in Springfield were locked down after bomb threats, police said. Other threats received by Springfield officials have forced government buildings to close, two elementary schools to be evacuated and the students moved to a different location, and a middle school to shut down altogether.

After JD Vance first began spreading baseless rumors about Haitians in Springfield, members of the neo-Nazi group "Blood Tribe" marched into the city carrying guns, wearing body armor, and carry-

ing Neo-Nazi flags. At an Aug. 27 town hall meeting, one claimed that the city had been taken over by "degenerate third worlders," blamed Jews for the influx, and warned that "crime and savagery will only increase with every Haitian you allow in."

Springfield's Haitian immigrants say they are afraid. Some have kept their children home from school, fearing violence. Others have reported harassment on the street, in their cars, and at stores. A Springfield family whose son died last year when the bus in which he was riding accidentally collided with a car driven by a Haitian immigrant has pleaded for Trump and Vance to stop using their deceased son for political purposes.

Yet Trump and J.D. Vance are doubling down. Sept. 15, before the attempt on Trump's life, Vance said on CNN that the claims about Haitians eating the pets of Springfield residents came from "firsthand accounts from my constituents." When interviewer Dana Bash suggested that the claims had caused bomb threats, Vance called her a "Democratic propagandist." But the connection is indisputable.

Rather than offhand comments, Trump's and Vance's claims are calculated. Trump's last two posts on Truth Social before the debate were AI images of cats and ducks — one depicting cats in military fatigues carrying assault rifles and wearing MAGA hats, the other showing the candidate himself sitting on a plane amid a crowd of ducks and cats.

Trump is now talking about holding a rally in Springfield. "We're going to get these people out," Trump said in a Sept. 13 news conference. Although Springfield's Haitian immigrants are in the United States legally, he promised to stage "the largest deportation in the history of our country" if reelected.

Trump's and Vance's claims are completely bogus. Ohio's Republican governor, Mike DeWine, told CBS News on Sept. 11 that "these Haitians came in here to work because there were jobs, and they filled a lot of jobs. And if you talk to employers, they've done a very, very good job and they work very, very hard."

Another of Trump's bogus claims is now threatening legal immigrants in Aurora, Colorado, a Denver suburb that Trump has repeatedly asserted is being

"taken over" by Venezuelan criminals. "Simply not true," Aurora's Republican mayor and city council member wrote in a joint statement.

As in Springfield, Trump's baseless claims are harming innocent people in Aurora. Immigrants there say they have been told their nationality makes them ineligible for jobs or housing. Trump's claims have led to threats and drawn armed groups to the city, claiming to offer vigilante-style protection.

Trump and Vance are using the oldest of tyrannical ploys — fueling deep-seated fears by creating an "other" — depicted as subhuman — who "take over" towns and "devour" loved ones.

In Springfield, the loved ones are people's pets. But how far is this bogus claim from vicious Nazi claims of Jews devouring children? Substitute "Jew" for "Haitian" in Springfield or for "Venezuelan" in Aurora, and you're back to the Nazis of the 1930s.

In demonizing and dehumanizing migrants, Trump and Vance are not just seeking to win over a few wavering voters across the nation or making a play for control of the Senate. They are trying to scare America into becoming a more fearsome, more racist nation.

"They're poisoning the blood of our country," Trump said of immigrants at a rally in New Hampshire eight months ago, virtually quoting Adolf Hitler (who wrote

in "Mein Kampf" that "All great cultures of the past perished only because the originally creative race died out from blood poisoning.")

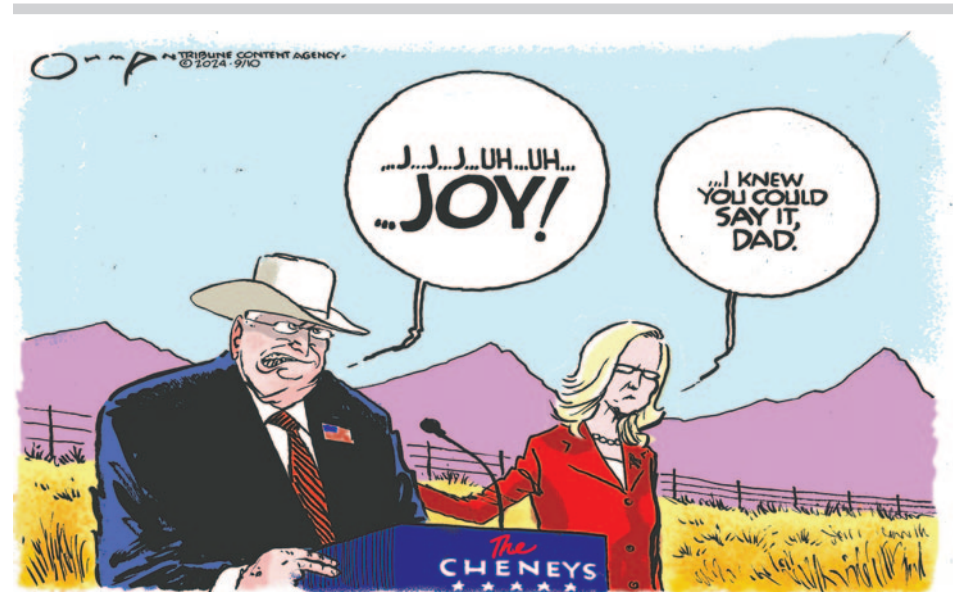
In a last-ditch effort to prevail in their campaign, Trump and Vance are encouraging the haters. On Sept. 10, Vance told his followers to "keep the cat memes flowing," notwithstanding that they were endangering people in his own state.

Meanwhile, members of Trump's social media war room — including Trump confidante Laura Loomer (known for sexist, homophobic, transphobic, anti-Muslim, and antisemitic posts) — are busily spreading AI-generated images of dogs and cats being protected by Trump, along with other content promoting the claim that the pets were being eaten by Haitians.

Let me repeat: There no justification whatsoever for violence or threats of violence in our democracy. While utterly despicable, yesterday's second apparent assassination attempt on Trump can be seen as a symptom of the hate-filled politics he and Vance are peddling.

This must stop.

Robert Reich, former secretary of labor during the Clinton administration, is professor of public policy at the University of California at Berkeley. His latest book is "The System: Who Rigged It, How We Fix It." He blogs at www.robertreich.substack.com.



Harris Makes the Most of Her Chances, While Trump Phones It In

By CLARENCE PAGE

Many, many moons ago, my family elders advised me: “Son, prepare yourself, because you never know when the doors of opportunity are going to open up. And when they do, you need to be ready to step inside.”

That was good advice, although I didn’t immediately take it to heart. I had to learn the hard way that walking through those doors meant cracking my books open first.

Democratic presidential candidate Kamala Harris made no mistake about the opportunity before her on Sept. 10 in her televised debate with Republican opponent Donald Trump. She was a woman with a plan, and she executed it flawlessly.

Trump was another story.

While the former president is a master of the internet arts of insult and relentless trolling, in the debate he showed himself to be utterly unprepared for face-to-face competition with an opponent who had done

her homework.

Harris, a former prosecutor, seemed prepared to use every tool at her disposal. She understood Trump’s deepest insecurities, and she wasted no time in coaxing her opponent to vent them.

Directly challenging Trump’s ability to keep his cool by insulting him personally is not a game for the squeamish. Yet Harris did so with startling ease. One imagines that Trump’s advisers warned him against taking the bait, but he couldn’t help himself.

The contrast between the candidates was embarrassingly apparent.

Harris cited respected academic economists to argue that Trump’s tariffs would be costly to consumers and potentially disastrous to the economy. Trump replied by citing the plaudits of Fox hosts Laura Ingraham and Sean Hannity.

Harris pointed out the large number of past Trump cabinet members who have warned that he would endanger American democracy if elected again. She revealed that numerous NATO leaders had privately expressed similar sentiments about his threat to the trans-Atlantic alliance, calling him a disgrace.

Trump retorted that Hungary’s strongman, Viktor Orban, is a major fan.

Closer to home, Harris zinged Trump — deservedly — for injecting himself into a bipartisan agreement on a border protection

bill to kill it.

Which raises the question of whose side Trump really is on in the border debate. As Harris put it: “Donald Trump got on the phone and called up some folks in Congress and said, ‘Kill the bill.’ And do you know why? Because he’d prefer to run on a problem instead of fixing a problem....”

No need to be more complicated than that. What really infuriated Trump was that he faced an opponent who gives as good as she gets in the game of toppling the self-important.

For the first time, it seemed, Trump the TV star had found something like his match in political showmanship. Perhaps no remark cut more deeply than when Harris asserted, “Donald Trump was fired by 81 million people ... and clearly he is having a very difficult time processing that.”

Unable to quite match the Harris assault, Trump made stuff up like a high school gossip. Without evidence, for example, he claimed that Joe Biden and Harris still hold grudges against each other, and he blamed her rhetoric for the failed assassination attempt against him in Pennsylvania.

But Trump hit a new and bizarre low in common decency when he falsely declared that Haitian immigrants in Ohio were hunting and eating dogs and cats.

Even Harris seemed momentarily stunned by the absurdity of the remark,

which ABC anchor David Muir pointed out had no evidence to back it up — but that didn’t stop Trump from doubling down anyway.

Two months ago, the Democratic Party had much to worry about. President Joe Biden, then the presumptive nominee, was flagging in public opinion polls. His disappointing performance in a televised debate added to widespread doubts about his ability to beat Trump.

Since Harris secured the nomination, the dynamics of the race have changed. Yet on Sept. 10, Trump’s performance seemed to indicate that his campaign has not adapted to a new opponent.

In the debate, Harris may not have delivered all the messages that undecided voters needed to hear. She did not fully answer questions about the economy, the issue of greatest concern for the electorate this year.

However, she did something that was immediately apparent to every American watching that debate. A door of opportunity opened as she walked on stage with a smile and an outstretched hand that seemed to catch the former president by surprise.

She, by comparison, appeared to see the doors of opportunity open up — and she was prepared to walk right in.

Clarence Page is a columnist at the *Chicago Tribune*. Email cpage@chicagotribune.com.

THE BIG PICTURE/*Glynn Wilson*

Harris Dispatches Trump in Debate; Now to Retake the House

Congressional Seat in Eastern Arkansas On the Line in November

Now that Vice President Kamala Harris has dispatched Donald Trump in the presidential debate on ABC, live from Philadelphia — the birthplace of American independence, freedom and democracy — it’s time to think about which party might control the closely divided Congress next year.

The public responded pretty quickly to the debate, with 57% of those who watched saying Harris won, while only 34% said Trump did, according to ABC’s 538 poll. Harris raised \$47 million in the 24 hours after the debate, and Trump was quick to say he would not debate her again.

The Democrats need to pick up at least nine seats in the House to take over the gavel and control the legislative agenda. There are 435 seats in Congress. Republicans now hold 220. Democrats hold 211. There are 4 open seats since New Jersey Democrat Donald Payne Jr. died in April and New Jersey Democrat Bill Pascrell died in August. Wisconsin Republican Mike Gallagher resigned in April. Texas Democrat Sheila Jackson Lee died in July.

If Harris wins the White House, her vice president will have the power to cast the deciding vote in the Senate in the event of a tie. There are 100 seats in the Senate. Republicans now hold 49 of those, while Democrats hold 47, along with four independents who vote with them. But there are contested races against incumbents in both parties.

It has come to our attention that there is an interesting contested Congressional race in Eastern Arkansas between a U.S. veteran and Democrat Rodney Govens from Cabot, who is a longtime Court Appointed Special Advocate for abused and neglected children, and incumbent Rick Crawford, an entrenched MAGA Republican Trump supporter, originally from Jonesboro.

Crawford, who was swept into Congress in the anti-Obama Republican wave that crested over the South in 2010, is known for voting for tax cuts for the rich and corporations, and for opposing the landmark bill to rebuild America’s infrastructure, a measure sought and promised by every president since Ronald Reagan — including Trump, who could not get it done. The infrastructure bill passed both houses of Con-

gress in bipartisan fashion in Joe Biden’s first year in office.

Crawford openly opposes the Supreme Court precedent-setting ruling upholding same-sex marriage as constitutional, and he supported Trump’s Muslim travel ban during the height of the COVID pandemic, which critics attacked as a racist act by the White House. He also engaged in the conspiracy to overthrow the legal results of the 2020 presidential election. Trump lost to Joe Biden, certified by Congress under the leadership of Trump’s Vice President Mike Pence as president of the Senate, on the night of Jan. 6, 2021, after the violent mob threatening to hang him was finally removed from the building by the Capitol and Metro police and the National Guard, when they finally arrived.

In December 2020, Crawford was one of 126 Republican members of the House who signed an amicus brief in support of *Texas v. Pennsylvania*, a lawsuit filed at the U.S. Supreme Court contesting the results of the 2020 presidential election. The court declined to hear the case on the basis that Texas lacked standing under Article III of the Constitution to challenge the results of an election held by another state.

Crawford has also sponsored federal legislation that would have gutted legal protections for the environment and slowed efforts to take on climate change caused by global warming from the burning of fossil fuels for energy and transportation, in 2010 signing a pledge sponsored by the right-wing Americans for Prosperity to vote against any global warming legislation that resulted in an increase in taxes.

And he opposed legislation to allow veterans to collect benefits for being injured in battle, including Vietnam vets who were exposed to the highly toxic and deadly chemical Agent Orange, and toxic burn pits. Crawford was an explosive ordinance disposal technician before being discharged in 1989, ending his four-year stint with the Army. He was elected to the House in 2010, the first Republican to represent Arkansas’ First District since the Reconstruction period following the Civil War.

Govens, the Democratic Party’s candidate in the First Congressional District, is a U.S. Army veteran who served as a communications specialist during Operation Iraqi Freedom and Operation Enduring Freedom. He was honorably discharged in 2005 after three and a half years. He’s running a moderate, solution-focused campaign, in a different town every day, studying the

challenges facing the communities in his district. The First District comprises 31 counties, stretching from Boone County in northwest Arkansas eastward to the Mississippi River, and southward to the Arkansas-Louisiana state line. The district population totals about 750,000 people, and it voted largely blue until about 2010.

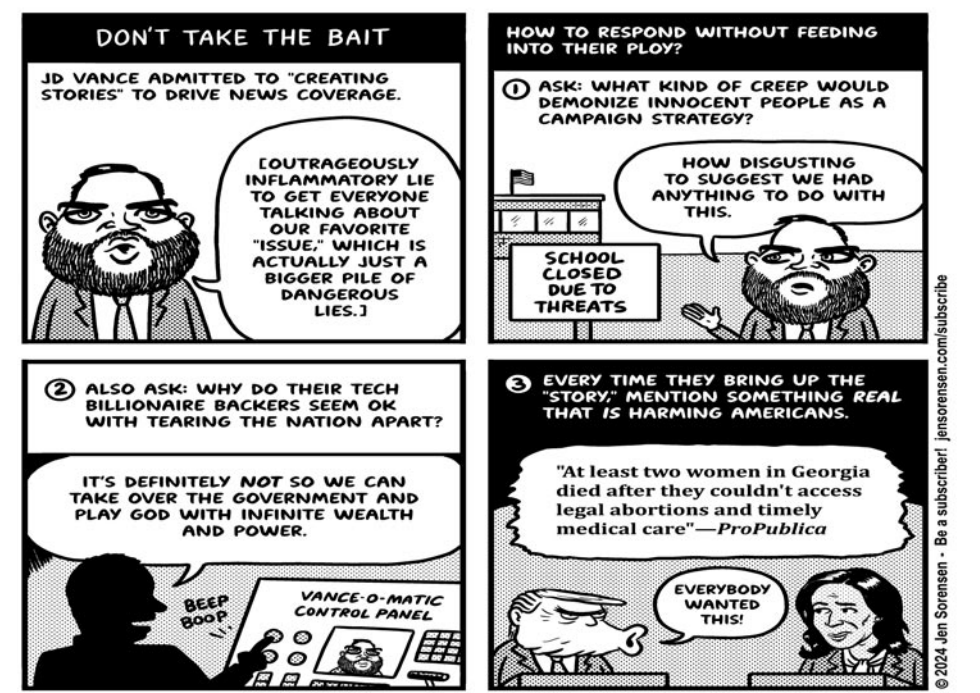
On the campaign trail, he’s answered many constituent complaints about Crawford’s chronic absenteeism by pledging to hold town halls every quarter in a different area of the district, once he’s elected.

“Arkansas needs a Congressman who is accessible and accountable to his constituents every day, not just at election time,” he said, hinting at criticism of Crawford for rarely showing up back home in his state to personally tackle the needs of the people and instead hobnobbing in Washington, D.C. with radical, divisive MAGA Republicans like Marjorie Taylor Green, Matt Gaetz and Jim Jordan.

They are members of the so-called Freedom Caucus, which has been called the Dixie Caucus by critics, harkening back to the lost cause Civil War, that, as we speak, are once again threatening to shut down the government at election time by withholding votes on funding bills for strictly partisan demands.

Perhaps most egregious, Crawford is suing the federal government, taxpayers, which Govens has written and talked about. In his lawsuit, Crawford claims his Congressional salary of \$174,000 is “unconstitutionally low” and seeks a retroactive cost-of-living raise with back pay not only for himself but for every current and former member of Congress going back decades.

Crawford voted against the American Rescue Plan and the infrastructure bill, Govens points out.



There is Money in Misery

Since COVID, Americans' overall mental health has plummeted. A lot of us suffer from depression, anxiety, substance abuse — a gamut of diagnoses. The causes are not so much biologic as social.

The pandemic-fueled lockdown shocked most psyches: We need everyday interactions with others, from friends to acquaintances to colleagues. Knowing that if we left our homes, we risked death contributed to the despair. Add the trials and uncertainties of everyday life: Will my job pay off my \$100,000 in student loans? Will I pay off my credit card debt? Will I find a house I can afford near my workplace? Will I have good-enough health insurance to pay for treatment? Will my children go to safe — let alone adequate — schools? The CDC has said that parenting today poses a major public health menace — simply too stressful. The specter of a warming planet hovers. And now when our beloved Labradoodles and dachshunds run away, we have to fear that a dark-skinned immigrant is barbecuing them.

It is no surprise that the measures of mental illness have risen.

Similarly, it is no surprise that a lot of people are seeking help. They need help. And as a nation is behooves us to help them.

So the demand for psychiatric social workers is up. Ditto for psychiatrists, for psychologists, for substance abuse counselors, for mental health counselors. The Bureau of Labor Statistics forecasts robust growth in those jobs. Psy-

chiatric facilities report a shortage of inpatient beds.

Not to worry: Private capital has rushed in to save us. The newest burgeoning industry: for-profit psychiatric hospitals. But these are not free-standing ones. They are “partnering” with nonprofit hospitals.

The grafting is clever. A nonprofit hospital wants money. In fairness to the auditors, the nonprofit is supposed to give money back to the community — the perk that justifies its nonprofit status. (Of course, the perk is arguable since nonprofits, like their for-profit counterparts, still hone in on the bottom line.) So the nonprofit hospital wants to bolster its revenue, but sees no easy solutions: it is not going to draw private-paying patients who can pay the full tab; it is unlikely to lure more donations; it has wrangled as much as it can wrangle from the nation's insurers, private and public. The dilemma challenges the MBA-management.

The managers have a solution: Graft onto the nonprofit a for-profit branch — especially artful if the branch cannot thrive on its own. For the nonprofit hospital, the newly diagnosed patients who present with mental health emergencies also present as patients, a.k.a. sources of revenue; yet the nonprofit would need to add specially trained staff to treat, and bill, these patients. The solution is ingenious, almost a symbiotic grafting: a nonprofit hospital grafts onto its revenue stream a private psychiatric hospital, especially one so beset with scandal that it is seeking a host-trunk. To add to the success, the nonprofit does the graft secretly, so that patients, entering the doors of Nonprofit Hospital, do not know that they are entering the branch operated by For Profit Psychiatric Hospital. (Stat: Troubled For-Profit Chains Are Stealthily Operating Dozens Of Psychiatric Hospitals Under Nonprofits' Names.) Only when patients complain to the hospital do they discover that they were admitted to a private psychiatric hospital.

If only those hospitals didn't see those patients prima-

rily as sources of revenue, this would not be a problem. After all, people need care; the psychiatric hospitals presumably can give that care.

But investors want profits. The patients generate revenue. So the recent *New York Times* exposé, “How a Leading Chain of Psychiatric Hospitals Traps Patients” (Sept. 1, 2024) by Jessica Silver-Greenberg and Katie Thomas into Acadia Healthcare's entrepreneurial zeal is not surprising. The best way to “maximize” insurance payments is to prolong patients' stays — not to return the patients to the community quickly. “Successful” treatment is not a good business strategy: The *Times* discovered that one hospital in Florida was even holding patients against their will.

As a nation, we can bolster the mental health of our citizens without filling the coffers of investors. Government — the demon of Project 2025 — can help. Consider the omnipresent violence besetting schools, workplaces, shopping malls. We are all chagrined, frightened. But the government can outlaw the automatic weapons easily acquired, recently used in massacres. The government can impose sane regulations. On to housing woes. The government can spur the production of more units, rental and owned. Urban schools often pale in “quality” beside their suburban counterparts. Communities can invest in education, so that all schools are excellent. The government can expand Obamacare, can extend Medicaid (states' zeal to pare the rolls has left thousands of Americans without insurance). A forceful government can lower the cost of drugs (as it did with insulin). The government can raise the minimum wage, giving more Americans a boost out of poverty.

Beyond government, though, we ourselves can stop the libelous hate-filled rhetoric that divides us.

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

To Secure Worker Rights, We Must Fix Our Democracy

Gerrymandering and the filibuster are holding back wage increases, the right to unionize, and other benefits for workers.

By PAUL SONN

New waves of workers are standing up and demanding fair treatment on the job — from the fast food workers of the Fight for \$15 to the workers at companies like Starbucks, Trader Joe's, and Volkswagen that are fighting for a union and a fair contract.

But as these workers have made significant gains, they've simultaneously run into huge barriers: our broken democratic systems. That's why one of the most important priorities for advancing worker power is

democracy reform.

In particular, that means reforming the anti-democratic filibuster in the U.S. Senate and ending partisan and racial gerrymandering, which have made state legislatures unresponsive to worker needs.

Take the Fight for \$15. Over the last decade, the brave workers driving this inspiring campaign have won wage increases in half the states and scores of cities. As a result, about half of our workforce will soon be covered by a \$15 minimum wage — one of the highest among industrialized countries. But the other half languishes with one of the lowest minimum wages in the developed world. The federal minimum wage remains frozen at a paltry \$7.25.

Despite the fact that more than 80 percent of Democratic, independent, and Republican voters want to raise the minimum wage, no Republican-led legislature has passed a genuine increase in decades. Many have not only blocked state wage increases, but also passed punitive “preemption” laws to prevent cities from stepping in to ensure fair wages. Not coincidentally, many of these are among the most gerrymandered.

At the federal level, there's a similar dynamic: Republicans in the Senate have used

the anti-democratic filibuster for years to block increases in the federal minimum wage despite strong voter support.

Workers fighting to form a union face similar roadblocks. Employees who demand a fair shake routinely face retaliation from their employers — and those who defy the odds and win a union election often endure years of stonewalling as corporations refuse to negotiate a contract. Others, such as app-based workers at Uber and Doordash, have been denied the right to unionize at all.

The PRO Act would remove these roadblocks and modernize our broken labor laws to give workers a real opportunity to join a union and negotiate with their employers over fair pay and benefits, protection against extreme heat, how AI is deployed in their workplaces, and more.

But while 70% of voters, including a majority of Republicans, back the PRO Act, the threat of a Republican filibuster in the Senate prevents it from advancing.

Fortunately, there's new and long overdue momentum for addressing these anti-democratic roadblocks.

Senator Chuck Schumer announced recently that if they win this year, Democrats plan to prioritize key democracy reforms, in-

cluding reforming the filibuster to empower a simple majority of the Senate to pass the Freedom to Vote Act and John Lewis Voting Rights Act. These crucial voting rights bills include new limits on racial and partisan gerrymandering — the practices that have made many state legislatures so unresponsive to worker needs.

But safeguarding fair elections is only the first step. The next step must be removing the filibuster — which has a long and ugly history of being used to deny people of color basic rights in our nation — as an obstacle to restoring protections for workers. In an echo of Jim Crow, senators today are using the threat of a filibuster to protect a broken labor law system that denies all workers, and especially workers of color, a fair chance to join a union and earn a decent minimum wage.

The rights of workers to earn a living wage and have a voice in their workplaces are fundamental for our democracy. The key next steps for making those rights real is to restore our democracy by ending both gerrymandering and the filibuster.

Paul Sonn is the Director of National Employment Law Project (NELP) Action. This op-ed was distributed by OtherWords.org.

Why the Far Right Lies About Immigrants

Springfield's immigrant influx is a success story, not a scandal. But when powerful people don't want to share prosperity, they lie.

By PETER CERTO

When my dad moved to southwest Ohio in the early 1970s, the Dayton-Springfield area's second city was home to over 80,000 people. When I was growing up nearby in the 1990s, it was 70,000. Today, it's less than 60,000.

Springfield's decline looks like an awful lot of Rust Belt cities and towns. And behind those numbers is a lot of human suffering.

Corporations engineered trade deals that made it cheaper to move jobs abroad, where they could pay workers less and pollute more with impunity. As the region's secure blue collar jobs dried up, so did the local tax base — and as union membership dwindled, so did social cohesion.

Young people sought greener pastures elsewhere while those who remained nursed

resentments, battled a flood of opioids, and gritted their teeth through empty promises from politicians.

It's a sad chapter for countless American cities, but it hardly needs to be the last one. After all, the region's affordable housing — and infrastructure built to support larger populations — can make it attractive for new arrivals looking to build a better life. And they in turn revitalize their new communities.

So it was in Springfield, where between 15,000 and 20,000 Haitian migrants have settled in the last few years. “On Sunday afternoons, you could suddenly hear Creole mass wafting through downtown streets,” NPR reported. “Haitian restaurants started popping up.”

One migrant told the network he'd heard that “Ohio is the [best] place to come get a job easily.” He now works at a steel plant and as a Creole translator. Local employers have heaped praise on their Haitian American workers, while small businesses have reaped the benefits of new customers and wages have surged.

Reversing decades of population decline in a few short years is bound to cause some growing pains. But on balance, Springfield is a textbook case of how immigration can change a region's luck for the better.

“Immigrants are good for this country,” my colleagues Lindsay Koshgarian and Aliyah Lusuegro have written. “They work critical jobs, pay taxes, build businesses, and

introduce many of our favorite foods and cultural innovations (donuts, anyone?) ... They make the United States the strong, diverse nation that it is.”

In fact, it was earlier waves of migration — including African Americans from the South, poor Whites from Appalachia, and immigrants from abroad — that fueled much of the industrial heartland's earlier prosperity.

But some powerful people don't want to share prosperity equally. So they lie.

“From politicians who win office with anti-immigrant campaigns to White supremacists who peddle racist conspiracy theories and corporations that rely on undocumented workers to keep wages low and deny workers' rights,” Lindsay and Aliyah explain, “these people stoke fear about immigrants to divide us for their own gain.”

So it is with an absurd and dangerous lie — peddled recently by Donald Trump, JD Vance, Republican politicians, and a bunch of internet trolls — that Haitian Americans are fueling a crime wave in Springfield, abducting and eating people's pets, and other racist nonsense.

“According to interviews with a dozen local and county and officials as well as city police data,” Reuters reports, there's been no “general rise in violent or property crime” or “reports or specific claims of pets being harmed” in Springfield. Instead, many of these lies appear to have originated with a local neo-Nazi group called “Blood Pride” — which

is about as lovely as they sound.

“In reality, immigrants commit fewer crimes, pay more taxes, and do critical jobs that most Americans don't want,” Lindsay and Aliyah point out.

Politicians who want you to believe otherwise are covering for someone else — like the corporations who shipped jobs out of communities like Springfield in the first place — all to win votes from pathetic White nationalists in need of a new hobby. It's lies like these, not immigrants, who threaten the recovery of Rust Belt cities.

Springfield's immigrant influx is a success story, not a scandal. And don't let any desperate politicians tell you otherwise.

Peter Certo is the communications director of the Institute for Policy Studies and editor of OtherWords.org.



WAYNE O'LEARY

On Not Going Back (Or Forward Either)

If this presidential campaign was the movie “Treasure of the Sierra Madre,” Kamala Harris would be the Mexican bandit leader informing Humphrey Bogart’s character how things would be. “I’m Kamala,” she would say, “I don’t need your stinkin’ press conferences, and I don’t give no stinkin’ interviews. You want to know my plans? You’ll find out when I’m elected. Now, hand over those votes.”

This would be fine with the Democrats who gathered in Chicago the week of Aug. 19. In an orgy of anti-Trumpism, they put their faculties on hold. It didn’t matter who the candidate was, how the candidate reached the nomination, or what the candidate might do in office. All that mattered was that the candidate was someone new who might save the party from the predations of Donald Trump, the most frightening apparition Democrats have ever encountered in their worst nightmares.

Trump is so far into Democrats’ heads that they can’t think straight. They’re convinced he’s an evil genius, the Devil in drag, long red tie, orange complexion and all. Let him near power again, and he’ll put all the liberals in a gulag somewhere in Texas, or refurbish Guantanamo for his political enemies.

Actually, Trump himself is increasingly having trouble thinking straight as he ages. Never smart and disciplined enough to really be an effective autocrat, he’s less so now. A future Trump administration would heavily depend on the Donald’s subordinates. As for the much-referenced Project 2025, he’s probably never read it and would likely disown its proposals at the slightest hint of unpopularity.

Still and all, the Democrats paranoically fear his return so much that they’ve raised to leadership someone who’s never won a presidential-primary election or caucus, simply in hopes that a newer, younger, different face can magically succeed and prevent the apocalypse. They’ve wrapped themselves in smiley faced ebullience, reinforced with balloons, rock music, dancing, and general mass delirium: With Kamala, we’ll win, win, win and be happy, happy, happy! The euphoric momentum generated, a kind of psy-

chic levitation, only has to last two more months to election day.

If the popular Jerry Seinfeld TV show of yesteryear was about nothing, the Democrats of 2024 put on a political convention about nothing. Except for Bernie Sanders, who reiterated his dogged pitch for universal health insurance and for long overdue dental, hearing and vision coverage under Medicare, speaker after speaker whispered (or shouted) sweet nothings to the gathered delegates.

Sanders, in fact, gave the only substantive speech worth hearing. The rest either trashed Trump, or urged upon the assembled the need to understand and love their neighbors, reach across partisan lines, and broaden still further the already flapping big tent that is the amorphous Democratic Party.

Sanders also issued the only major prime-time condemnation of the travesty in Gaza, the convention’s untouchable subject, other than the nominee herself, who made a brief, passing mention of it in her acceptance speech. Harris acknowledged the suffering of the Palestinians and their need for self determination, but diluted the impact by prefacing her statement with the usual reference to Israel’s “right to defend itself.”

The Democrats celebrated their diversity — racial, ethnic, gender — as if that were an end in itself. In so doing, they pinpointed the party’s real problem: It stands for little or nothing, ideologically speaking; it’s become a party of platitudes, so that a likeable personality is now all that matters in the people it offers up to the electorate. The main qualification for its candidates, personified by the selection of centrist Kamala Harris, is to be infinitely flexible and adaptable, with no set beliefs that can’t be traded off when convenient. Those in Chicago had just one thing in common, one message to deliver: they were anti-Trump.

If the Chicago Democratic convention meant anything, it meant generational change — out with the old, in with the new. An emerging generation of youngish politicians has arrived on the scene. They want power, and an older generation, the much-maligned gerontocracy, is standing in their way. That’s an unspoken reason why Joe Biden had to go. There’s an element of ageism, conscious or subconscious, involved here.

Older White guys, in particular, are out of fashion in a Democratic Party increasingly weighted toward women and “people of color,” and they’re being turfed out. It’s not that their successors will be smarter, morally superior, or more idealistic; often, the reverse may well be true. It’s all a matter of demographics; people prefer to be led by those like

themselves. As Biden learned, energy, appearance and cultural relevance are more important than wisdom and experience. In Chicago, this truth was expressed with a cynicism that was almost comic: “Thank you, Joe,” was the refrain. (Pay no attention to the knives sticking out of your back.)

In keeping with the generational theme, the Chicago convention, having no real business to transact, became a made-for-television show-biz production aimed particularly at younger voters who, Democrats fear, might stay home in 2024 unless sufficiently excited and motivated. (Kamala worked at McDonald’s; she can relate!)

And if we’re going to put on a show, kids, let’s not do it half way; let’s have a bogus roll-call vote. (“The great state of North Cupcake casts all of its votes for the next president of the United States, Kamala Harris.”) Even Vladimir Putin allows Russia’s election losers 8% or 10% just for appearances sake, but not the Democrats; their pre-selected candidate got 100% across the board — except for the missing uncommitted pro-Palestinian delegates, who walked out because they were permitted no speakers liable to spoil the festivities by mentioning Gaza.

The show ended with Kamala Harris sashaying across the stage to be received by the adoring multitude and deliver an acceptance speech in which she said — precisely nothing. The only thing lacking was the late Bert Parks crooning, “Here she comes, Miss America . . .”

Sequel: Ten days later came the Dana Bash softball interview on CNN eliciting more sweet nothings. Harris declined to answer questions about her chronic flip-flopping on issues (yes, then no, on the Green New Deal, Medicare for All, decriminalizing illegal immigration, and fracking). But, the candidate said, her “values” had not changed, only her policies, and what, after all, have policies to do with values? There was no follow-up by a compliant Bash.

Nothing was revealed about Kamala’s stance on Gaza or climate change, the elephants in the room, but we learned lots about “the baby nieces.” She’s an opportunist, admitted Harris supporter David Brooks on PBS, but she’s our opportunist.

The convention about nothing thereby transitioned seamlessly into the campaign about nothing.

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Here’s a Good Topic for Candidates to Debate: Taxing the Filthy Rich

“The wealthiest of the wealthy have figured out how to get richer and richer and richer and richer in ways that just don’t show up on a tax form,” said Sen. Elizabeth Warren at a recent Senate hearing. It’s time to change that.

By SAM PIZZIGATI

The first televised U.S. presidential debate came way back in 1960. Few of us who happened to watch that debate remember much about it. But a look back at the transcript of that debate — a session that concentrated on domestic issues — shows that the evening’s proceedings mentioned not a single word about a stunning domestic transformation then about midway through its third decade.

That transformation? The United States had become a significantly more economically equal nation. With federal tax rates running as high as 91% on top-bracket income and unions representing more than a third of America’s private-sector workers — over five times today’s private-sector union share — the United States had given birth to the world’s first mass middle class.

In just a single generation, America had gone from a nation where the richest 1% held nearly half the nation’s wealth to a nation where that top 1% held only just over a fifth of that wealth.

This stunning reality came up nowhere in that first debate between the Democratic Party candidate John Kennedy, then a U.S. senator, and Richard Nixon, the nation’s Republican vice president.

But what if that debate had explicitly recognized that reality? What if that debate’s panel of journalists had asked the candidates whether they would encourage or discourage, strengthen or trim, the tax and labor policies that had created a much more equal United States?

If those journalists had asked questions along that line, would John Kennedy, once president, have dared to ask Congress, as he did in 1963, to drop the top-bracket tax rate on America’s richest down to 65%?

That Kennedy-era Congress would end up lowering the nation’s top tax rate, from 91 to 70 percent. A bit over two decades later, in Ronald Reagan’s second term in the White House, that top rate would sink all the way down to 28%.

The current top rate? On income over \$731,201, married couples filing jointly face a 37% tax rate. Taxpayers making 100 times that \$731,201, over \$73 million, face that same 37% top rate. And on “capital gains,” the profits from the sale of stocks and other assets, these rich pay taxes at no more than a 20% rate.

At the first — and probable last — debate between Kamala Harris and Donald Trump on Sept. 10, the two candidates faced no questions on how little in taxes our contemporary tax code expects rich people to pay. Few noticed. But at a Senate hearing on Capitol Hill, Finance Committee chair Ron Wyden from Oregon did his best to inject how much in taxes rich people don’t pay into America’s most high-profile political deliberations.

The bargain-basement tax rates on high incomes now in place, Senator Wyden made vividly clear, only hint at the tax windfalls our super rich are now regularly realizing.

Our billionaires, Wyden noted as he opened the hearing, can essentially “avoid paying taxes forever” through a neat trick tax justice advocates have come to label “buy-borrow-die.”

Our ultra-wealthy, Wyden went on to explain, are using their wealth to acquire valuable assets, then watching those assets appreciate and borrowing against the higher value of those assets to generate the cash they need to maintain their luxurious

lifestyles. Eventually, of course, these deep pockets die, but any tax owed on their investment gains simply “disappears into the ledgers of history.” Their heirs face no tax whatsoever on the gains their benefactors have left them.

“This kind of tax trickery isn’t available to nurses and firefighters and tradesmen. Their taxes come straight out of every paycheck,” Wyden pointed out. “The ultra-wealthy get their own special set of rules.”

Long-time tax attorney Bob Lord, the current senior advisor on tax policy for the Patriotic Millionaires network and an Institute for Policy Studies associate fellow, expanded on “buy-borrow-die” and assorted other lucrative tax dodges in his testimony before Wyden’s panel. Those dodges could — and should — take center stage in 2025, he agreed, as America’s lawmakers debate whether to extend the 2017 Trump tax cuts for the rich set to expire by next year’s end.

Republican lawmakers on the Senate Finance Committee spent a huge chunk of their time at the hearing depicting America’s rich as noble souls doing their best to create jobs in the face of a tax system that harasses them at every turn. Senator Elizabeth Warren from Massachusetts disputed that depiction.

Young...

Continued from page 7

secretary. Then there was his first secretary of state, who famously called him a “f-cking moron.”

Heck, his vice president won’t be voting for him.

The only true expertise Trump has demonstrated has been how to delay criminal sanctions. Job 1 in his quest to regain office is to wipe clean all the criminal charges he has rung up. (Credit where due: He has a masterful command of bankruptcy courts.)

He managed to delay sentencing for 34 counts of business fraud until after the election — papering over hush money to a porn star he says he never bedded (yeah, sure).

“The wealthiest of the wealthy have figured out how to get richer and richer and richer and richer in ways that just don’t show up on a tax form,” Warren noted. “The result: The top one-tenth of 1% pays about 3.2% of their wealth in taxes every year while the bottom 99% pays more than double that.”

The Biden-Harris administration, the Massachusetts senator added, has advanced a proposal that would subject Americans with net worths over \$100 million — the nation’s wealthiest 10,000 people — to a minimum 25% tax on their income, well below our federal tax code’s current 37% top rate.

But these wealthy, Warren continued, are claiming that they don’t have the money to pay that tax because their wealth is sitting “all locked up in stocks.”

“Are these 10,000 mega-millionaires actually cash-poor?” Warren asked Robert Lord, the veteran tax attorney witness. “Are they living like monks?”

“I haven’t seen,” Lord smiled in reply, “many monks on yachts.”

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F-f-f-felon.

Only a Trump cultist could have watched the debate and not pronounced Kamala Harris the only presidential figure on that stage. Speaking of pronunciation, Harris made sure he heard it with that handshake. She was Muhammad Ali needling Ernie Terrell amid an in-ring battering. “What’s my name?”

The divine irony is that this slow-footed invention of reality television — he who gets his news and cues from Fox Spews, was revealed for 67 million TV viewers to be nothing but a cardboard cut-out. But, hey, check out those ratings!

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Trump-Vance Are Doing to Haitians What the Israeli Right Has Done to Palestinians — Demonize a Whole People

By JUAN COLE

ANN ARBOR — The vile and disgusting tactic of J.D. Vance and Don Trump of spreading false, racist charges against Haitians of eating the pets of suburbanites is nothing unexpected. The MAGA wing of the Republican Party thrives on finding poor, weak victims and demonizing them. First they manufacture an imaginary threat, then they pose as the champions of Das Volk — oops, I mean, the people, as the ones who can save them from this menace.

Haitian workers, having legally come into the U.S., started going to Springfield, Ohio, for jobs in 2018 when Trump was president. The Springfield municipal authorities needed workers and were happy to have them come in. Their numbers have almost certainly been vastly exaggerated.

In fact, the Trump administration did not cut immigration. Trump issued green

cards at about the same annual rate as the Obama administration until the advent of COVID. The annual rate of green card issuance went back to normal under Biden-Harris but did not increase over what Trump had been doing. Trump's immigration scare is just a scam — the US has been averaging about a million legal immigrants a year for a long time, and that continued under Trump before the pandemic.

Why target Haitians? Some on social media have suggested that it is a slam at Kamala Harris's paternal ancestry in Jamaica, an attempt to smear all Caribbean-Americans as deviants.

Haitians have fled Haiti in some numbers, but they aren't the only emigrants from the Caribbean to the US and are not distinctive percentage-wise. There are about 1.1 million persons of Haitian descent in the U.S., while the population of Haiti is 11.5 million. That's 9.5% of the population in the U.S. But there are 2.5 million persons of Dominican descent in the U.S., and the population of the Dominican Republic is almost identical to that of Haiti. That's nearly 22% of Dominica in the US.

Haitian emigration, like all emigration, is driven by pull factors and push factors. The US economy and demand for jobs are pull factors. Natural disasters and gang governance are push factors. Hurricane Matthew in 2016 destroyed 200,000 homes and left over a million people without housing. Hurricanes have gotten more powerful and destructive because Americans put 4 or 5 billion tons of carbon dioxide into the atmosphere every year from

burning coal, fossil gas and petroleum. So Matthew was extra destructive and it is our fault. There are many reasons for which the US owes Haiti reparations.

The murder rate in Haiti is 40 per 100,000 per annum. In the US recently it is about 6 per 100,000 per annum. In France it is 1.4 per 100,000 per year, which shows just how violent the US is. But Haiti is more so.

The Trump-Vance smear of Haitians as eaters of family pets in part refers obliquely to the violent conditions from which Haitian immigrants have fled. There are some 200 armed gangs in Haiti. They have around 12,000 members. But obviously most Haitians are not gangbangers. In fact, 11,488,000 are not. As with Mexico, US-made semi-automatic weapons have flooded the island and worsened violence. But over one million in the US came here in part to get away from that kind of thing. Trump and Vance want to smear hard-working blue collar Haitian families.

This demonization of an entire ethnic group is typical of fascist politics. The Nazis also accused German Jews of spreading false rumors, of spreading diseases, and of being generally undesirable.

The targeting of Haitians resembles in some ways the demonization of Palestinians. Even their scarves, the keffiyeh, have been demonized. Palestinians have been accused of being intrinsically violent, as though it were a gene trait. I have long thought that given that they were kicked out of their own country and have been

kept under a brutal occupation, they have responded with a remarkable lack of violence. Even now, as the Israeli military has slaughtered over 40,000 Palestinians in Gaza, the bulk of them women and children, the Palestinians of the West Bank have been long-suffering. Indeed, most of the violence in the Palestinian West Bank has been committed by militant Israel squatters determined to steal Palestinian land.

A lot of the 160,000 Palestinian Americans seem to be professionals and small business people. Some of them have staged protests. The biggest rap against them seems to be that they protested without a permit (a charge that seems oblivious to what "protest" means.)

Palestinians can be killed with impunity because they are not considered human beings. A whole panoply of Israeli leaders have said that there are no innocent Palestinians, which is a genocidal statement. Just switch it around and consider how horrible it would be for someone to say that there are no innocent Jews.

And now, courtesy of rising American fascism, there are no innocent Haitians.

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Neo-Cons See 'Pax Americana' Ending, as Americans Look Inward

By MARK ANDERSON

In this 61st year since JFK's oft-cited American University "peace speech," it's helpful to reflect on his expressed opposition to a "Pax Americana"—"peace" enforced by blunt U.S. power—in light of what a leading foreign policy professor and lecturer told the American Enterprise Institute Sept. 4.

The Hudson Institute's Walter Russell Mead told the neo-conservative group that the phrase "rules-based world order," widely used to describe the world-policing system the West has been upholding since World War II's conclusion, is off base, and what really has been in operation all along is the very "Pax Americana" that JFK decried, although Mead did not mention JFK.

Mead, a former Henry Kissinger Senior Fellow at the ultra-plutocratic Council on Foreign Relations, added that the Pax Americana (PA) is in serious decline and could be terminal, even while he professed to be at a loss for what to replace it with.

"The [American] uni-polar moment is over, and there's no agreed upon consensus on what should replace it," Mead stated, suggesting there's been a major paradigm shift, which our nightly news likely won't clearly reveal to the American people.

A Hudson Institute paper, meanwhile, written by Hudson staffer Arthur Herman, showed that while Mead offered several insights to the AEI that appeared to be based on original thinking, he actually partly recited the Hudson Institute's own "boilerplate" policy recommendations as expressed by the in-house wonk, Mr. Herman.

Herman alleged that the PA is literally deceased:

"The Pax Americana that has prevailed over world affairs since the end of World War II is dead, if not actually buried. It must now be replaced. The two remaining questions are: with what and how? The term 'Pax Americana' (American Peace) refers to the international order the United States constructed after World War II and the decades of relative peace and prosperity that followed under the U.S. economic and military leadership of the free world, notwithstanding the ... Cold War." Herman added: "Since 1948, that order has proved remarkably resilient ... in the face of multiple challenges. These included ... America's ... large-scale wars in Asia (Korea, Vietnam) and the Middle East (Iraq,

Afghanistan)—not to mention the collapse of [the USSR], and the rise of ... China."

Mead cited Iran cited as a growing regional menace, possibly rivaling the threat posed by China or Russia. An unrelenting foe of Israel, Iran is seeking to become a dominant regional power; meanwhile, Israel's other enemies, such as Hezbollah, also won't relent, Mead explained, while alleging Iran's "proxy" influence is especially strong in Syria, Iraq and Lebanon.

The next U.S. president likely will face a nuclear Iran, yet Mead lamented that the core supporters of both Harris and Trump "are inward-looking," meaning that a sizable cross section of Americans may be growing tired of policing the world and want to focus on domestic betterment (a welcome trend). Mead feels "Team Harris" generally wants to restore the PA yet may fail to act, but "Team Trump" probably never fully supported the PA concept in the first place.

Additionally, Mead believes Americans will tire of supporting Ukraine, thereby enabling Russia, China and Iran to further weaken and displace the seemingly fragile PA.

"China understands the stakes and what the seizure of Taiwan would mean [and goods from that greater region's nations may stop flowing]," Mead continued, predicting a major economic crisis should a U.S.-China showdown take place over Tai-

wan.

"[I see] geopolitical competition ... driving a wave of [conflict and] wars," Mead stated.

Concurrently, a new global economic landscape has taken shape, evidently challenging American dominance more than at any time since 1945.

"Unlike during the Cold War, when the USSR posed a military but not economic threat to America and its allies, China has emerged as both," Herman wrote, adding that India has remained an "ambiguous partner" in "re-stabilizing the global order." And America's military seems "less ready to assume its remaining global responsibilities ..."

But has America really kept actual peace since the latter 1940s? Or has it simply fostered an age of undeclared, and therefore unlawful, "perpetual wars for perpetual peace" via heavy-handed, deadly, largely fruitless ventures in Korea, Vietnam, Iraq, Afghanistan (our longest war) etc?

And if policing the world is indeed becoming less popular and less sustainable, perhaps that's because it was simply a bad idea in the first place—just as JFK warned.

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Republicans are Still Making Excuses for Trump's Disastrous Debate

By ELWOOD WATSON

When it comes to the issue of debates, perception is often just as crucial as reality and substance.

Donald Trump's debate performance Sept. 10 was nothing short of dismal. It was a failed opportunity for Trump to persuade the American people (albeit cynically) about the direction of our nation. True to his character, he was abrupt, combative, and ruthlessly negative. As Trump sees it, the country is a few steps away from implosion.

From a historical perspective, presidential debates usually are irrelevant. A trove of social science literature argues the majority of debate watchers have firmly decided whom they intend to vote for. While the victorious candidate might get a current

boost from a competent performance, the polling bump often subsides.

But the debate between Trump and Kamala Harris may very well be a political aberration. It was a one-sided affair, a Waterloo of epic proportions for the former president.

It was such a rout that many conservative pundits frantically bewailed Trump's disastrous performance. Some resorted to sinister conspiracy theories in an effort to discredit Harris' performance, pointing to an unsubstantiated document dispensed by a random social media account that claimed, without evidence, ABC News colluded with the vice president against Trump.

The charges were so outlandish that Gateway Pundit, a far-right conspiracy theory site supportive of Trump, denounced it as "a complete hoax."

None of these issues stopped folks like Texas Sen. Ted Cruz, Georgia Rep. Marjorie Taylor Green, billionaire Bill Ackman, and X owner Elon Musk of jumping all over the false story and sharing the phony documents.

Until recently, many perceived Harris as ill-suited for the role of the vice presi-

dency, let alone president of the United States. She was a person that much of the mainstream media often ridiculed, a number of political pundits had derided as the "weakest" alternative to Biden. Racist and sexist voices on the right routinely demeaned her supposed political deficiencies and large segments of the press provided only sporadic coverage of the vice president.

Her debate performance effectively dispelled initial perceptions, misguided assumptions and bigoted prejudices that she was a "DEI" hire. Even now, post-debate performance, there are a few detractors who believe that Harris is devoid of the necessary political acumen to be successful.

There are a small segment of journalists that have championed her achievements and competencies, but they have tended to be voices on the political periphery. Interestingly, the Sept.10 debate became a revelatory moment to many seasoned beltway political veterans who had smugly dismissed Harris as being ill-suited for her current position. Many of them were left wondering as well as pondering what it was that made them misdiagnose their patient with such gross negligence.

As history indicates, first debates do not always guarantee a final outcome, though this one may be the only event between Harris and Trump. Walter Mondale, John Kerry and Hillary Clinton were seen as the victors after their initial debate performances yet failed to win the presidency. Nonetheless, for the moment, the vice president and her campaign have the wind at their backs.

Harris is the nation's first female vice president. In a nation that historically has been deeply politically ingrained in racial conflict, such a fact itself is glaringly noteworthy. Regardless of whether she is victorious or not in November, Harris is the first woman of color to serve as the Democratic party nominee.

This is a fact that will be permanently etched in her life story as well as in the political annals of American history.

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.

The Fall of Donald Trump

By JAMIE STIEHM

It's over for you, Donald Trump. America can't go on like this — don't you feel it too? The breaking point came during the debate with Kamala Harris. After nine years, your dangerous duel with democracy is done.

Something to do with Haitian immigrants in Ohio eating cats and dogs was a bridge too far even for your ugly dark vision. The bridge fell, taking you with it.

On the way down, you declared, "I HATE TAYLOR SWIFT!" — the act of a desperate man.

In a poetic twist of fate, the Sept. 10 debate did to you what the June 27 debate did to faltering President Joe Biden. Exit stage.

Each debate exposed an absence of mind, to put it kindly, that ruled out governing a country back on its feet after a global pandemic, an economic crisis and a violent attack on democracy. (Thank you, Biden.)

Democrats are not the only ones appalled at the latest claim coming out of your mouth, your tongue like a blade.

Up and down the ranks, Republicans are concerned about the company you keep, and some are running for cover from a candidate more extreme than ever. Arch-conservative columnist George Will endorsed Harris.

The mayor of Springfield, Ohio, and the governor of the state, both Republicans, condemned your racist smear on Haitians, which caused bomb threats to the town.

The immigrants are legal working residents in the community. But your running mate, Sen. JD Vance of Ohio, boasted that he "created stories" in his home state.

Back to the debate: The split-screen sight of your contortions next to Harris' calm and collected manner was a stark contrast. The vice president commanded the fact field and chose her slings and arrows wisely and well. Your crowds leave rallies early out of "exhaustion and boredom"; 81 million Americans fired you in 2020. Ouch!

Sixty-seven million Americans saw your red-faced fury and heard your outright falsehoods (aka lies), Donald.

Did you say one true thing in 90 minutes in Philadelphia, the nation's birthplace? The Declaration of Independence's signers and the Constitution's framers were a short walk across the courtyard.

Their spirits were there, watching the republic come to this.

So — is nothing sacred to you? Ever get tired of yourself, the town crier peddling insults, hoaxes and witchhunts? Don't even answer that question.

It's like Joseph Welch asking Sen. Joseph McCarthy, "Have you no sense of decency, sir?" That public moment silenced McCarthy in 1954 from further pursuing suspected "communists." All of a sudden, he lost his power.

That's what's happening here, Donald: a showstopper in American politics.

You and McCarthy have Roy Cohn in common — instigator for McCarthy, mentor to you. Cohn instilled his ruthless methods in you, and boy, you were a star pupil.

To their credit, the ABC News debate moderators checked you on key points, like the cat-and-dog rumor.

But they couldn't catch every breath you took to tell another whopper.

For one, crime is not way up. It's down — violent crime in cities especially. Inflation is not the highest in history. Actually, its growth is now less than 3%. Harris is not a "Marxist" (shades of Cohn). Nor was her father a "Marxist" economics professor.

One particularly offensive falsehood was asserting that "every legal scholar" wanted reproductive rights to be up to the states. Harris demolished that demeaning statement. We now have pregnant girls and women crossing state lines for medical care, an arc from enslaved people seeking freedom.

Self-determination: just another word for freedom.

And did you expect us to believe you offered to send "10,000 National Guard soldiers" to the Capitol riot that you incited on Jan. 6? You spoke of the mob as "we."

How brazen to say such a thing, when you deployed — and enjoyed — the largest (armed) crowd of your career: 30,000.

We who were there know the National Guard did not get there for hours, after the smoke cleared and the mob had done its damage. That was the best day of your life.

Last, the best proof that you lost the debate badly is that you insisted, over and over, that you won — after the fall.

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.

The Enemy of My Enemy is at the Door

By BARRY FRIEDMAN

Democrats have a problem. Many horrible people — certainly politically horrible people — keep agreeing with them about Donald Trump.

More than 200 Republicans, including members of Trump's own administration: his former defense secretaries, James Mattis and Mark T. Esper; his longest-serving chief of staff, John F. Kelley; his former national security advisor, John Bolton; his former White House attorney, Ty Cobb; and, for good measure; his vice president, Mike Pence, all refuse to support him.

Among others in the GOP who refuse to hop aboard his despotic, dystopian train are former senators Mitt Romney, Jeff Flake, and Pat Toomey. Former Attorney General Alberto Gonzales, he who during the George W. Bush administration approved "enhanced interrogation techniques" — you may know that as torture — said Trump is "Perhaps the most serious threat to the rule of law in a generation."

How awful do you have to be to offend that guy?

The enemy (enemies) of our enemy are at the door.

Which brings us to the father and daughter of the mother of all Trumpian resistance — Liz and Dick Cheney.

First the daughter.

Before endorsing Vice President Har-

ris, before being the vice-chair of the House Select Committee to Investigate the Jan. 6th Attack on the United States Capitol, which was brought to us courtesy of the 45th president, Representative Liz Cheney (R-Wyo.) voted with President Trump 90% of the time. When Trump's Supreme Court gutted *Roe v Wade*, she praised its actions. She was then drummed out of the Republican Party for having the temerity to think first about the country, though. Her constituents in Wyoming refused to send her back to Washington.

On the 2024 election, she said, "Given the closeness of this election, particularly if you're going to find yourself voting in a swing state, you've got to take the extra step if you really do recognize the threat that Donald Trump poses. Then it's not enough to simply say, 'I'm not going to vote for him.'"

She was encouraging Republicans like those senators, like Vice President Mike Pence, like Larry Hogan, who was running for senator from Maryland, to not just not support Trump — as they had all promised to do — but to actually vote for Harris.

For his part, her father, the former vice president — he who still says the Iraq War "was the right thing to do" — who engaged in 476,679 other things that should require him to take a written exam before being allowed back into the human race, said, "In our nation's 248-year history, there has never been an individual who is a greater threat to our republic than Donald Trump. He tried to steal the last election using lies and violence to keep himself in power after the voters had rejected him. He can never be trusted with power again. As citizens, we each have a duty to put country above partisanship to defend our Constitution. That is

why I will be casting my vote for Vice President Kamala Harris."

So what do you with all that? What do you do when you agree with Liz and Dick Cheney about anything, much less the direction of the country?

But if Donald Trump is (and he is) an existential threat to America — it's the marker we laid down when he first rode down his escalator at Trump Tower in 2015 — does it even matter what either Cheney thinks about the environment, regulations, Supreme Court decision, taxes, immigration, or, for that matter, abortion, if they're also fighting to keep Donald Trump out of the White House again?

No.

True, the Cheneys and many of those other 200 helped normalize a Republican Party that allowed a man such as Trump to grow and prosper. It would be nice if they, and they alone, suffered the consequences of Trump, but we're all in this together now.

If Trump wins, they lose.

We lose.

"But then he came for America and there was nobody left," to paraphrase Niemoller.

If we're lucky, the rancid Trumpian smoke that hovers over the Republican Party will soon dissipate — it has to, right? — and the Cheneys and those other Republicans, as well as columnists like George Will, Jennifer Rubin, Max Boot, and David Frum, will undoubtedly rush back to their corner of the American ring to plot, defend, and articulate new pieces of horrendous, unconscionable legislation — and, when the time comes, to support presidential candidates like Marco Rubio, Ted Cruz, Glenn Youngkin, and Ron DeSantis.

Fine.

America will survive if Nikki Haley is elected president someday.

They're all at the door, these Republicans.

Do we turn them away because of their past sins?

Tempting.

But no.

On Nov. 20, 1977, Egyptian President Anwar Sadat went to Jerusalem and spoke to members of the Israeli Knesset. He acknowledged Israel's right to exist, but also demanded that she withdraw from the territories it controlled after 1967 war and that the nation must allow Palestinians their right to self-determination, including a right to their own state. During the speech, a cabinet minister turned to then-Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin and said, "He's not saying anything new. These have always been his demands. What's different?" at which point Begin told him, "The difference is he's saying them here, he's saying them now."

All those Republicans, including the Cheneys, are here now. They're on the porch. Invite them in.

*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" was released in June. 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 baryfriedman.com*

Every Time J.D. Vance Tells a Story, a Sinkhole Swallows 30 People

This is the story I must tell to raise awareness.

By ALEXANDRA PETRI

"If I have to create stories so that the American media actually pays attention to the suffering of the American people, then that's what I'm going to do." — Republican vice-presidential nominee J.D. Vance

Every time J.D. Vance opens his mouth, a sinkhole opens and swallows 30 people whole. I haven't seen the people myself, but I know that something like this is happening. I keep getting calls from all kinds of people, all of them frantic, begging me to do anything I can to keep this story out there. I never get

their names; it seems rude to inquire too minutely at such a stressful moment.

I think this is my duty. If I have to create stories so that the American media actually pays attention to the volume of sinkholes opened daily by the words of JD Vance, then, by God, I will invent them. Some of the details might not be exactly accurate. The part about the sinkhole, or the number of people who fall into it. But I know that JD Vance opens his mouth and bad things follow, and it is my responsibility to make a story about that.

Sometimes, without warning, at the end of a speech or a cable news hit, J.D. Vance will activate his neck frill (picture one of those lizards, but taupe) and hiss. A corrosive acid will shoot from his throat and onto the faces of anyone he perceives as a threat. It is important that we keep saying this! It is important that we keep saying this, or people might not know that it was happening. It is not literally happening, but isn't it a compelling visual? Isn't it a powerful story?

And I feel a deep sense of obligation to all those people who have been dissolved by

acid, whether they exist or not. I almost feel more of a sense of obligation to them if they don't exist; fictional characters can be real in a way that real people never are.

There are things that are true and there are things that are real and there is this: my bone-deep conviction that J.D. Vance once spent a whole interview very slowly coughing up a series of large eggs. No one knew where the eggs came from. When they hatched, awful things climbed out of them and blinked and slunk into the shadows and disappeared. We have never been able to track them down, but the world is worse now because of what came out of the eggs. They caused three earthquakes, and New Jersey no longer exists. Some people are saying it does, but the important thing is the story. And all because J.D. Vance wouldn't stop coughing up those eggs! People deserve to know.

It's so important, as J.D. Vance told us, to create these stories, to call attention to what's really happening. It can be a powerful thing, to open your mouth and create a story. Maybe I should tell another story about what happens when J.D. Vance opens

his mouth. A story where elementary schools and colleges and hospitals are receiving bomb threats — by an eerie coincidence, in the very place that J.D. Vance has singled out in his stories. A story where J.D. Vance opened his mouth and frightening things happened, and sinister forces were unleashed to walk about. But do those stories count if they're true?

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)."

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Let's Start the Revolution – Get This Election Time Book and Here's Why?

My new book is hot off the press. It is full of hundreds of practical ways to help candidates to motivate voters and do good for America. Incumbents and challengers, cocooned by their corporate-conflicted political advisors, could benefit from this unique guide to political victory. Giving voice to two dozen seasoned civic leaders on many different subjects and adding some of my own ways to expand the GOTV turnout, my new book "Let's Start the Revolution: Tools for Displacing the Corporate State and Building a Country that Works for the People" should be invigorating reading for voters and the people wanting to be elected in that spirit.

Am I surprised by the managers of the Democratic Party who so often reject the truism that none of us are as smart as all of us? Of course not. Not when they spend so much of their time dialing for the same corporate dollars as the GOP (aka Grand Old Plutocracy).

Don't they want to win and do so by a comfortable margin so they can govern? Yes, so long as they do not alienate the military-industrial complex, Wall Street, the lobbies for the Israeli government's genocide, the fossil fuel giants, and, of course, demanding big billionaire donors.

Kamala Harris confirmed the smug conformity that closes out important initia-

tives during her exchange with Dangerous Donald on Sept. 10.

This exclusion of civic group input has been deep and longstanding by the Party of the Donkey. In July 2022, we invited any candidates wanting to break through the corporate-infested cocoon to a Zoom conference on winning campaign messages and tactics. Many of the lessons from this event are contained in my new book. The vast majority of political leaders, including Nancy Pelosi and Chuck Schumer, were not interested. So, against the worst GOP in history, the blundering Democrats lost the House of Representatives and barely kept the Senate under a Senator Joe Manchin veto.

Did they learn any lessons? Of course not. How could they if they kept operating behind closed doors, directed by avaricious consultants shoveling massive commercial money into insipid TV/video ads from which they take a 15% cut? An intense, effective ground game would produce better results for far less money.

The Democratic playbook also involves co-opting many labor union leaders and ignoring the messages of proven motivators of minority voters, like African-American Rev. William Barber. He is just out with his compelling, usable book "White Poverty: How Exposing Myths About Race and Class

Can Reconstruct American Democracy," emphasizing class bonding against impoverishment and powerlessness.

See what multi-millionaire James Carville, described as "the blunt-talking Democratic strategist," told a *New York Times* reporter in January 2024:

"The [Democratic National Committee], the state party chairs, the labor people, the progressive advocacy groups, they all want a seat at the table." "You can have a seat at the table as long as you keep your mouth shut ..."

I hear you, James, just shut up and follow the Party's orders that again and again have deep-sixed the Party at the state and national levels in languid contests. So few proposals to excite the cynical or bored electorate and give them tangible and aspirational reasons to go and vote. Go along with the Democratic Party's serious missteps, scapegoating cowardliness, and withdrawal from half the country. (Red States).

The Party scarcely knows how to learn from its failures, hold political operatives accountable for disastrous results, and replace hacks with fresh energetic talent.

Let's get this book's message to the voters. You do not vote for a Party. You only vote for candidates on the ballot. At the federal level, you vote for three candidates – a president, a Senator, and a Representative. First, poll yourselves about what you want these candidates to stand and fight for. Then see whether their actual record matches their rhetoric. If they do not have any record on some of your mandates, summon them with like-minded voters to take a specific stand on issues such as cracking down on corporate crooks, or increasing long-frozen social security benefits, or cleaning up campaign corruption.

"Let's Start the Revolution" STARTS with you, a demanding voter who refuses

to be fooled, flummoxed, or flattered. Like a trimtab on a large ship, it only takes a small percentage of voters to become visible, active and break through the cocoons to change the climate of these campaigns.

Consider it a citizen lobby every couple of years. If you like any of the candidates, you can use the practical advisories in this book to secure many more votes on his/her behalf.

I'm talking about experience-driven, very usable policies, strategies, tactics, rebuttals, messaging, slogans, and startling ways to get out the vote, including having voters meet one another for stronger post-election citizen action. The powerful voters are those who vote for the issues furthering justice, peace, and freedom to safely fulfill life's possibilities.

So, if someone asks you who you're voting for – list the changes and reforms you are voting for and pull the candidates toward those objectives if they want your vote. That changes the dynamics away from the usual fundraising letters, the handshaking, and BS campaigns all around you.

Loaded with the on-the-ground civic actions by many fighters for justice, "Let's Start the Revolution"'s tools are made for self-respecting voters who take their sovereign powers seriously. In the swarm of corporate power, never think the people's well-being can advance without a critical mass of the people taking charge.

That, by the way, is the crucial lesson of the best chapters in American history. When the people decisively say YES only to a government that works for them.

Visit nader.org to find out how to get your copy of "Let's Start the Revolution."

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

TED RALL

Millions Have No Home. You Don't Need Two

Responding to polls that show that voters are worried and angry about the high cost of housing, both major parties are floating plans to make buying a home more affordable. Harris and the Democrats want to encourage new housing construction and subsidize first-time home buyers by \$25,000, which economists worry would have an inflationary effect. Trump thinks that deporting illegal immigrants would reduce demand and lower prices—a logical stretch to say the least.

As important as it is to allow middle-class and working-class people to build wealth by investing in a house or condo, however, the real need is not those who would prefer to own than to rent their residence. The real need is those who have no housing at all.

Roughly half a million Americans are chronically homeless and nearly four million more "hidden homeless" are imposing on friends and family for a place to stay that may or may not remain available in the future. Cities are blighted, families are shattered, children are traumatized. Homelessness is both a moral and economic crisis as well as a failure of leadership.

Homelessness impacts us all. Every person who must be treated at the emergency room as a consequence of going unhoused not only burdens the healthcare system, they live outside the workforce who contribute to productivity, fuel consumer spending and remit payroll taxes. Their deprived physical persons, their meager possessions and their vehicles are eyesores that negatively impact property values and thus reduces municipal revenues. People experiencing homelessness and housing insecurity get arrested more often than the average citizen, only for survival offenses

like stealing food and clothing. Many are or become mentally ill, especially from schizophrenia, as a result of fending off hot and freezing weather; homeless people commit about 30 times more violent crimes than average.

According to the National Alliance to End Homelessness, it would cost about \$55 billion, most of it spent once rather than recurring, to house both the visible and hidden homeless, who total about 4.5 million people. But where would we put all these people?

Incredibly, that answer is easy. There's no need to build a single new unit. We have plenty lying around completely unused.

More than 15 million homes, over 10% of the nation's housing stock, was vacant in 2022—a record low. Three out of four are investment properties, many owned by venture-capital companies that are converting neighborhoods once comprised of local homeowners into transient rental units with algorithmically-inflated rents, particularly in middle-class areas with many people of color. Most of these are vacation homes, timeshares and hunting cabins that sit empty well over 95% of the year.

Property rights matter, but a national emergency like a war prompts the government to requisition private property in service to an important cause. During World War II, for example, the United Kingdom commandeered personal cars and paid their former owners what they determined to be fair market value, while the United States requisitioned merchant ships. U.S. occupation forces appropriated German land for military use in the late 1940s.

Homelessness is a national emergency on par with World War II. Actually, it's much bigger. Had the isolationists prevailed and the U.S. not joined the Allies against Japan and Germany, there is no reason to believe that the U.S. itself would ever have been invaded. For America, World War II was optional. Fighting homelessness is about saving the lives of millions of American citizens right here at home. It's as essential as it gets.

Florida and Hawaii, both popular vacation destinations, have more vacant second homes than other states. But the vacation-house mentality also afflicts cities with high densities—or that used to have them. In the 2005-2009 American Community Survey, 102,000 of the 845,000

apartments and houses in Manhattan were identified as vacant. One out of 25 units in the nation's cultural, media and financial capital were occupied less than two months out of the year. "In a large swath of the East Side [of Manhattan] bounded by Fifth and Park Avenues and East 49th and 70th Streets, about 30% of the more than 5,000 apartments are routinely vacant more than ten months a year because their owners or renters have permanent homes elsewhere," *The New York Times* reported in 2011. It's worse now.

The number of vacant units in New York City lines up almost exactly with the estimated number of homeless men, women and children: 100,000.

Every single person who shivers on the sidewalks of the Big Apple does so within a few dozen feet of a heated, insulated, empty apartment with running water, a place that no one uses. It's obscene. It's piggish. And it needs to be fixed. A real estate speculator's right to invest in a housing market is not half as important as a homeless person's need to sleep inside. A bourgeois family's desire to winter in Florida and summer in New York must take a back seat to the human right of a homeless person not to die.

City and state housing authorities should be granted the right and the funding

appropriations necessary to seize vacant housing units under eminent domain for conversion to housing for the homeless, with fair market compensation to be paid to those deprived of their properties.

The United States signed the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which recognizes housing as a basic human right, in 1948. The UDHR was codified into a treaty, the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights in 1966. Because the U.S. signed the ICESCR, it is obligated to uphold its "object and purpose." Nearly 80 years after our nation committed to ensuring that everyone has a decent and secure place to live where he or she need not fear eviction, it should make good on its commitment to international law.

Condemn vacant investment properties and vacation homes, and seize them under eminent domain.

Until the last American citizen moves from the outdoors to the indoors, no one should be legally permitted to own more than one home.

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



Volunteers Power the Colorado Trail

By DAVE MARSTON

The Colorado Trail, an iconic 567-mile high-elevation trail that crosses the Rockies, owes its existence largely to Gudy Gaskill, a charismatic, 6-foot-tall woman who could make tough things seem easy.

Gaskill not only carried out the vision of a state trail, beginning slowly in the late 1970s but also gave birth to it. In 1972, she lobbied Congress, along with forester Bill Lucas, credited with the Colorado Trail idea, to change federal law so that volunteers could be allowed to build trails on public land.

Volunteerism was so potent an idea, that when, in 1984, writer Ed Quillen broke the story about Gaskill's efforts to revive trail building that had foundered under the Colorado Mountain Trails Foundation, people were energized to join her. Soon, thanks to fundraising, she had 350 volunteers coming each summer to join trail crews she often led herself.

She made creating the Colorado Trail

seem like a privilege: You camped out in beautiful backcountry, ate great food, and found stamina you never knew you possessed.

In 1985, caught up in the story, my father, Ed Marston, then publisher of *High Country News*, volunteered my sister, Wendy, 15, and me, 13, for a week of trail building. That's how we learned how to swing those axe-like tools called Pulaskis on the Molas Pass to Durango section.

Gaskill herself led our crew, setting out early with orange ribbon to mark the trail. She was efficient and tireless, and in just a few hours, older, urban and young volunteers became trail builders with blisters to prove it.

It was exciting to work on a trail that unfurled along the rooftop of Colorado. Typical trails in those days led up mountains or over steep passes. The Colorado trail rejected peak-bagging and offered a moderate route of week-long, 70-mile sections, neither losing nor gaining elevation rapidly, though often charting a route above tree line.

I joined a trail crew to revisit my childhood adventure this summer, and from Aug. 7 to 11, Denver friend Jeff Miller and I worked to repair a trail in Chaffee County's Collegiate Peaks Wilderness.

In wilderness, if there's a tree to fell,

you use a handsaw. We needed to move big rocks, so two of us yoked ourselves together in nylon harnesses to do that. We divided labor this way: Men hauled big rocks, and women wielding rock hammers smashed the rocks into gravel.

Trail work has changed a lot in 39 years. Back then we built water bars to stop erosion from runoff. Logs anchored into slopes sluiced water off trails but required annual maintenance. Now, water moves off trail through "grade reversals." The trail swoops below grade, efficiently shunting water off the path, then swoops back up to level grade. Drains are large versions of grade reversals.

My fellow volunteers were largely thru-hikers, skilled backcountry voyagers who spend their holidays hiking the trail from Denver to Durango in one go. Mark Stephenson, 26, from Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania was one of the trail's most ardent fans.

He arrived on the trail via Greyhound bus with \$40 in his pocket, saying, "This is a place where money doesn't matter."

Thinking a reported two-and-a-half-mile hike to camp would be easy, my friend and I arrived at the trailhead loaded up with both front and back packs. I confess to having done the shopping. My friend was optimistic: "I can carry anything two and a half miles."

But our camp had moved six miles away and 2,700 feet uphill. We made it, slowly, and once at camp, we quickly became free-store proprietors. But there was another problem: I'd left my tent poles at home. Crew leader Matt Smith, an engineer from Golden, easily came up with a fix: He used parachute cord to rig up the tent fly, then added a tarp to ward off the rain that soaked us every afternoon and night.

I don't recall meeting thru-hikers in the mid-1980s, but today they seem to dominate hiking culture. I could only listen as the rest of the group talked about trails known by acronyms, including the famous AT—Appalachian Trail.

"You're doing great work!" hikers told us as they passed by. Crew leader Smith offers this perspective today: "19,000 volunteer person-hours go into trail improvement every year."

We owe thanks to those original trail stalwarts — forester Bill Lucas, journalist Merrill Hastings and of course, Gudy Gaskill. Their vision created one of the state's wonders.

Dave Marston is the publisher of Writers on the Range, writersontherange.org, an independent nonprofit dedicated to spurring lively conversation about the West. He lives in Durango, Colorado.

Muslim Women Punk Rockers Show 'Lady Parts'

By ROB PATTERSON

The brilliant British TV series "We Are Lady Parts" makes me think of a line from the satiric political comic strip "Pogo" — "We have met the enemy and he is us." The incisively hilarious comedy about four young London Muslim women who form a punk rock band evoked a variation on that from me.

Yes, you read that correctly: Muslim women ... punk rock band. Two notions that seem like not just apples and oranges, but in near total contradiction. An ideal equation for hilarity.

Ever since 9/11, too many Americans have lumped all Muslims together as our enemy. Some Republicans slam our two female members of Congress, Ilhan Omar and Rashida Tlaib, as enemies within our national government. Both perceptions are flawed, equating any Muslim with radical Islam and terrorism.

"We Are Lady Parts," screening on Peacock, is, alas, perhaps only a small ameliorative for anti-Islamic prejudice. But it does at least very clearly show how Muslims in Western nations that some tag as enemies are in fact very much like us. I'm reminded of how the South Asian Muslim owner of a convenience store I patronized and became friendly with once referred to his mosque as going to church.

The series makes both light of, yet respects the faith of modern Muslims. And is a celebration of girl power, even if it is feminism within a religion that largely represses women. Those two equations are sources of the non-stop comedic potency of "We Are Lady Parts."

It was created by Mida Manzoor, a Pakistani Muslim whose family moved to London when she was age 10. She has played guitar since she was eight years old and is a Bob Dylan acolyte.

The show's main character, Amina, is drawn from her creator. A PhD. microbiology student, she wears a hijab (head scarf) and at first glance seems a rather traditional young first-world Muslim young woman. Yet just like her peers of other faiths, she's prone to boy crushes and shy and awkward in their presence. She plays guitar, enjoys folk music and singer-songwriters, and teaches guitar to younger students.

When she auditions for the band, Amina's skills as a hot electric lead guitarist

emerge. She's the ideal fourth member for the group, but for one hitch — crippling stage fright that causes her to vomit. It's one of many challenges that she and Lady Parts must overcome.

Manzoor designed the band to reflect a range of modern young Muslim women. Bassist Bisma wears casual Western clothes. Drummer Juliette, like Amina, wears a hijab. Lead singer and rhythm guitarist Sarah, an African Muslim, sports a hair-wrap atop her head.

Their manager, Lucie, is garbed in full Islamic wrap down to a Niqab veil over most all her face, is nonetheless a feisty hustler and social media maven who thrusts the band forward towards building an audience for their shows and making a record.

Humor abounds throughout from such ripe situations. The show lovingly nudges at being Muslim in the modern world. All of the show's characters feel like people we might and even do know, regardless of their religion. And best of all: The four actresses became a real and pretty darn good rock band playing clever and catchy original songs as well as some cool takes on cover tunes. In short, Lady Parts rock indeed.

With its warm and lovingly pointed humor, "We Are Lady Parts" stresses a universality of contemporary human experience and offers a universalist religious

vision our modern world sorely needs. As we witness the iniquitous suffering of Palestinian Muslims in Gaza due to a conflict with religious elements, the show reminds us how we are all human. And that laughing about that while we rock out is quite a delicious tonic.

Populist Picks

ALBUM: *The Amazing Denny Freeman* — Guitarist Freeman was a peer of Stevie Ray Vaughan and his brother Jimmie who never reached their renown. But his fine playing shines on this two-fer reissue of albums he did in the 1980s that feature all-star musicians from the fertile Austin blues-rock scene.

TV DOCUMENTARY: "Stax: Soulsville USA" — This four-part series about the unlikely rise and tragic fall of the pivotal Memphis-based Southern R&B label that was pivotal in 1960s popular music and race relations is a must-see for all music buffs.

Rob Patterson is a music and entertainment writer in Austin, Texas. Email robpatterson054@gmail.com.

David, Goliath and Press Freedom

By SETH SANDRONSKY

Press freedom struggled when a federal tax agency looked into The Davis Vanguard, a community news outlet based in Yolo County, one of 58 in California. Just ask David Greenwald, founder, editor and executive director of The Davis Vanguard (DavisVanguard.org). In 2021, a private attorney who attended law school with the Yolo County District Attorney filed an Internal Revenue Service complaint over the new outlet's coverage of the race involving this public official, according to Greenwald. Much was at stake, centrally the TDV's 501(c)(3) nonprofit status.

SS: Can you lay out The Davis Vanguard's experience with the IRS recently?

DG: The IRS received a complaint — pretty clearly by or on behalf of Yolo County's District Attorney, that TDV had engaged in what they call interference into elections, which is prohibited for non-profits. That generated an audit, which forced TDV to hire an attorney and triggered a long process. The IRS flagged roughly 36 articles as being political, which in my view, clearly were not. Some of the articles were analyses into who might win in an upcoming election, some of

the articles were interviews with candidates (all the candidates in a given race) which should have been permissible, some were letters to the editor or op-eds, which TDV has an open submission policy for and publishes all submissions, and a few were critical of the DA as a government official well outside of any electoral context. The IRS upon the case going to appeals, acknowledged that TDV did not improperly engage in political activity and has now dropped its attempt to revoke its non-profit status.

SS: Who is this Yolo County DA, and what in a nutshell is your political history with him?

DG: Yolo County's DA is Jeff Reisig, former president of the California District Attorney's Association (CDA). We have long covered Reisig in Yolo County — in a very critical manner — criticizing his policies as being too aggressive. The result is that there have been a series of articles critical of him and his office's policies. The result is that the DA in Yolo County has never agreed to sit down to an interview or even an off the record conversation over coffee — despite numerous overtures.

SS: Please describe the timeline of your case with the IRS.

DG: We saw an article in a right wing online publication in October or so of 2021. It wasn't for another year that we got an audit notice from the IRS. We went back and forth over our records and eventually in 2023 we received a copy of the articles in

question during the summer of 2023. We met with the agent in December 2023, when he informed us of his intent to revoke our nonprofit status. We hired a new attorney in February of 2024. The agent completed his findings by May. We filed our appeal over the summer and within two months, the IRS alerted us that they were conceding the political case against us, that we would retain our non-profit status and that they were wrapping things up.

SS: What are the financial implications of The Davis Vanguard's struggle to keep its nonprofit status with the IRS?

DG: We are a small organization that runs on a shoe-string budget. Because of our innovative programs and dedicated staff, we have long been able to punch above our

weight. But because having to hire multiple CPA firms and a tax attorney, we have stretched our financial resources past the breaking point and have had to engage in multiple emergency fundraising measures over the course of this year.

SS: How can people get more information about TDV's content and fight for press freedom?

DG: Our website is located at DavisVanguard.org and there are three videos (find links via the online version of this article at Populist.com).

Seth Sandronsky lives and works in Sacramento. He is a journalist and member of the Pacific Media Workers Guild. Email sethsandronsky@gmail.com.



Defending the Indefensible

What Type of African Americans Publicly Support Rightwing Republicans and Trump?

By ED RAMPPELL

How can one explain members of oppressed minority groups who make a profession out of publicly, as George Orwell quipped, “defending the indefensible,” supporting Republicans and Donald Trump, against their own people’s interests?

On Aug. 28, I watched “Exhibit A” of this phenomenon, “political commentator” Shermichael Singleton, a young Black man, on anchor Jim Acosta’s CNN show. In five-ish minutes, Shermichael proved he was no Sherlock, flunking history, failing math and proving himself wildly incapable (and/or unwilling) to answer a question.

During the “news” program, Singleton and others discussed Trump’s assertion aired Aug. 27 on Dr. Phil’s show, that: “If Jesus Christ came down and was the vote counter, I would win California,” which had voted 63.5% for Biden/Harris in 2020.

In response to Trump’s deranged claim about the Golden State, which voted Democratic in every presidential election since 1992, the question arose as to who was the last Republican candidate to win California in a White House race? Singleton, who has been a paid Republican strategist and served in a GOP administration, had no idea. Another journalist stated it was “Ronald Reagan,” which prompted Singleton to say this was about “30” years ago. Not only did Singleton flub the historical question, he couldn’t subtract correctly either, as a majority of Californians voted for Reagan in 1980 and 1984, which is more like about “40” – not “30” – years ago. (Actually, in 1988, George H.W. Bush was the last Republican candidate a majority of Cal-

ifornians voted for in a presidential contest.)

Singleton compounded his display of sheer ignorance with his non-reply to a question about an altercation between Trump’s team and Arlington National Cemetery administrators about photographing a wreath-laying ceremony there for servicemen killed during the U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan, in an area where photography for partisan purposes is off-limits, according to federal law. The brouhaha sparked widespread controversy, with critics slamming Trump for exploiting a sacred ceremony at hallowed ground and disrespectfully, cynically breaking the rules by using Arlington National Cemetery – final resting place for 400,000 Americans who’d served in uniform – as a prop for campaign publicity.

When asked about it, Singleton’s lips moved, sounds spewed forth from his mouth – but he never addressed the specific point. Instead, in what could be called “verbal three-card Monte,” seeking to deflect and distract, the professional obfuscator changed the subject to remark upon how purportedly popular Trump was with armed services members. The way Shermichael danced around this question indicated that instead of CNN, he’d be more at home on ABC’s “Dancing with the Stars.” Of course, in his non-response response, single-minded Singleton not only completely avoided answering the question he was asked, but never mentioned military-related criticism that has swirled around Trump since he dodged the draft during the Vietnam War.

Nor did Singleton ever mention the scorn heaped upon “General Bone Spurs” by many high-ranking officers who’d served in Trump’s regime. About 12 hours after Singleton’s change-the-subject non-reply, he appeared on Laura Coates’ CNN program, and when Trump’s troubling Arlington photo op was raised again, his two co-panelists answered – Shermichael remained tightlipped.

No wonder: The U.S. Army issued this Aug. 29 statement: “Participants in the August 26 ceremony and the subsequent Section 60 [mainly for graves of those killed in Iraq and Afghanistan] visit were made aware of federal laws, Army regulations and

DoD policies, which clearly prohibit political activities on cemetery grounds. An ANC employee who attempted to ensure adherence to these rules was abruptly pushed aside,” and, according to NPR, “verbally abused” by Trump campaign staff.

Trump campaign manager Chris LaCivita derided the ANC staffer as “a despicable individual” “spreading these lies ... dishonoring the ... armed forces, and ... disrespecting everyone who paid the price for defending our country.” (The uncivil LaCivita also ignorantly referred to “hollowed” instead of “hallowed” ground.) Trump spokesperson Steven Cheung also slandered the Arlington employee as “suffering from a mental health episode.”

A campaign ad including footage of Trump’s visit to the cemetery was posted on TikTok the day it happened. Regarding the ANC fracas, at an Aug. 28 campaign event in Erie, Pennsylvania, Trump’s running mate J.D. Vance snarled that Democratic presidential candidate V.P. Kamala Harris “can go to hell.”

Singleton’s sycophancy is especially eyebrow-raising, considering he was fired from the Department of Housing and Urban Development under Ben Carson due to his previous op-ed in *The Hill* criticizing Trump. Shermichael was led out of HUD’s building by security once it was discovered he’d written: “Trump has taken us to a new moral low, where it is acceptable for a presidential candidate to mimic and mock someone with disabilities. Yet our religious leaders stand by and say nothing while defending their reasons for maintaining their support (.)” Now, it’s Shermichael’s turn to take “a new moral low” and “stand by,” providing cover for someone he knows is unethical and a convicted felon.

Singleton is a simpleton who demonstrated in five-ish minutes he doesn’t know history, basic math and is incapable of answering questions, doing so to defend the indefensible – even regarding the Defense Department. What makes Sherm run? Why does this young African American ply his trade as a mouthpiece and shill for Republicans and Trump, a virulent racist?

You don’t have to be Sherlock Holmes to deduce what makes Shermichael Singleton and his ilk tick (and TikTok). Why they

contribute to the Big Lie is extremely simple. Going back to the Garden of Gethsemane, history has always had quislings seeking, among other things, 30 pieces of silver. Shooting your mouth off on TV and being a Black Benedict Arnold or African American Elia Kazan, an informer betraying colleagues to the House Un-American Activities Committee, is a much easier gig than working for a living. Being a glib collaborator offers higher pay and status that accords turncoats attention and purse more than pursuing an honest day’s work does.

The real question is why purported “news” outlets such as the Cable “News” Network hire race traitors like Shermichael Singleton to squeal their indefensible obfuscations? The guy proved in roughly five minutes he didn’t know history, couldn’t subtract or answer a simple question. How does he add anything of value to what that another Holmes, U.S. Supreme Court Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes, called the “marketplace of ideas”? Of course, racial renegades like Singleton provide value to the far right by giving “Black cover” to their extremism, often ranting outlandish lies in public members of the dominant majority can no longer do in polite company and on TV/radio/Internet/podcasts.

“Political commentators” like Singleton mainly serve to further cloud America’s low level of social discourse, adding to the plague of disinformation. In their quest to provide different points of view, news outlets need to be careful who they select to provide political commentary, just as NBC became after a rebellion sparked by MSNBC hosts about the network’s ill-fated, short-lived choice of former Republican National Committee Chairwoman Ronna McDaniel, who had lied about 2020’s election results, to be a political analyst was scuttled. As Sherlock would say: “It’s elementary!”

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. An extended version of this article appears at Counterpunch.org.

EDGE OF SPORTS/*Dave Zirin*

Police Violence, Tyreek Hill and the NFL Owners Who Bankroll Brutality

The NFL does not cross the police. The NFL partners with the police.

Before the Miami Dolphins’ season-opening game Sept. 8, the Miami-Dade police pulled over Dolphins All-Pro wide receiver Tyreek Hill outside his hometown stadium. From the video footage, it’s clear that the police put Hill face down on the concrete—twice. One of the officers appears to have struck Hill while the NFL star was complying with orders. Because it was filmed, the media broadcast the incident within minutes. This news overtook the game-day hype before the first Sunday of the season, surely a distressing fact for NFL commissioner Roger Goodell.

After the game, one of Hill’s teammates, the 38-year-old locker-room leader Calais Campbell, said he tried to de-escalate the situation and that the police also cited and cuffed him. Against the Jacksonville Jaguars, Hill went on to play one of his typically brilliant games, but afterward he looked shaken when recounting the experience to the press. He quietly asked the question: “What if I wasn’t Tyreek Hill?”

You might expect the NFL to stand up for one of its most famous players, but the NFL does not cross the police. The NFL partners with the police. This is a league that blackballed quarterback Colin Kaepernick for kneeling during the national anthem to protest racist police violence after the killings of Alton Sterling and Philando Castile in 2016. It is also a league that, in the wake of outrage from all sides over how it handled Kaepernick’s protest, turned to public relations instead of honest dialogue. It wanted to be seen as a force to “end racism”—words it emblazoned in the back of every end zone. It would play “Lift Every Voice

and Sing” before the “Star Spangled Banner.” Even Sunday’s news that rapper Kendrick Lamar had been chosen to play the halftime show at the next Super Bowl is a part of this agenda. (And if you’re surprised that the NFL would choose someone as political as Lamar, you might remember that the last time he played the Super Bowl halftime show, his lyrics about police killing civilians mysteriously disappeared.)

Notice what all of these gestures elide: They refuse to address what Kaepernick called upon the world to confront: racist police brutality and those in uniform “getting away with murder.” It immediately brought to mind last week’s scandal when a right-wing propagandist allied with James O’Keefe surreptitiously videotaped Washington football team vice president Rael Enteen. The O’Keefe Media Group is putrid, but it did catch Enteen telling truths that people “behind the shield” are afraid to utter. About the league’s anti-racist efforts, Enteen said, “It’s performative. It’s not done out of the goodness of their heart and morality. It’s done because George Floyd changed the game.... I mean that the social justice efforts are a performance for the sake of public perception and not because they want to actually push progress.”

O’Keefe’s minion asked if this kind of branding was being done to assuage “liberals,” and Enteen perceptively said: “No, I think it’s to make as much money as possible. I think the NFL cares about the bottom line like any corporation above all else. And they don’t need to really pinch pennies because they make so much revenue. Therefore, they can faux-prioritize DEI for the sake of good publicity.”

The Washington Commanders fired Enteen faster than a Tyreek Hill sprint to the end zone.

There were loud voices online that said Hill should not receive sympathy because of his ugly past of spousal and child abuse. While that behavior was awful, this is absurd. It is a logic that advances a reactionary line of thinking in which only a perfect victim deserves justice. The police did not know or care about Hill’s past, and it wouldn’t matter if they did. No one should be subject to state violence.

In the current political climate, this incident matters. One presidential candidate is calling for mandatory stop-and-frisk by the nation’s police and wants to grant police full immunity from charges of brutality. For these initiatives, despite his own criminality, he has been endorsed by the Fraternal Order of Police.

The other party, when faced with an opportunity to remake and rethink policing in 2020 following the murder of George Floyd, instead insisted on more funding for the

police. And we will hear nothing from their candidate about policing so as not to take any position that could offend the nonexistent political middle—forget the fact that every “Cheney Democrat” could probably fit in a phone booth.

Eight years ago, amid a vacuum of leadership, NFL players started to build a movement, using their cultural visibility to fight back against racist police violence. The league killed it and offered a series of empty gestures in its stead. The NFL is run by billionaire franchise owners who are mostly Donald Trump supporters – many of whom are bankrolling Trump’s promise of unaccountable policing. They are profiting off of Black bodies on the field and criminalizing them off of it. If Hill and Campbell want to understand why the police saw their lives as something less-than, they could start with the owner’s box. Their boss, the real estate developer Stephen M. Ross, is a friend of Trump’s and has fundraised for the former president. It all recalls the day in 2019 when mogul and rapper Jay-Z announced a partnership with the league. With Goodell sitting by his side, Jay-Z said, “We have moved past kneeling.” The NFL certainly has, and by the way, have you heard that Kendrick is playing the Super Bowl?

Dave Zirin is the sports editor at The Nation. He is the author of 11 books on the politics of sports. He is also the coproducer and writer of the documentary “Behind the Shield: The Power and Politics of the NFL.”



AMY GOODMAN



The planet is at a tipping point, on the verge of climate destruction. Activists engage in non-violent direct action, but face prison and even death.

Climate Activists in the Crosshairs While the Planet Burns

A hurricane walloping Louisiana, wildfires scorching California and Greece, floods and landslides in Southeast Asia: impacts of the worsening climate emergency are everywhere, and scientific evidence that human activity is the principal driver of the destruction is rejected by only the most hardened climate change deniers. Formal negotiations to address the crisis are proceeding, but aren't happening fast enough. The planet is at a tipping point, on the verge of climate destruction accelerated by irreversible feedback loops. Climate activists are increasingly engaging in non-

violent direct action, demanding change. Many face prosecution, prison, violence and even death in retaliation.

"It is my role, as a defender, to push elite power to take radical action that swings us away from fossil fuels and towards systems that benefit the whole of society." So wrote Nonhle Mbuthuma, South African 2024 Goldman Prize Winner, in her introduction to Global Witness's new report, "Missing voices: The violent erasure of land and environmental defenders."

Global Witness is an international non-governmental organization that investigates and exposes environmental and human rights abuses in the extractive industries, like mining and fossil fuels, as well as the deep political and financial links to those abuses.

This latest report details the murders and disappearances of land defenders last year, with 196 documented killings globally.

"Unfortunately, 2023 was yet another appalling year for those who want to protect their lands and their environment," Laura Furones, senior adviser to Global Witness's land and Environmental defenders campaign, said on the Democracy Now! news hour. "We're seeing the levels of violence being more and more prevalent around the world. We really fear that this will intensify as the consequences of the climate crisis become more apparent."

More than 70% of the murders in 2023 occurred in just four countries: Brazil, Colombia, Honduras and Mexico, with Colombia topping the list with 79 killings, or 40% of the reported total.

"The case of Colombia is particularly tragic," Furones said. "If we look back at all

of the historical data that Global Witness has gathered ever since we started recording cases in 2012, then you still see Colombia coming up as number one. We're talking about Nasa people, Nahua people, Indigenous people. Half of all of the killings in Colombia, and, in fact, half of all defenders murdered across the world, 49% globally, are Indigenous peoples and Afro-descendant communities."

She explained, "This is no coincidence. ... Science tells us very clearly, that Indigenous peoples are particularly good at protecting the lands they live in. So, the decreasing number of natural resources the planet has, as we continue to extract them, are still in their lands."

By far the largest industry driver of land defender killings and disappearances is mining, and half of those mining-linked deaths occurred in Latin America. As Global Witness reports, though, environmental activists are also at great risk across Africa and Asia as well.

Global Witness's report includes one 2023 killing of a land defender inside the United States: Manuel Esteban Terán. Known as Tortugueta, the 26-year-old activist was killed by police, shot 57 times while peacefully protesting the planned multimillion-dollar Cop City police training facility in Atlanta, Georgia. No officers have been charged.

While the killing of a land defender inside the United States is unusual, climate activists inside western Europe and North America are facing severe penalties for taking non-violent action.

"In a number of these wealthy democratic countries, the sorts of sentences being

used on the treatment of climate protesters is truly reaching a very repressive level," Linda Lakhdir, legal director of Climate Rights International, said on Democracy Now! "You have very long sentences being imposed. You have people being put in preventative detention in order to prevent them from attending protests. You have water cannons and pain grips being used against peaceful protesters. It's really striking how these countries who have held themselves up as beacons of rule of law are essentially repressing peaceful protest."

Climate Rights International investigates the human rights consequences of climate change, as detailed in their new report, "On Thin Ice: Disproportionate Responses to Climate Change Protesters in Democratic Countries."

The next United Nations climate summit, COP29, will take place in November in Baku, Azerbaijan. As with many previous climate summits, this one is being held in a dictatorial petrostate where protests are outlawed and there is no right to free speech.

Time is short and action is needed on all fronts to forestall the worst impacts of the climate emergency. Those leading the movement for a sustainable future need to be praised, not persecuted.

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."

The Second Amendment Is the Hill We Are Literally Willing To Die On

By BONNIE JEAN FELDKAMP

Gun violence is not just an urban issue. As rural community members along I-75 near Daniel Boone National Forest in Kentucky say things like "this is unheard of here" after a gunman shot at cars driving on the highway, they are forced to grapple with the fact that this American atrocity has found their door.

Gun violence does happen there. It happens everywhere.

It will continue to happen as long as the wrong people have carte blanche access to an arsenal. This horror will play out in our communities again and again. Not just in the inner city. Not just in relation to gang violence. But, communities of every kind.

I am not anti-gun. Guns have their

place. My husband is a hunter. He proposed to me over a deer we harvested together in the woods. That said, I am a little uneasy with the fact that we can have a shotgun in the house and no one bats an eye. Our weapons don't need to be registered or insured. Homeowners pay higher insurance premiums if they have a pool or trampoline but not if they own guns. This makes no sense to me.

As reported by Everytown, a 2022 study in the *Annals of Internal Medicine* found that "living in a home with a handgun owner increased the risk of the non-gun owner being shot and killed at home by a spouse or an intimate partner more than sevenfold, and that the vast majority of victims — 84% — were women."

All of us should absolutely be held accountable for the firearms in our homes. It should be a question that's asked when applying for a homeowners insurance policy. According to the National Safety Council, your odds of dying from a gun are 1 in 89. Your odds of drowning are 1 in 1,032. So why don't our premiums go up for guns like they do for pools?

Why don't our lawmakers see the opportunity to create a safe firearm industry? Let gun enthusiasts champion an industry in the name of safe gun ownership, complete with licensure and training requirements for the betterment of our entire country.

Licensing matters. With licensing comes education and training for how to use a very deadly machine — a car. We should take this same approach to gun use. Vehicles are carefully studied. Because of this, there has been a marked decline in motor vehicle crash fatalities since the 1990s thanks to changes in roadway design, graduated licensing requirements, campaigns to reduce drunk driving and increased seatbelt use. All because researchers were able to pinpoint causes and create solutions.

Meanwhile the so-called Dickey Amendment effectively barred the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention from studying firearm violence by prohibiting the use of federal funds to advocate or promote gun control. The law was softened a little in 2018 when Congress allowed federal funding of research regarding the causes of gun

violence.

It is possible to uphold Second Amendment rights while also upholding every citizen's inalienable rights. You know, life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.

Life.

The foundation of our inalienable rights starts with an American's right to live. It is hard to imagine that our Second Amendment right to bear arms trumps that. How is it that lives lost to senseless gun violence seem to some like an acceptable cost?

It's not. Your freedom ends where mine begins. You have a 1 in 89 chance of dying because of guns. In a movie theater, at the mall, the grocery store, a night club, school, at home or just driving down the highway. There is literally nowhere to hide.

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Dispatches ...

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being evaluated after being challenged.

While "coordinated campaigns by a vocal minority of groups and individual actors" that claim to fight for "parents' rights" made for a "chilled atmosphere of overly cautious decision-making regarding the accessibility of books in public school libraries," said PEN, state legislation especially accelerated book bans.

Laws like those passed in Florida and Iowa made it "easier to remove books from schools without due process, or in some cases, without any formal process whatsoever," wrote Kasey Meehan and Sabrina Baëta of the group's Freedom to Read program. "Over a dozen new laws and state policies used to ban books in schools have been implemented, as have a number of district policies at the local level."

The organization identified Utah as having "the most extreme state book-banning bill currently in place," with H.B. 29 establishing what PEN called a "No Read List."

If any three school districts in Utah find that a title includes "objectively sensitive material," the book must be banned in all schools across the state.

The law went into effect in July and "is

expected to result in significant book bans during the 2024-2025 school year."

PEN's analysis came out as the American Library Association (ALA) unveiled its own preliminary findings about banned books for the first eight months of 2024. While PEN considers a title to be "banned" if it is pulled from shelves at any point, even if access is later restored after review, ALA counts books as banned only if they are permanently censored.

Using that criteria, ALA found that from January 1-August 31, 2024, 414 challenges were made to 1,128 unique titles—compared to 695 challenges over the same period last year, affecting 1,915 titles.

Both ALA and PEN said their tallies were likely undercounts of banned books.

PEN found that 13 books were banned in the last school year for the first time, including "A Tree Grows in Brooklyn" by Betty Smith, "Black Reconstruction in America, 1860-1880" by W.E.B. DuBois, "Roots: The Saga of An American Family" by Alex Haley, and "How the Garcia Girls Lost Their Accents" by Julia Alvarez.

The two analyses came out days after the Nationhood Lab at Salve Regina University's Pell Center published a poll showing, as program director Colin Woodard said, that "Americans, regardless of party, really hate public library book banning."

Sixty-six percent of respondents to the group's poll said they strongly opposed the censorship of books, including 90% of Democrats and 64% of independents.

Fifty-three percent of Republicans said they either strongly opposed or somewhat opposed book bans.

Despite the unpopularity of the bans, PEN warned that Republican-controlled state legislatures are likely to forge ahead in the coming months with more laws blocking people's access to books, particularly those that have themes related to LGBTQ+ identities, race and racism, and women's sexual experiences.

In South Carolina, the newly passed Regulations 43-170 prohibit books with "sex-related content" and empower the state Board of Education to ban books across the state, while in Tennessee, the Age-Appropriate Materials Act of 2022 just took effect in July. The law "requires schools to remove books that contain nudity, 'excess violence,' or sex-related content," and allows a state commission to evaluate possible book bans.

EGG ON HIS FACE: VANCE BUNGLES ATTEMPT TO BASH HARRIS OVER GROCERY PRICES. Republican vice presidential nominee J.D. Vance accused Vice President Kamala Harris of causing egg prices to spike to \$4 per dozen—despite making his accusation in front of a sign

advertising eggs for as low as \$2.99 per dozen, Oliver Willis noted at DailyKos (9/23).

"Eggs, when Kamala Harris took office, were short of \$1.50 a dozen. Now a dozen eggs will cost you around \$4 thanks to Kamala Harris' inflationary policies," Vance claimed during a media availability at a Pennsylvania supermarket on Sept. 21.

Just over Vance's right shoulder it can clearly be seen that eggs were available at the supermarket for \$2.99.

The Trump campaign posted the video of Vance's specious claim on its official "War Room" X account, amplifying the allegation to the account's 2.1 million followers.

According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, egg prices are down from the spike in prices that occurred in January 2023, when the average cost for a dozen eggs was \$4.82. The current average, as of August, is \$3.20.

The rise in egg prices is not connected to policies of the Biden-Harris administration, either.

In 2022, there was an outbreak of avian influenza. The outbreak, which was the largest in U.S. history, resulted in the deaths of at least 52.7 million animals. That led to a shortage of chickens to produce eggs, and when the supply was reduced, the price went up.

The virus had a resurgence in November 2023, which has caused current price increases.

Continued on next page

Are Assassination Attempts Now Just a Fact of Life?

By DANA MILBANK

In early September, after a school shooting in Georgia claimed four lives, Donald Trump's running mate, JD Vance, argued that school shootings are just a "fact of life."

"I don't like that this is a fact of life," the Ohio senator said. "But if you are a psycho and you want to make headlines, you realize that our schools are soft targets. And we have got to bolster security at our schools."

Less than two weeks later, after what appears to have been a second assassination attempt against Trump, it now looks as though even "hard" targets — the once and perhaps future president — are a lot more soft than we would like them to be. In our gun-mad culture, we can keep neither our schoolchildren nor political leaders safe.

Now will come more, necessary efforts to fortify the Secret Service. President Joe Biden acknowledged this on Sept. 16 when he said the Secret Service "needs more help." But there's only so much "hardening" of targets, whether schools or presidential candidates, that can be done. A civilized society can't ignore the obvious commonality between the assassination attempts and the Georgia school shooting: They all involved assault rifles. It was an AR-15-style weapon in

the Georgia school shooting and in the first attempt against Trump. In Florida on Sept. 15, the suspected gunman had an SKS-style rifle with him in the bushes on the golf course a few hundred yards from the former president.

This reflects the overall shift in patterns of gun violence. Until recent years, handguns were the weapons of choice in mass shootings, but that has shifted in the past few years to AR- and similar-style rifles. This helps to explain why, as the Violence Prevention Project has found, half of the 36 deadliest mass shootings in the past 120 years occurred in the last decade.

There have been 393 mass shootings in the United States so far this year, and 12,136 people have been killed by gun violence, according to the Gun Violence Archive. I'm thankful that none of our high officeholders is among those. But if our gun laws continue to allow deranged people to have unlimited access to weapons of war, it's likely that those psychos who want to make headlines, as Vance puts it, will keep taking shots at our leaders.

Of course, this is the last thing you're going to hear from Trump and Vance. Instead, the GOP nominee went right to the baseless claim that Biden and Vice President Kamala Harris are to blame for the possible assassination attempt. "Because of this Communist Left Rhetoric, the bullets are flying, and it will only get worse!" Trump predicted — or possibly threatened — in a social media post Sept. 16.

Trump told Fox News that the would-be gunman "believed the rhetoric of Biden and Harris, and he acted on it. Their rhetoric is

causing me to be shot at." He went on to call his opponents "the enemy from within," a phrase used by authoritarians. He said both this perpetrator and the July shooter were motivated by the Democrats' rhetoric and the "lawsuits they wrap me up in."

Trump issued a series of statements, social media posts and even fundraising appeals attempting to profit from the incident. Meanwhile, Trump surrogates such as Laura Loomer and Rep. Marjorie Taylor Greene (Ga.) spread a conspiracy theory online suggesting the gunman had inside information on Trump's whereabouts.

And, so, another near disaster became just another excuse to plant more disinformation.

Trump ally Elon Musk used his X platform to muse about why "no one is even trying to assassinate Biden/Kamala," with a chin-stroking emoji. He later deleted the post, saying this was somehow a joke.

It's patently false, in fact. The same gunman who fired at Trump in July had targeted Biden, too; Trump represented a target of opportunity. And an intruder targeted then-House Speaker Nancy Pelosi (Calif.) two years ago, fracturing her husband's skull after finding that she wasn't home. Trump joked about that attack just a week before the Florida gunman was foiled.

Blaming Democrats' rhetoric is equally absurd. The July shooter was a registered Republican with no identified political motive. The suspected golf course gunman apparently voted for Trump in 2016 before turning against him and later expressing sup-

port for Tulsi Gabbard, Nikki Haley and Vivek Ramaswamy, while also giving small-dollar contributions to Democrats.

Both would-be assassins were, by definition, madmen. There is no credible evidence that either was motivated by Democratic rhetoric, and the primary example of inflammatory rhetoric Trump and his allies are citing — calling Trump a threat to democracy — isn't a call to violence. It's a statement of fact: He instigated an attack on the Capitol to overturn a free and fair election, and he later called for the "termination" of the Constitution. Contrast that with what's happening in Springfield, Ohio, where schools have been evacuated multiple times over threats stirred up by the false claims, spread by Trump and Vance, that Haitian migrants there are eating dogs and cats.

There have been assassination attempts, and assassinations, throughout our history. There will always be maniacs who want to take a shot at those in high office. The difference now is these maniacs have unfettered access to astonishingly destructive weapons.

"It wasn't rhetoric in the bushes. It was an SKS," says Emma Brown, head of the anti-gun violence group Giffords. "The clearest takeaway from this alarming and terrifying fact is this is not a country where anybody is safe from gun violence."

This isn't a fact of life. It's a choice.

Dana Milbank is a political columnist for the Washington Post, where this appeared. Follow him on Twitter @Milbank.

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Another Political Court Delivers for Donald Trump

By GENE NICHOL

To no one's surprise, in mid-September the Republican North Carolina Supreme Court intervened to help Donald Trump in the 2024 election by making sure, despite the ruling of the State Board of Elections, that Robert Kennedy Jr. must be removed from the already-printed ballot. The justices had to violate North Carolina law to do it. But they're used to that.

The cost of re-printing "more than 2,910,000 general election ballots" must now be shouldered by our 100 county election boards, not the state. As the dissenting justices noted, the ruling also places "the whims of one man ... above the constitutional interests of tens of thousands of voters" facing an "effectively truncated absentee period".

The court order offered little in the way of explanation or justification. It principally made clear it would "prevent the dissemination" of ballots listing Kennedy's candidacy. Jus-

ice Allison Riggs objected in dissent that the "egregious" interference with the electoral process represented "a dark day in the history of the state's judiciary." She added that "public aspersions cast on the impartiality, independence, and dignity of our state courts are well-earned." I'm guessing Republicans won't like that much. I hope Riggs has a good lawyer.

RFK v. Board of Elections raised two interesting points for me.

First, in short order, the N.C. Supreme Court has demonstrated itself to be the most politically partisan tribunal in our history. We now expect it, like a bad storm. Litigants don't anticipate independence. The new majority has barely hidden its embrace of the Republican cause. Our high court has become the black-robed Republican caucus of the Tar Heel State.

The Kennedy case made me wonder, though, how the process works. How do the five Republicans know precisely what their partisan benefactors prefer?

Often it's easy, of course. In lots of our cases, one set of the parties is listed as Sen. Phillip Berger and House Speaker Tim Moore. Clear enough, we know who wins.

But what about in Robert Kennedy's case. It's not necessarily obvious — or at least

it wasn't months ago — who Kennedy's presence might hurt, or by how much. And, more relevant, how do the justices know what North Carolina Republican leaders think about the question. How do they find out?

Do the Republican justices expect Chief Justice Newby to pass down the mandated line? Does it come by rank — chief judge to associates? Or is it, perhaps, by blood. Maybe Justice Berger (the Senate Leader's son) communicates for his dad, as the most powerful figure in the party? So young Berger delivers the final message?

I'm being at least partly fanciful here, I suppose. But I have wondered, more seriously, if Republicanism rather than law prevails, whose Republicanism is it? Who is the oracle?

Second, and in a completely different direction, one aspect of the Kennedy case was shocking. It was a 4-3 ruling, not 5-2 as presumed. For the first time, Justice Richard Dietz departed from his Republican col-

leagues. He concluded in dissent, simply:

"I believe this Court's role is to follow the law as it is written. The State Board of Elections properly determined that it would not be practical to reprint the ballots ... before the deadline set by law." Really.

The Dietz opinion was odd, structurally, because he felt compelled to repeatedly announce that the Republican majority opinion was "well-reasoned," "thoughtful" and "entirely reasonable." Illegitimate, I guess, but really, really, thoughtful.

Lots of lawyers I know expected Dietz to be an actual judge, unlike his four Republican compatriots. It looks like his muscle memory slipped in for a moment. Good news. But I wouldn't expect to see it when the Republicans actually need his vote.

Gene Nichol is Boyd Tinsley Distinguished Professor of Law at the University of North Carolina School of Law.

Dispatches ...

Continued from previous page

The animal death toll is now over 100 million.

Overall inflation is down. According to data released by the Bureau of Labor Statistics on Sept. 11, the Consumer Price Index—which measures price changes for commonly purchased goods—increased 2.5% in August (year over year), the lowest annual increase since February 2021.

The positive economic news comes in the wake of the Inflation Reduction Act, which was signed into law by President Joe Biden in August 2022. The legislation faced unified Republican opposition in Congress and advanced with only Democratic votes. Harris cast the deciding vote in the Senate that allowed the legislation to eventually become law.

The law locked in price reductions for many medicines covered by Medicare and allowed the agency to negotiate on drug prices for the first time ever, with the intent to cut costs for consumers in response to inflation.

The Inflation Reduction Act also sought to direct federal investment in job creation by providing tax credits for domestic green jobs. According to an analysis by the Political Economy Research Institute at the University of Massachusetts Amherst, the law is projected to create 9 million jobs over the next decade.

Trump and Republicans have called for the law to either be repealed or severely cur-

tailed, which could cause a spike in drug prices and cut back on job creation—which is vital to economic growth.

NEW FBI STATS REFUTE TRUMP LIES ABOUT VIOLENT CRIME WAVE. If you follow GOP presidential nominee Donald Trump's social media or watch Fox News, you might believe that stepping out of your house means you're plummeting into a dangerous, post-apocalyptic world. Morgan Stephens noted at DailyKos (9/23).

You're probably paranoid that strolling down any major city street could result in being mugged, beaten, or murdered by the usual scapegoats—immigrants. Because according to the right-wing's favorite talking points, immigration and homicide are wreaking havoc on major American cities.

But here are the facts: Violent crime fell 3% in 2023, while murder and manslaughter dipped by 11.6%, according to new data from the FBI. And as for those big cities that, according to Trump and his surrogates, are in anarchic free fall? Crime rates there are down for the second consecutive year.

Urban areas have long been a target for Republican ire and right-wing media criticism. But the FBI statistics show that cities with more than 1 million residents saw the most significant dips in violent crime, with a 7% decrease from 2022 to 2023.

See more Dispatches at Populist.com.

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John P. Cullen, Publisher, Sept. 18, 2024

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A handful of corporations are consolidating their grip on the nation's primary information sources. Megacorporations and hedge funds already own the major radio and TV networks, newspapers, magazines, book publishers and movie studios. Now they're moving to control the Internet. Is it any surprise that editors and news directors reflect the concerns of their corporate bosses?

Little wonder that populism — the theory that people are more important than corporations, and government needs to be strong enough to keep corporations in line — gets short shrift in public policy discussions, and politicians and journalists who question the power of corporate barons are dismissed as radicals. Well, there are a few of us in the Heartland of America armed with the First Amendment, access to a printing press and a newspaper with a mission: to tell the stories of working people and how we can regain control of the United States.

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