



Stars and Stripes and Fascists

Beautiful and dreadful things have been done in the name of the Star-Spangled Banner. Beware fascists who wrap themselves in the flag.

By HAL CROWTHER

"Nationalism is power hunger tempered by self-deception." — George Orwell, "Notes on Nationalism"

I've rarely been taken to task, by friends or readers, for the kind of maudlin, low-rent patriotism that fuels alt-right pseudo-populism and spawns grotesque politicians like Donald Trump. Trying to think of an image that makes me even sicker than the ones of Trump against a waving backdrop of American flags, all I could come up with was a news service photograph of emaciated, starving Sudanese children holding out their food bowls.

I'm afraid I've been schooled in the skepticism of H.L. Mencken. He never hesitated to point out that nationalism and religion have caused more pain, in terms of wars, deaths, persecution and displaced populations, than any other forces in the history of the human race.

It was Samuel Johnson who said "Patriotism is the last refuge of a scoundrel." Accurate as that may be, I like to think Dr. Johnson was making a point about scoundrels, not about patriotism. Every native—and every naturalized citizen who believes he's chosen wisely—has moments when that familiar flag, and the music that goes with it, brings a lump in the throat. One such moment was a concert by the Castine, Maine, town band, on the centuries-old village green under a towering ancestral elm. The band always plays "America the Beautiful" and "The Star-Spangled Banner," and next to the big flag that flies behind its audience is the bronze statue of a Union soldier from the Civil War. The very one, we've been told, that inspired the poem "For the Union Dead" by the Yankee poet Robert Lowell, whose home was in the northwest corner of the Castine Common.

This softened me up, I guess, for an image on television the next day, the beautiful, superhuman, gravity-scorning gymnast Simone Biles literally wrapping herself in the American flag after winning another gold medal at the Paris Olympics. You can get a little too much of nationalism at the Olympics, while war and terrorism rage across the globe, but there are moments

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The Progressive POPULIST

A Journal from America's Heartland

Business Office:
PO Box 487
Storm Lake, IA 50588
1-712-732-4991

Subscription Information:
1-818-286-3104

USPS 016011. Periodicals postage paid at Storm Lake, Iowa 50588. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to The Progressive Populist, PO Box 487, Storm Lake, Iowa 50588-0487.

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Subscriptions are \$45.00 for one year (22 issues). Back issues: \$3.50 prepaid. Foreign, group bulk rates and advertising rates available on request. If you don't want your name shared with other progressive groups in list exchanges, call 800-205-7067 or email populist@usa.net and ask to be "unlisted."

The Progressive Populist (ISSN 1096-5971), entire contents copyrighted 2024, is published twice monthly, with combined issues in July and January, by Ampersand Publishing Company, 220 W. Railroad St., Storm Lake, Iowa 50588.

AN EDITORIAL

Harris Clears Launch Pad

Kamala Harris told the people what they wanted to hear at the Democratic National Convention in Chicago, and, with Minnesota Gov. Tim Walz as her running mate, they have two months to close the deal with the rest of the country.

Some of her top lines in accepting the nomination: "I promise to be a president for all Americans. You can always trust me to put country above party and self, to hold sacred America's fundamental principles, from the rule of law, to free and fair elections, to the peaceful transfer of power," she said.

Harris called Trump an "unserious man," but said "the consequences of putting [him] back in the White House are extremely serious."

"Just imagine Donald Trump with no guardrails and how he would use the immense powers of the presidency of the United States — not to improve your life, not to strengthen our national security — but to serve the only client he has ever had: himself," she said.

"We know what a second Trump term would look like. It's all laid out in Project 2025, written by his closest advisers," Harris, noted, referring to the Heritage Foundation-led plan for the second Trump administration that the Republican nominee has unconvincingly tried to disavow.

"Its sum total is to pull our country back to the past. But America, we are not going back ... We are not going back to when Donald Trump tried to cut Social Security and Medicare. We are not going back to when he tried to get rid of the Affordable Care Act, when insurance companies could deny people with pre-existing conditions. We are not going to let him eliminate the Department of Education that funds our public schools.

"We are not going to let him end programs like Head Start that provide preschool and child care for our children. America, we are not going back."

Fears of large-scale protests by supporters of Palestinians did not materialize at the convention. Uncommitted Palestinian-American delegates were upset that DNC organizers wouldn't give a Palestinian-American delegate five minutes to address the convention. But in her speech, Harris acknowledged the "heart-breaking" scale of the suffering in Gaza and declared that the Biden administration is "working to end this war"—even as the U.S. continues to transfer weaponry to the Israeli military.

"What has happened in Gaza over the past 10 months is devastating. So many innocent lives lost. Desperate, hungry people fleeing for safety, over and over again," said Harris, who received sustained applause from the convention audience after calling for "dignity, security, freedom, and self-determination" for the Palestinian people.

Harris also pledged to "always stand up for Israel's right to defend itself" amid mounting global calls for an arms embargo.

Wrapping up, Harris called on Americans to "write the next great chapter in the most extraordinary story ever told."

"It is now our turn to do what generations before us have done," she said. "Guided by optimism and faith, to fight for this country we love, to fight for the ideals we cherish and to uphold the awesome responsibility that comes with the greatest privilege on Earth — the privilege and pride of being an American."

"So let's get out there," she said. "Let's fight for it."

Harris also has consolidated her position in polls, gaining narrow leads in national polls as well as swing states, such as Michigan, Pennsylvania and Wisconsin and she is within the polling margin of error in Arizona, Nevada, North Carolina and Georgia. But she clearly has momentum; since she entered the race on July 21, her support has increased from the base Biden left her, up 2.8 percentage points in Wisconsin, where she leads by 3 points in the *Washington Post's* average of polls, to 3.9% in Arizona, where she is 1 point behind Trump. She leads Trump by an average of 2 points in national polls, as of Aug. 26.

Harris also beat Trump in the ratings, as her acceptance address was watched by 28.9 million viewers, according to Nielsen data, outdrawing Trump's speech in Milwaukee, which drew 28.4 million viewers across 15 television networks. That likely will stick in the old man's craw, as Trump is famously obsessed with TV ratings and the size of his crowds.

Of course, the election should not be close. Harris has served honorably as a California prosecutor, state attorney general, U.S. senator and vice president. She faces a twice-impeached former president who has been convicted of 34 felonies and is awaiting sentencing. Trump also has been found liable for sexual assault and numerous cases of fraud in New York. He faces scores of other felony charges in federal courts in D.C. and Florida and Georgia state court, which he managed to delay past the election.

Trump's criminal record and his lack of moral character has not shamed the Republican Party. They'll need a thorough beat-down, up and down the ballot in November, to accomplish that.

Harris and Walz are on the trail.

Sustainability Fund Appeal

We have published *The Progressive Populist* for nearly 30 years, starting out as a monthly and expanding to twice monthly 25 years ago, covering politics, economics and the arts for working people. The past few years have been a challenging time for publishers, as much of the "content" has moved from newspapers and magazines onto websites.

I edit *The Progressive Populist* from Manchaca, Texas, with my brothers, who run a community newspaper in Storm Lake, Iowa. We are working to update our website, Populist.com, to attract younger readers, but we still intend to publish our newspaper for those of our subscribers who prefer to read our columns from the comfort of your easy chairs.

In the past couple years our production costs have risen while our circulation has dropped, as many readers have let their print subscriptions lapse, and printing and postal rates have increased substantially.

Unfortunately, we're not independently wealthy. We might have to increase subscription rates, but we're hoping your contribution will help us shore up our financial reserves to keep the newspaper subscription affordable for readers with limited funds.

Any amount you can give will help. Send a check to The Progressive Populist, PO Box 487, Storm Lake, IA 50588. Call 1-800-205-7067 to charge the gift to your credit card. Or send money to *The Progressive Populist* account at GoFundMe.com online. And if you know anybody who is looking for a good, progressive newspaper, let them know about *The Progressive Populist*. Thanks. —JMC

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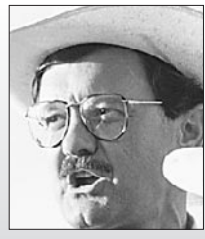
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Cover illustration by Dolores Cullen

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JIM HIGHTOWER



People are realizing that their time, energy and their very lives are consumed a day at a time to profit far-away Big Boss Men, and their jobs are pointless.

The Changing Meaning of 'Work' — And the Idea of 'Boss Man'

“Big Boss Man,” an old song by blues legend Jimmy Reed, still packs a potent political punch for today’s working class:

You got me workin', boss man, working round the clock

I wanna little drink of water, but you won't let Jimmy stop

Big boss man, can't you hear me when I call?

But then, Reed urges workers to see how small the boss man really is:

Well, you ain't so big, you just tall that's all.

Well, I'm gonna get me a boss man, one gonna treat me right

Work hard in the day time, rest easy at night.

That could be the anthem of millions of Americans today, who are rebelling against soulless corporate jobs and layers of bosses demanding longer hours doing tedious tasks. These workplace uprisings are not about another dollar a day, rather the idea of work itself is being confronted.

People are realizing that their time, energy and their very lives are being consumed a day at a time to profit faraway Big Boss Men. It’s also dawning on more and more workers that their jobs are pointless — generating paperwork that no one sees, babysitting computer systems, making electronic downloads that are silly, etc.

Thus, large numbers of workers are saying: Who needs it? Is this my “life”? What’s the point? My “job” could — poof! — disappear tomorrow, and it wouldn’t matter. How am I to take any pride or find a smidgeon of personal fulfillment in surrendering the biggest chunks of my life to that?

This is Jim Hightower saying ... Big Billionaire Bosses like Elon Musk and Jeff Bezos bark that it’s time for employees to double down on the “work ethic” — yet there’s no ethical core to the work they demand. Bosses don’t get it, but what’s happening is not merely a labor rebellion but a revolution for humanity to be valued for itself ... and for workers to become their own bosses.

Republicans Discover a Big Flaw in Tim Walz: He’s Not Rich!

Here’s a hard-right political twist I wasn’t expecting, and Tim Walz is probably surprised, too.

Within the confines of Trump’s MAG-Aworld, some are appalled by Walz’s wealth. Wealth? They’re claiming this former high school teacher is rich? No ... and that bothers them.

Walz gets a gubernatorial paycheck and a modest public pension. That’s it. No portfolio of Wall Street stocks, no deferred payouts on corporate bonuses, and he doesn’t even own a house, much less a vacation home. While this pegs him as a regular middle-class American, it seems to put off a covey of moneyed Trumpsters who see his lack of riches as a personal weakness.

The *Wall Street Journal* recently featured one such partisan, who says he prefers “a high net worth” politician, like

J.D. Vance. Being rich, explained the partisan, means a candidate “has financial acumen, business and investment savvy.” Righto! For example, Vance was savvy enough to kiss-up to right-wing Silicon Valley billionaire Peter Thiel, who has pumped millions into the fictional “hillbilly,” turning Vance into a pretentious “hillwilliam.” And please stop pretending that rich candidates are less corrupt since they aren’t dependent on special-interest funding. Trump himself put the lie to that when he recently begged a Big Oil group to give a billion dollars to his campaign — in exchange for his promise to slash their taxes.

This is Jim Hightower saying ... Most bizarre is the assertion by Walz critics that his failure to be invested in Wall Street stocks means he’s out of touch with the financial concerns of “the average American.” Hello, nearly all stocks are owned by the superrich, like Trump and Vance. In fact, the average American family owns zero stocks — just like Walz.

A Flock of Rich Plutocratic Democrats Want Lina Khan’s Head. Why?

We’ve recently learned about Project 2025, the GOP’s scheme to let corporate agents take over our government. But what about the less visible effort to make Democrats install corporate-subservient officials who’ll expand their monopoly power?

High-finance finaglers of Wall Street and Silicon Valley are quietly demanding that Kamala Harris commit to appointing their designated toadies to oversee America’s so-called free-enterprise structure. Their primary target is the Federal Trade Commission, a little-known agency meant to protect and extend economic competition.

The FTC is now headed by Lina Khan, a tenacious opponent of anti-consumer, anti-worker mergers and takeovers. She rightly recognizes that the “free” in free enterprise is not an adjective but a verb requiring aggressive public action to free up the enterprise of people who are now routinely shut out of the market by monopolistic giants. So, says Khan, if we really want free markets, let’s free them.

Oh, how the money vultures screeched! “She’s a dope,” raged takeover bully Barry Diller in a dopey fury. And, since many of the monopolistic titans who are offended by Khan’s otherwise very popular progressive populism are from the Democratic Party’s high-dollar donor class, they have undue clout. Thus, they are bluntly demanding her head as their price for financially backing Harris’ presidential run. Commissioner Khan, they exclaim, simply does not understand “the way the Washington game is played.”

Oh, yes, she does — and she’s flat out rejecting it! She’s the first real anti-trust champion America has had in years — but will the party’s higher-ups have the guts and integrity to defend her? Or will the business-as-usual powers be ushered back in? The answer to that will be an early measure of Harris’ commitment to economic democracy.

Want to Cool Earth? Just Block the Sun. Simple!

Challenging conventional wisdom can advance society’s understanding of truth. Good. Arrogantly challenging the complex balance of nature, however, can go kablooié! Very bad.

In recent times, there’s been an unfortunate tendency for some scientific hotshots to send society off on techno-tangents to “remake” nature, promising miracles. About 70 years ago, for example, a so-called agricultural science genius promised that dumping synthetic pesticides on monoculture crops across the globe would end hunger. Chemical giants and governments rushed to do the dump, but the “fix” ultimately resulted in the ongoing poisoning of Earth’s land, water, food and people — while enriching agricultural monopolists and allowing hunger to rage.

Unfortunately, insistence by technolo-

gists and profiteers that they can outsmart and overwhelm nature is now being pushed with cosmic vengeance. A covey of arrogant academics and billionaire backers are saying: “Trust us, we can handle that little global warming issue.”

One is named David Keith, running a \$100 million “stratospheric solar geoengineering” scheme named SCoPEX. Keith proposes to solve global warming by — get this — dispensing volumes of sulfur dioxide into the Earth’s stratosphere to “regulate” the amount and location of sunlight around the globe.

Gosh, what could go wrong with that? Never mind the unknown consequences of tampering with basic nature, argues Keith, for his bold techno-fix to global warming

bypasses the political difficulty of ending our fossil fuel addiction — so we should just do it.

Keith does admit he can be “inappropriately forceful ... I’m intense,” he says. Well, then, let’s all chip in a for some therapy sessions to help him overcome his megalomania before he makes an irreversible mess of the only planet we have that sustains life.

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

Democrats Are Only Hope For Climate

By FRANK LINGO

If any voters around America are considering voting for alternative candidates in November, please remember these two terrifying words: President Trump.

Any votes cast for third or fourth party nominees instead of for Kamala Harris will only benefit the ex-Oaf of Office, worst president in American history and wannabe dictator if elected again.

For a while it looked like there might be a spoiler. Robert F. Kennedy Jr., a KINO (Kennedy In Name Only), once had a small claim of being an environmental advocate. That’s gone now, along with RFK Jr.’s sanity.

A July 2023 NPR profile revealed that he’s not just an anti-vaxxer. Kennedy’s crazy conspiracies fill what’s left of his worm-eaten brain. He recommended ridiculous remedies for COVID, such as Ivermectin and Hydroxychloroquine, and accused Dr. Anthony Fauci, the nation’s leading expert on infectious diseases, of orchestrating a coup against American democracy. Fortunately, his campaign discombobulated as he offered to throw his support to BOTH Trump and Kamala Harris in exchange for a cabinet post.

On the extreme other hand, Green Party candidate Jill Stein suffers from perhaps too much sanity. I agree with Stein that there is a climate emergency. I agree with her that Israel is committing genocidal war crimes in Gaza. In a more perfect union where the Green Party stood a chance of winning, there could be valid votes for Stein.

But this ain’t no perfect union. It’s a deeply divided, racist, sexist, gun-nut nation.

In 2016 Jill Stein got 1.4 million votes while Trump won the Electoral College by under 80,000 votes in a few swing states. There is some speculation that Stein’s votes took a victory from Hillary Clinton. In 2020, Joe Biden carried the four swing states that gave him the Electoral College win by barely 50,000 votes.

The razor-thin margin of these last two elections reminds us of the importance of every vote. With the dangers of dictatorship hovering over our delicate democracy, we can’t indulge casting protest votes for candidates who won’t win. As we look at leaders around the world, dictators are the worst mistreaters of nature. We can be sure that another Trump presidency would guarantee climate catastrophe.

Regrettably, not enough Americans place a priority on the planet. It’s only the 19th most important issue with voters, less than improving roads and the budget deficit, according to the Yale Program on Climate Change Communication.

Kamala Harris and the Democratic Party have actually improved on their ecological commitments. Sure, I was angry and disappointed when Biden broke his promise about drilling on the Willow Project. But overall Biden and Harris made progress on a host of environmental issues with the most significant green legislation in half a century.

So we have a choice between the probably pretty good of Harris against the certain s#*t storm of Trump. Let’s keep in mind our extremely tight budget. With the survival of our sovereignty at stake, we can’t afford the luxury of voting for an ideal.

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



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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

New Swiftboating

The recent attacks by J.D. Vance on Tim Walz' military record is straight out of the GOP playbook on discrediting by deceit the service of Democratic veterans to a gullible public. Rewind back to 2004 and the Bush-Cheney swiftboat denouncement of Democratic challenger John Kerry. The comparisons are disturbing.

Lt. Kerry was awarded three Purple Hearts and a Bronze Star for his Navy service in Vietnam. During the 2004 campaign, a group of disgruntled swiftboat vets organized opposition to his awards. Strange that only one had actually served under Kerry.

Those who did organized to back their Commander, calling the bogus charges "garbage," "a pack of lies" and politically motivated. Many campaigned for him. So did Tim Walz, then a Minnesota teacher and National Guard Sergeant Major who would later resign/retire from both positions to successfully run for Congress in 2006.

Neither Bush nor Cheney had active military service. Bush was suspended from the Texas Air National Guard for missing annual physicals. Cheney never got that far. He was classified 4F for old high school football injuries. Both of these failed neocons made the horrendous decision to invade Afghanistan and Iraq, a trillion-dollar boondoggle that cost thousands of American lives. A decorated Vietnam vet might have known better.

At least Bush #43 served, albeit in a limited capacity. The same cannot be said for convicted felon Donald Trump. Both were born in 1946, the earliest Baby Boomers. Both had influential fathers. With the Bushes, Papa POTUS #41 helped steer son POTUS #43 into the Guard and away from possible deployment to Vietnam. Millions back then chose a similar path.

With the Trumps, a totally different dodge. Papa Fred found a Queens podiatrist who got The Donald a 4F deferment for nonexistent bone spurs. Seems the doctor's office was in a building owned by Papa Trump. Think there was a quid pro quo on the rent? This on the heels (sic) of paying off smarter students to take his son's SATs and write his college term papers.

If J.D. Vance was sincere about 24-year vet Walz' military record, then why did he enthusiastically agree to be running mate to a lying, pampered draft dodger? He had it right when he castigated Trump as "America's Hitler." A political oppor-

tunist, Vance sold his soul to gain national notoriety for his own future Presidential run. Deplorable.

ED ENGLER, *Sebring, Fla.*

Stay Away from the Flames

An ancient Greek philosopher suggested that humans were like marionettes, jerked around on strings by gods and goddesses. But he further suggested that the divinities were kind enough to allow humans to tug back on one string — the string of reason.

Long before the fall of war-prone Nineveh, the folly of armed conflicts should have been understood through sanity and reason. But even now, in the 21st century, as we measure millennia, we absurdly study the self-defeating destruction of ourselves and others — millions seeking to kill or cripple fellow human beings!

Must we, in truth, "modernize" our enormous nuclear arsenal, as though it weren't already sufficiently deadly for life on our smallish sphere? If the Olympians proffered reason to us, we had better indulge and employ that holy virtue, ere we self-destruct as moths into candle flame.

WILLIAM DAUENHAUER, *Willowick, Ohio*

This Nation Needs a Cleansing of Despicable Politicians

The buying and poisoning of our secular republic democracy has been an ongoing deceptive, lying "societal stupidifiers" realm from our founding forward to 2024. Having just read my daily newspaper and the article pertaining to J.D. Vance and the "self-avowed opponent of democracy" and its substantiation of my long-held beliefs regarding our more realistic "plutocracy" we actually live in needs a cleansing and reconstruction in order for "We the People" to actually have any credence.

This article and every "societal Despicable Deplorables" cited Peter Thiel, J.D. Vance, Elon Musk and Alex Jones are deserved of a more explicit depiction, such as SCUM — ergo, scurrilous, seditious, sexist, conning, corrupted, con-man, unaware, uncaring, unabashed, malicious, malfeasants, misogynists, SCUM.

As I approach my nonagenarian status this fall, having served my country during the Korean War (1952-1955) and my community for 28 years as a firefighter, my absolute disgust and concern for our democracy's future is waning, seeing as how we are being vigorously targeted with autocratic dictatorial intentions via our Alt-Right Project 2025. In my approaching nine decades of a fairly eclectic led life involved

in several professions and within the community as well am I convinced of the reality that our nation/world needs an urgent and expeditious replication of our 1800s Era of Enlightenment, where centuries of prior lies (ex. Flat Earth) and propaganda supported by feudalistic dictates controlling human behaviors and mindsets were exposed and democracies began to flourish. Coupled with this long overdue roll in our very salvation is the defiance of our anthropocentric, misogynistic mindsets with the Mandated, Demanded Parity (50% male, 50% female) throughout our entire governance, local, state and federal within a mandated time frame from inception to fruition of four years time (2025 to 2029).

When this nation finally negates the 144 years of oppressive denigration of women and members of the Black community and has representative decision making, we shall begin to finally give credence to our nation's motto, "We the People," having rid ourselves of the corrupted powers of the aforementioned "societal despicable deplorables."

FRANK C. ROHRIG, *Milford, Conn.*

Election's Coming Up

A security blanket, as used by Linus, the cartoon character in Peanuts, a comic strip in a newspaper. At this time, a lot of folks are feeling it, malaise. It is defined as a vague awareness of moral or social decline. Jimmy Carter spoke of such a malaise affecting the American people. He was our president in the late '70s. We are now in the mid 2020s. Once again, we go through the process of selecting a president. An election is coming up. Are you going to participate? I hope so. Go to the polls in early November knowing you have voted for the candidate of your choice.

LELAND ALPER, *Barnet, Vt.*

Does Hamas Deserve a Mulligan?

If the Iraq "war" starters in Washington, D.C., can gift themselves a "war" mulligan for the Iraq "war," why can't the Hamas "war" starters do the same thing?

Bush, Cheney, Biden and the rest of them who voted for the Iraq "war" gave themselves a "war mulligan" for starting a "bad idea war." They got to walk away free and clear. But the Hamas "war" starters got no mulligans. They are held responsible for starting "bad idea wars," and they got executed.

We obviously need to work at getting racism out of "war."
FRANK ERICKSON, *Minneapolis, Minn.*

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Trump is Getting Worse. Will the Media Notice?

By ELWOOD WATSON

Donald Trump's campaign is in a fierce tailspin as his failed attacks on Kamala Harris haven't been able to slow down her growing popularity.

"It's very clear the former president is unraveling. He's having a complete meltdown," Ashley Etienne, a former Joe Biden staffer and political advisor, said during a recent segment on Anderson Cooper's CNN show. "Kamala Harris has got him a chokehold that is really driving him to the point of insanity, and really driving his campaign to the point of paralysis."

Harris is officially the Democratic presidential nominee. Nonetheless, Trump has continued to describe the vice president's elevation to the top of her party's ticket as "unconstitutional" and accused her of taking part in a "coup." Recently, Trump told a group of reporters that he was "very angry" at Harris and ranted, "I think I'm entitled to personal attacks."

"I don't have a lot of respect for her intelligence, and I think she'll be a terrible president," Trump added.

During a campaign rally in Pennsylvania last week, Trump went off script, and declared himself more attractive than Harris.

"I say that I am much better looking. I'm a better-looking person than Kamala," Trump declared to a crowd of his supporters. For a man to compare his attractiveness to a woman's is odd and arguably creepy. And if Trump genuinely believes he supersedes Harris in the looks department, he needs to take a good look in a mirror.

He also bizarrely claimed Harris is not Black, and only started "pretending" to be Black when she decided to run for political office. And he continues his perverse obsession with crowd size, falsely bragging he had a bigger crowd at the Ellipse in Washington D.C. during the Jan. 6, 2021, insurrection than Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. enjoyed at the Lincoln Memorial for his "I Have a Dream" speech in August 1963, which drew an estimated 250,000 people.

Trump also falsely claimed that a crowd that showed up to greet Harris at the Detroit airport simply didn't exist. "There was nobody

on the plane, and her campaign used 'A.I.' instead," Trump declared. This would probably come as a major surprise to the 15,000 fans in attendance, captured on video camera by multiple news outlets.

There are a number of reasons the right-wing obsession and fascination with Harris is so rampant. Apart from her being the Democratic's presidential candidate, she is a biracial woman of color and one of a very small number of women of color in Congress. She is intelligent, attractive, and unapologetically direct in a professional sense.

Harris exudes an unabashed, refreshing level of confidence. She is the embodiment of the living nightmare for many right wingers. Black, biracial, confident, candid and competent. She epitomizes pretty much everything many of them dislike. For a first-term congressperson to have struck such fear into a sizable sector of a political movement is really interesting.

Trump has claimed President Biden deployed the FBI to Mar-a-Lago with the intent to assassinate him. He accused Biden of "faking" having the COVID virus. He falsely claims Democrats want to murder babies after birth, and that Venezuela is releasing its convicts

from prison and sending them to the United States with the current administration's blessing. And, of course, he is still touting the same lie that he, not Joe Biden, was the winner of the 2020 election.

The truth is Trump is not funny. There is nothing amusing about his rhetoric. He's not confused. He is a mentally unhinged person.

The media should be discussing this alarming reality every day. Rather than treating Trump as if he is a run of the mill candidate when he clearly is not, and begin reporting him for what he is — an older man who has already reached the stage of mental illness and is rapidly becoming worse as time progresses.

One can only wonder how many Republicans — and segments of the media — would have demanded invoking the 25th Amendment had Joe Biden stated such a litany of falsehoods. I think we know the answer.

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.

Two Partners, One Purpose

By DON ROLLINS

"We are going to build a younger, darker, hipper, fresher, sneaker-wearing labor movement, A movement that is going to be more inclusive and built for the middle class. And we are going to end poverty-wage work once and for all." — April Verrett, President, Service Employees International Union, at the 2024 Democratic National Convention

Although a mere month and 90 miles apart, the now completed 2024 national party conventions were light years apart by way of substance. Not that the Democrats were above the nonsense, hype and style-

point distractions that characterize the modern political era; but unlike the GOP with their universal, indiscriminate loathing of federal spending, Dems (largely) held the line on government as a critical partner for betterment.

This elemental contradiction in governing philosophy was the true star of the platform, first in Milwaukee then in Chicago. From the late afternoon warmups to the primetime headlines, few if any bypassed the proper role of central government, for or against. Change the era and the players, and it could have been a 1780s showdown between Alexander Hamilton's Federalists, and Thomas Jefferson's burgeoning Republicans.

But there was nothing remotely nostalgic about GOP attacks on federal economic programs designed to enhance the workforce they presume to support. Trump sycophant and Teamsters President Sean O'Brien broke

political ranks long enough to deliver a bootstrap economics homily, but an applause meter would've barely registered. Not even the assembled faithful seemed to buy it.

Contrast this tepid nod to workers with that of the six leaders from the nation's largest labor unions who spoke at the DNC. Each was animated and focused, calling out the Republicans for years of anti-union policies. The house felt the vibe, and gave it up for all six.

The moment was real, maybe even sustaining for the long haul.

The only passing cloud was the relative mute praise for President Biden's unflagging support for labor rights. Using executive orders designed to bypass inevitable Republican opposition, Biden's labor policies included better working conditions for federal employees, preferred status for federal construction projects, and federal apprenticeship

programs based on skills and abilities, not previous education alone. And in 2023 he became the first sitting president to walk a picket line, bolstering an effective strike on alongside United Auto Workers.

Uncle Joe deserved a little more love.

That oversight notwithstanding, the contrast between the two conventions speaks volumes about the parties' differences in priorities and personalities, especially as applied to the workers' rights. Wild applause and appeals for unity don't guarantee much in the harsh tumble of presidential elections, but something happened on the floor of one convention and not the other. Two partners renewed their vows, declared for one purpose.

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

What About Desolation of Rural America?



Rural America is a lot more complicated than an elephant, but nobody gets anywhere without understanding real life.

It has become fashionable for big city publications to opine about how to fix rural America. Indeed, many of the pundit/columnists are retired from USDAs in past administrations and their solutions to devastation in the rural community are usually recycled from their own faulty policies. Occasionally, an op-ed writer falls on his sword and suggests corrections for what he did wrong.

The solutions remind me of pronouncements from the blind men examining an elephant. The guy at the trunk says the elephant's a snake and the guy at the leg says it's a tree. I don't remember what the guy at the ear says but when the elephant sprays they all agree it's a rain cloud come to Earth.

Rural America is a lot more complicated than an elephant, but nobody gets anywhere without understanding real life. Writers lump all rural folks together, big farms with small ones. North with south with east and west. They blame born-again churches and Fox News for rural anger. Here's what the pundits need to understand:

1. Rural America is diverse. One

ecosystem provides for raising wheat. Another provides for timber. In between, the plains and prairies muddle through with corn and beans, and a smattering of livestock, while USDA's system of subsidies rewards those that holler the loudest. All of big-city wealth is shipped out from rural lands. We send food, timber and, increasingly, green energy from our communities to town.

2. All of today's food, timber and even energy systems depend on subsidies. The biggest payments go to the farms with the best bookkeepers and relationship to the USDA office. Corn-and-bean commodity guys make enough to spend winters in Florida; their subsidized GMO products fatten subsidized hogs in confined animal feeding operations (CAFOs). Other farmers squeak by.

3. "Get big or get out" hasn't worked for rural folks. Earl Butz's 1972 edict banished small farmers to urban places where they lived in their pickup trucks. Towns were abandoned and their antique fixtures sold for parts. My town

friends tell me I don't have any neighbors. I do, but they're few and far between while in the old days there was a family on every 60 acres.

4. The lands our neighbors left became consolidated into mega-farms. Houses and barns were burned and plowed over. Fences disappeared as pastures became plowed land. This system hasn't worked out well for the soil or the water and the degraded resources are now expensive to maintain, no longer assets.

5. As farms become bigger, equipment becomes massive. At a certain point, a farmer figures out he can do better by giving up his equipment and hiring custom crews to take care of the land. Custom crews start in Texas and work their way north to Canada. To prepare for them, the big guys kill their crops to dry it out for the harvest machines. That killing herbicide (glyphosate or 2-4D) can't be washed off—it goes right into the food system.

6. Rural kids are gone. When farmsteads are abandoned, it means families have moved to town. Rural school systems are broken. Gathering places like general stores and community centers are gone. Things that define community, like public safety, medical help, roads and jobs are quickly endangered and disappear despite the courageous work of folks that want to save them.

And, here's the piece the pundits REALLY miss:

7. The old-timey fire-and-brimstone churches are still here. When the school system in my neighborhood went to four days a week in 2021, churches stepped in with off-day programs. They provide meals,

daycare, meeting places for clubs. Stores, schools, doctors may be endangered but rural churches, while struggling, are the last community vestiges hanging on even though churches, too, are in trouble.

Why do the crazy churches have so much power? It's because every institution except the churches have abandoned rural America. Our folks are lonely, seeking company and, on Sundays, they go to church and think about the end times.

Now for the fix: A few courageous youngsters have returned to their rural homes or even come here from families that have been urban for generations. A few courageous immigrants have moved to our places with hope of building their own farms. These folks have no clue how hard it's going to be but they're building greenhouses, selling at farmers' markets, creating entertainment and wedding venues, following the business plans of successes that worked in rich communities on the coasts.

We can keep those folks in our communities by extending a hand of friendship and by patronizing their fledgling businesses. USDA has started to step in with a few programs to help beginning farmers. If we want to re-build rural America, and please remember that it's where America's wealth begins, we need to support our local farms.

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

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DISPATCHES

PROTESTS LIGHT AT DEMOCRATIC CONVENTION. They said tens of thousands of protesters would be in Chicago. They claimed they would "shut down the DNC for Gaza." Like the Chicago riots during the 1968 Democratic convention, their demonstrations would snarl the city, shake the party and doom the candidacy of "Genocide Joe."

Then came Kamala Harris — and the protest fizzled. Organizers anticipated there would be 30,000 to 40,000 protesters on hand for the Dec. 19 kickoff. But only a few thousand showed up; police estimated 3,500, Dana Milbank noted at *The Washington Post* (8/22).

"There were more reporters than protesters," observed Bennett Weiss. He was there selling Gaza-related buttons, including one that, he said, describes himself: "Self-Ambivalent Jew Against Zionism."

As the smaller-than-expected group assembled in Union Park near the United Center, Milbank reported, hundreds of signs reading "Victory to the Palestinian Resistance" were left stacked and unused. (They were the work of the "Freedom Road Socialist Organization.") The protesters had their street puppets and their giant bloody hands. They denounced "Killer Kamala" along with Genocide Joe. Milbanks added, "I heard nary a mention of Oct. 7 or Hamas's hostages, but clarion calls for the destruction of Israel: 'From the river to the sea, Palestine will be free. From the sea to the river, Palestine will live forever.'"

Still, the first question from a reporter at a news conference by the organizers was about whether the loss of Biden as their foil had "changed the crowd size." An organizer said "we won't know that for a couple more hours."

A few hours later, we knew. Only 100 people attended a protest march on the DNC by the "Poor People's Army," and that was after they delayed the start by 90 minutes. With Green Party candidate Jill Stein in attendance, their announced intention was to make "citizen's arrests" of Democrats attending the convention and to charge them with "crimes against humanity."

A few dozen demonstrators broke off from the main group Monday night, Aug. 19, and, a couple of blocks from the arena, threw water bottles at police while taking down a few sections of the outer perimeter fence. Police quickly seized control without using tear gas, nobody was seriously injured, and police reported a grand total of 13 arrests for the day.

[An unsanctioned protest outside the Israeli Consulate on the second night resulted in clashes between protesters and police and 56 arrests, the Associated Press reported.]

RFK JR'S SIBLINGS BACK HARRIS AFTER JR'S INCOHERENT ENDORSEMENT OF TRUMP. Five siblings of Robert F. Kennedy Jr. called his decision to suspend his independent presidential campaign and endorse Donald Trump the "sad ending to a sad story."

Amid RFK Jr.'s very long-winded speech, his siblings released a statement throwing their support behind Democratic presidential nominee Kamala Harris and running mate Tim Walz, Walter Eikenkel noted at *Daily Kos* (8/23).

"We want an America filled with hope and bound together by a shared vision of a brighter future, a future defined by individual freedom, economic promise and national pride. We believe in Harris and Walz. Our brother Bobby's decision to

endorse Trump today is a betrayal of the values that our father and our family hold most dear. It is a sad ending to a sad story."

The Kennedy family has been openly critical of their brother's dubious endeavors, as well as very public in their support of President Joe Biden's administration.

THANKS TO CITIZENS UNITED, 50 MEGADONORS PUT OVER \$1.5 BILLION INTO 2024 ELECTION. Just 50 donors have contributed more than \$1.5 billion in total to the 2024 federal elections, *The Washington Post* reported (8/26), based on an analysis of Federal Election Commission data.

The Post's top 50 list, which includes contributions reported by August 20, is comprised mainly of individual megadonors but also includes some organizations. Most of the contributions accounted for in the list have gone to super political action committees (PACs), which can accept unlimited funds from individuals and corporations, thanks to the 2010 *Citizens United* ruling by the U.S. Supreme Court that loosened campaign finance law, Edward Carver noted at *CommonDreams* (8/26).

The list led critics of the political system to lash out on social media, with one X user arguing that billionaire influence is undemocratic and leads to policies that hurt the working class, and another positing that it showed "capitalists bankrolling both capitalist parties."

The *Post* reported that those on the list "skew Republican" and the top several individual donors on the list are in fact Republicans.

The top donor is Timothy Mellon, an 82-year-old billionaire who was heir to a banking fortune and has given \$165 million in total this cycle. He contributed \$125 million to the Make America Great Again (MAGA) Inc. super PAC, which supports Republican nominee Donald Trump, and \$25 mil-

lion to Robert F. Kennedy Jr.'s now defunct campaign.

Kennedy withdrew from the presidential race (8/23) and endorsed Trump. Former U.S. Labor Secretary Robert Reich, who's now a professor and progressive commentator, said the Trump-Kennedy union was no surprise, given that they shared the same "billionaire nepo baby" donor.

Number two on the *Post's* individual list is Kenneth Griffin, a billionaire hedge fund manager who's given \$75.7 million this cycle, largely to congressional races. The top individual Democratic donor is Michael Bloomberg at \$41 million.

TEXAS BUSING OF MIGRANTS HITS SPEED BUMP AS FEWER ENTER COUNTRY. For more than two years, Gov. Greg Abbott has sent thousands of migrants who've recently arrived at the southern border to cities run by Democrats.

But in border towns, the buses have largely stopped rolling in recent weeks.

Texas sent no buses north in July, according to one report published this week. Another report said that Texas has not sent any buses since late June for a lack of passengers, Alejandro Serrano noted at *The Texas Tribune* (8/23).

The *New York Times* reported that the last bus dispatched by Texas left the border near El Paso on June 27 with 50 migrants headed to New York. Texas officials attributed the decrease in buses to a decrease in migrants, according to the *Times*.

"Texas has decreased illegal crossings into the state by over 85% thanks to our historic border mission," Abbott spokesperson Andrew Mahaleris said in a statement.

Abbott has vowed to continue the busing program, which only takes migrants who voluntarily get onboard.

The slowdown has coincided with a decrease in the num-

Continued on page 22



FROM HARROP



Some of the most moving testimony against Trump was delivered by Stephanie Grisham, Trump's former press secretary, and other Republicans at the DNC.

Gutsy Republicans Are Quiet Stars of the Democrats' Convention

The Democratic National Convention has been a lively dance party featuring the usual lineup of partisan speakers. Barack Obama, as usual, charmed the crowd, mocking Donald Trump's obsession over crowd size with a subtle but unmistakable hand gesture.

One of the most moving speeches, however, was a quiet address by Stephanie

Grisham. Trump's former White House press secretary, Grisham made headlines by abruptly resigning on Jan. 6, 2021, after her boss refused to call off the rioters savaging the Capitol. She didn't wait a week for some expression of regret, which, it turned out, was not forthcoming.

Also former chief of staff to Melania Trump, Grisham texted the first lady during the mayhem. "Do you want to tweet that peaceful protests are the right of every American, but there is no place for lawlessness & violence?" she wrote. Melania said, "No."

Bear in mind, Grisham was not intending to cause trouble for Trump. On the contrary, Trump defenders at Fox News also urged him to call off the thugs. They thought the scenes of violent destruction were not in Trump's interest.

Grisham's other descriptions of Trump's wanting character were of little surprise: that he lacked empathy and lied. That he made fun of his followers as "basement dwellers." That he resented cameras at the ICU focusing on dying patients rather than himself. A Trump supporter, Grisham hung in through all of that.

It was his encouraging of the criminals desecrating the Capitol in an effort to overthrow the results of an election. "Now here

I am behind a podium advocating for a Democrat," she said, "and that's because I love my country more than my party."

Donald Trump is who he is, but the enduring mystery is why so few other Republicans would put country over party. We know that many were appalled by the events of Jan. 6, with some squeaking out criticism of the former president's refusal to intervene. But when the MAGA hordes made defending Trump's role in that outrage essential to career survival, they ran right into their rabbit holes.

Not all, of course. Adam Kinzinger, a former Illinois rep known for his conservative politics and military service flying missions in Iraq and Afghanistan, was also on the DNC speaker list.

John Giles, the Republican mayor of Mesa, Arizona, gave an especially memorable address. Giles could never forgive Trump for trashing the reputation of war hero and fellow Arizona Republican, the late Sen. John McCain.

"I have a confession to make," Giles said. "I'm a lifelong Republican, so I feel a little out of place tonight, but I feel more at home here than in today's Republican Party." He went on, "The Grand Old Party has been kidnapped by extremists and devolved into a cult, the cult of Donald

Trump."

Giles had already endorsed Kamala Harris in an op-ed column in the *Arizona Republic*. That took guts but also smarts. Arizonans, Republicans included, have grown testy over Trump's efforts to interfere with their electoral process, witness senate polls showing Democrat Ruben Gallego ahead of Republican Kari Lake. A former TV news anchor, Lake had turned herself into one of MAGA's most primitive election deniers.

None of this has much to do with policy. This wasn't a discussion of abortion rights, child tax credits or tariffs. This was all about the survival of the democracy.

The good thing about a democracy is that if the elected leaders don't do what you want them to, you can vote them out of office. Without elections, the public must live with what they get. Trump's efforts to undermine the sanctity of the vote should scare those who share his worldview as well as those who don't.

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Trump's Flag Goes Limp in Dog Days of Summer

By ART CULLEN

It feels like the ground shifted under rural America since President Joe Biden dropped his re-election bid.

Vice President Kamala Harris is off to an electrifying start, tying or leading Donald Trump in poll averages across a half-dozen swing states. Picking Minnesota Gov. Tim Walz as a running mate energized rural Democrats who have been in hiding the past eight years.

The Trump flags are a bit tattered and limp. The signs are not as many or as big as 2016. The energy levels might have reversed.

Iowa Democrats are not drunk enough to think that Harris could carry the Tall Corn State. After Walz was introduced, the state party was overwhelmed with volunteer calls. They are encouraged that they can pick up seats in the legislature and flip one or two congressional seats if Harris can stay within single digits of Trump in Iowa. They did not hold such high hopes just a few weeks ago.

The last Iowa Poll showed that Trump had a 12-point lead over Biden.

I called around to friends like Rep. J.D.

Scholten of Sioux City and Walt Bradley of Algona, who mingle among Trump supporters. They agree the atmospherics have changed.

"They're definitely feeling it," Walt said. "Not as loud."

Social media posts are not as voluminous or as ardent with Biden out of the picture. Hurling vulgarities against Harris is a dicey proposition, and swift-boating Walz hasn't worked. He is not John Kerry from Massachusetts. He is the Guardsman from Mankato who actually does know how to handle a semi-automatic weapon and craves to shoot turkeys. He coached linebackers. "Sleep when you're dead," he advises.

"Mind your own damn business" has a ring to it in Kossuth County, which used to support both parties. That hasn't been true for a few years.

There may be a breath of life wafting through for the long frustrated. Not to get carried away, but ...

Scholten remembers that Barack Obama carried Iowa twice, and that Scholten came close to beating Rep. Steve King. He believes that Iowa could become a two-party state again if Democrats actually worked on rural voters, and paid more attention to places like Waterloo and Decora.

Rep. Randy Feenstra, R-Hull, faces no clear and present danger from Democratic challenger Ryan Melton in the Fourth Con-

gressional District. Republicans are not crazy about Feenstra, like they used to be about King. If Scholten or Melton had money they could be dangerous, or at least muck things up. If you can hold down the rural red wave, candidates challenging for the legislature in places like Oelwein or Clinton at least stand a chance.

Democratic hopes were not rekindled by any policy paper.

They say it's a vibe.

Rural voters are open to the idea that Democrats could share their values when you present them with a you-betcha candidate like Walz.

It has been drilled into our heads that Democrats only care about illegal immigrants, gays and single cat ladies. Voters outside the bicoastal metroplexes are eager to hear about fair wages, better health care and clean water regardless of identity politics. They're ready to knock down hurdles standing in the way of getting a fair shake, and like the sound of keeping the government out of your damn business.

Harris just laid out a broadly populist economic agenda that fared well at the recent Democratic National Convention in Chicago, from whence you can almost see Wisconsin and Michigan. Walz for sure can see them and does know how to talk naturally in the Upper Midwest vernacular. He can get disaffected rural voters to at least give a listen.

They are listening. They don't like

book bans and school vouchers. They like tax cuts and better healthcare. They don't want reeking air that drives children to asthma. They don't want the government in the exam room. They know we can bring health costs under control while improving access and quality by putting the patient first, not the insurance company.

Harris is putting North Carolina in play. She is approaching a tie with Trump in Florida. Iowa is the Florida of the North, Governors Ron DeSantis and Kim Reynolds agree. Voters in small towns widely rejected the Moms for Liberty and their playbook. They would vote against snarky Reynolds two years hence if her opponent has money and a clue what motivates Atlantic and Audubon.

Iowa is set to stay squarely in the Trump camp, simply for lack of effort on the part of Democrats. The tenor has changed nonetheless. Rural voters sick of government overreach and intrusion went from abject despair to cautious optimism within three weeks. They could be hopeless again in three weeks, but it just doesn't feel that way.

Art Cullen is editor and publisher 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.

Tariffs Are Never a Good Idea

By ALAN GUEBERT

Milton Friedman, the patron saint of free markets and a founder of the Nobel-adorned Chicago school of economics, took a very dim view of all tariffs – ours, theirs, anyone's.

Writing in "Capitalism and Freedom," his surprising 1962 best seller, Friedman explained that if "unilateral free trade" is the goal, "reciprocal negotiations of tariff reductions ... seems wrong." First, it's too slow; "He moves fastest who moves alone," he admonished.

"In the second place," he continued, "(i)t makes it appear as if tariffs help the country imposing them but hurt the other countries. In truth, the situation is quite different. Our tariffs hurt us as well as other countries."

That's Friedman's entire tariff seminar: "Our tariffs hurt us as well as other countries."

And don't worry about other nations' tariffs, Friedman adds. "We would be benefited by dispensing with our tariffs even if other countries did not."

That's not a political statement; it's a

key tenet of free trade from one of the most influential Nobel laureates in history. Many deeply conservative politicians worldwide – among them Barry Goldwater, Ronald Reagan, and Margaret Thatcher – however, did adopt Friedman's advocacy of the free market as their own.

So, what's changed in world markets since that Kennedy era pronouncement to now encourage former president Donald Trump to make import tariffs the centerpiece of his campaign's economic policy?

Absolutely nothing. Tariffs – ours, theirs, and anyone's – remain terrible economics; they still "hurt us as well as other countries."

Confirmation of this straightforward reality comes courtesy of the last Trump tariff fight in 2018 and 2019 on, chiefly, U.S. imports of Chinese steel and aluminum and U.S. exports of ag commodities. Neither tariff delivered what was promised: more American jobs, better economic growth, and increased U.S. sales.

In fact, reported *The New York Times* on Aug. 27, 2019, "Lucrative contracts that farmers long relied on ... have evaporated, with Chinese buyers looking to other nations like Brazil and Canada to get the commodities they need."

The story then quotes an American Farm Bureau estimate that "total American

agricultural exports to China were \$24 billion in 2014 and fell to \$9.1 billion last year," the first year of the Trump tariffs on U.S. commodity exports to China.

The *Times* wasn't the only one to notice Trump's southbound tariff policy. In January 2020, *Forbes* reported that the "Trump administration gave more taxpayer dollars to farmers harmed by (its) trade policies than the federal government spends each year building ships for the Navy or maintaining America's nuclear arsenal."

Despite the clear evidence, the Trump campaign insists its current push for import tariffs—from 10% on all U.S. imports to 60% or more on U.S. imports from China—will ensure the American economy grows faster than competitors.

Nonsense, says the Peterson Institute for International Economics, a nonpartisan economic research firm in Washington, D.C. "Unlike (today's) Biden tariffs," the Institute posted in January, "the Trump plan is for increased tariffs on all products from all countries."

That's "not just America First," the analysis continues parroting the Trump campaign's economic theme, "it is America alone." Tariffs "are, in fact, added taxes on us, and having them will have real costs."

American farmers are very familiar with those "real costs." Within weeks of im-

posing 25% import tariffs on Chinese products in 2018, "Beijing accused the United States of 'launching the largest trade war in economic history,'" reported the *Los Angeles Times* July 2018.

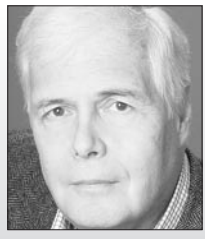
Then it "fired back with dollar-for-dollar tariffs mainly on American farm products and other food." It also quickly pivoted to "buying more from Brazil and Argentina."

Which is the exact outcome Milton Friedman predicted in 1962: "Our tariffs hurt us as well as other countries."

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

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GENE LYONS



Trump has gone completely around the bend. Some combination of senile dementia and mental illness has rendered him unfit for public office.

Hey, Republicans: You Can't Believe Your Lying Candidate

Here's my question: Is there anybody in the Republican Party with the presence of mind and the political courage to imitate the Democrats? Persuading Joe Biden to withdraw from the 2024 presidential race was difficult and painful for all concerned. Particularly for Biden himself.

Yet Biden's age-related infirmities were nothing compared to Republican nominee Donald Trump's. Prone to stumbling over words and intermittently forgetful, Biden appeared unlikely to carry the burdens of the presidency for another term. Yet when confronted with political reality, he acted appropriately. History will record it as

among his finest hours.

Trump, on the other hand, has gone completely around the bend. Some combination of senile dementia and mental illness has rendered him totally unfit for public office. To put it bluntly, the man has lost his marbles. He can no longer follow the plot or distinguish fantasy from reality. Maybe surviving an assassination attempt affected him, but it appears that the prospect of losing an election to a Black woman is more than his diseased ego can bear.

What other explanation could there be for the candidate's crackpot fixation with the size of crowds drawn to Kamala Harris' campaign rallies?

"Has anyone noticed that Kamala CHEATED at the airport?" Trump wrote in one of his mad Truth Social postings. "There was nobody at the plane, and she 'A.I.'d' it, and showed a massive 'crowd' of so-called followers, BUT THEY DIDN'T EXIST!"

Supposedly, a maintenance worker at a Michigan airport tipped off Trump to a "fake crowd picture, but there was nobody there, later confirmed by the reflection of the mirror like finish on the Vice Presidential Plane.

"She's a CHEATER," he continued.

By this time, just about everybody with a working TV has seen footage of the Harris campaign's Detroit arrival, which drew an estimated 15,000 voters to the airport on short notice. No fake photos necessary. The rally was covered live on C-Span, for heaven's sake.

The Republican nominee went on to boast about the vast throngs that supposedly attend his public appearances. Why, the

crowd that gathered outside the White House on Jan. 6, 2021, greatly outnumbered even those that heard Dr. Martin Luther King's famous "I Have a Dream" speech all the way back in 1963!

Another ridiculous invention. In reality, upward of a quarter-million people gathered on the Washington Mall to hear Dr. King speak during the Kennedy administration. That's at least five times as many as stood outside the White House to hear Trump whine about losing the 2020 election.

You wouldn't think the former president would want to remind people about Jan. 6, except that he now claims that shameful event caused no fatalities. History records that four people died after the mob that Trump urged to "fight like hell" stormed the Capitol.

Indeed, Trump's entire campaign has become a bizarre spectacle challenging all but the most deluded members of the MAGA political cult to deal with the question comedian Richard Pryor once memorably asked, "Who you gonna believe? Me, or your lying eyes?"

But what really took the prize during Trump's near-hallucinatory hourlong "press conference" last month was a preposterous tale involving an imaginary helicopter ride that was calculated to shame Harris for having once dated former San Francisco Mayor Willie Brown.

Asked by a helpful reporter if Harris' political career had been helped along by dating Brown — translation: Did your opponent sleep her way to the top? — Trump responded with a cock-and-bull story about an apocryphal helicopter crash that every-

body supposedly involved says never happened.

"Well, I know Willie Brown very well," Trump answered. "In fact, I went down in a helicopter with him. We thought, maybe this is the end. We were in a helicopter going to a certain location together, and there was an emergency landing. This was not a pleasant landing. And Willie, he was a little concerned. So I know him pretty well. I mean, I haven't seen him in years. But he told me terrible things about her ... But he had a big part in what happened with Kamala ... [M]aybe he's changed his tune, but he was not a fan of hers very much at that point."

Not a syllable of this is true. Brown insists he was never in a helicopter with Trump and never bad-mouthed Harris to him. Trump himself was involved in a hairy helicopter incident in New Jersey in 1990. Harris was then in her mid-20s, a fledgling prosecutor who hadn't yet dated Brown. A different Black California politician, Los Angeles city councilman Nate Holden, was on board. Now 95, Holden figures Trump couldn't tell him and Brown apart.

Mental health professionals call this kind of thing "confabulation" — basically a blending of a real memory with a fantasy. It's common among patients slipping into dementia.

But then Trump's always been a world-class liar.

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.

Health Care For All Should Be An Election Issue

You shouldn't have to qualify for the Olympics to qualify for free quality health care.

By SONALI KOLHATKAR

All it took for Olympian Ariana Ramsey to call herself a "universal free health care advocate" was — unsurprisingly — a taste of free health care.

The bronze-medalist rugby player, who represented the U.S. at the 2024 Paris games, posted Tik Tok videos of herself getting care at the Olympic Village.

"The fact that I'm actually so excited to be getting free dental ...!" she said incredulously, unable to finish her sentence. "This is

going to be my new fight for action — free health care in America — period." While in Paris, Ramsey got a pap smear, eye exam, and eyeglasses all free of charge — and said she was "truly amazed" that such a thing was possible.

Ramsey was so impressed she asked the people of France if she could be adopted into their nation so she could continue getting free care. Such a request, even if tongue-in-cheek, by a person representing the U.S. ought to embarrass politicians.

A majority of Americans report feeling dissatisfied with their access to health care. Millions turn to crowdfunding campaigns to ask family, friends, and random strangers to help them pay for unexpected care.

But ahead of the 2024 presidential race, neither of the two major party nominees has offered a pathway for a universal, publicly funded health care system.

Donald Trump has offered little detail on his current health plan, although he's linked to a group seeking to gut Medicare. His first presidential term was marked by a failed attempt to overturn the Affordable Care Act, a desire to cut Medicaid, and the appointment of Supreme Court justices who

overturned the federal right to an abortion.

Needless to say, these changes only make a deeply flawed system worse.

On the other hand, Kamala Harris, who previously co-sponsored Senator Bernie Sanders's single payer bill in 2019, will reportedly avoid promoting the plan this year. Nor has Harris adopted the more modest idea she endorsed in 2019: a publicly funded health plan that people could opt into, known as the "public option."

Instead, Harris has chosen to campaign on tinkering around the edges of our complicated patchwork system by lowering a handful of prescription drug prices for Medicare recipients.

While it is an incredible achievement on the part of the Biden-Harris administration to regulate drug prices for the first time in decades, the changes are modest. They're limited to only 10 drugs this year (with more drugs to be regulated each year) and only apply to people already enrolled in Medicare.

A better step forward would be to expand on the government-provided health care we already have for certain populations: veterans (through the Veterans Affairs system), people over the age of 65 (though

Medicare), and very low-income people making poverty-level wages (through Medicaid).

Simply expanding Medicare to all would cover everyone else — and save taxpayers trillions relative to buying for-profit insurance.

Harris still has time to back health care for all, but it will take a massive public push from below. In spite of the enormous amount of pro-corporate propaganda against universal health care, a majority of Americans have historically supported single payer healthcare. A May 2024 Data for Progress poll found that two-thirds of Americans support expanding Medicare to all.

Ramsey went viral for her endearing enthusiasm over a right that a majority of people in wealthy nations take for granted. "America needs to do better with their healthcare system," she rightly said. "There's no reason why an American girl should be so amazed by free health care."

Sonali Kolhatkar is the host of "Rising Up With Sonali," a television and radio show on Free Speech TV and Pacifica stations. This op-ed was distributed by OtherWords.org.

J.D. Vance is a Psycho Killer, or Something

By JOHN YOUNG

"We all go a little mad sometimes. Haven't you?"

I've thought about that line from Alfred Hitchcock's "Psycho" ever since I saw J.D. Vance in drag.

The "little mad" line comes from cross-dressing psycho killer Norman Bates, who, like Vance, is a little bit odd. How odd, we only find out in the shower scene.

Understand: Just because Vance donned women's clothing as a collegian and eyeliner as Donald Trump's running mate shouldn't disqualify him from public office.

(Although we should bar him from library storytime.)

Wore a woman's dress and wig? That makes him a groomer! And maybe a psycho killer.

Whatever the case, I wouldn't advise that you Google the image in question. It will haunt your dreams.

The fact is, you don't need that imagery in your head. Vance's words are enough to

scare you — women in particular.

Not only does he want the government to make women's reproductive decisions, he wants them to get down to popping out babies. Like right now.

If you can't or won't do that, ladies, apparently it's your duty to die.

Put aside Vance's "sad cat ladies" description of single women. Put aside his assertion that women's sole "post-menopausal" role is to Granny-up for the kiddos.

Those in the "childless left" who aren't contributing in said fashion, he said, "have no physical commitment to the future of the country."

You know, Tim Walz is right. This guy is creepy.

On the subject of not Googling images, don't do it with John Carpenter's creepy horror flick "Village of the Damned." You will see multiples of a young J.D. Vance. I said don't do it.

That movie is based on a John Wyndham novel, but it could be a Vance work considering his estimation of women's worth.

In it, all the inhabitants of an English village are induced into a slumber. All the women wake up pregnant.

All their children, rows and rows, have penlights for eyes, a stare eerily like J.D.

Vance's.

Who is this man? The more you hear from him, the more you wonder if he's comedy or horror.

Consider his endorsing a book co-written by bizarre right-wing conspiracist Jack Posobiec. It calls progressives "unhumans" who "kill the people who have more" than they do.

In other words, Bernie Sanders has a double life, and a machete.

If J.D. Vance can endorse such assertions, we can assert things about him, and wonder whom he has killed and at what motel.

This delivers me to suspicions anyone would have about a man who's changed his name more than once, as Vance has.

So, too, with one who so dramatically changed his assessment of a dangerous political figure — Donald Trump — whom he called an "idiot" and compared to Hitler.

Back to Vance's statement that "miserable, childless cat women" aren't vested in humankind's future: How vested is he in the role of mothers when he calls universal child care "class war against normal people"?

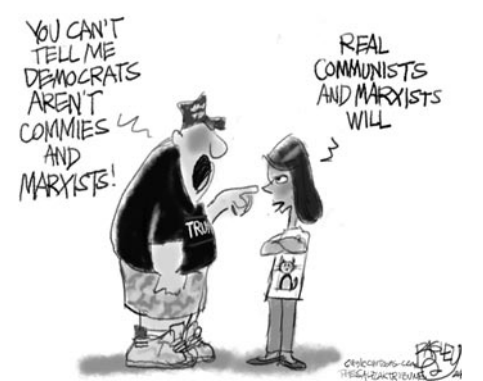
Bigger picture: How devoted to the future is an individual who blasts climate action legislation so that he can rake in mega-bucks from Big Energy?

It's just another flip-flop from the identity-fluid senator from Ohio. Not so long ago, Vance expressed real concern about climate change. That was before a Republican political career beckoned, along with inducements from the Koch money machine.

I'm beginning to think that J.D. Vance isn't one person but a composite of characters from more than one movie.

Whatever the case, never find yourself between this man and a shower curtain.

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



Cover Story..

Continued from page one

only the hardest heart can resist. I couldn't help rooting for Americans or grinning while the flag-wrapped medalists were interviewed. But the next day Lt. William Calley's obituary was in the paper, and all of us Olympic patriots were reminded of the My Lai massacre and the dreadful things that have been done in the name of that same star-spangled banner. In the same week's news was a depressing story about a thousand Native American children who died while they were being forcibly assimilated at U.S. government boarding schools. And other stories about the concentration-camp internment of Japanese-American citizens during World War II, and the government-sponsored syphilis study that made guinea pigs of Black Americans doomed to die untreated.

Not to mention slavery, or a hundred years of Jim Crow. No nation's unedited history is a pretty one. Imagine being a German. If the USA has more to be proud of than most nations, and arguably we do, it has so much to be ashamed of as well. The patriotism of denial, the kind that tries to censor textbooks that tell the truth, is the patriotism of Dr. Johnson's scoundrels and the fools who follow them. The path of wisdom, which so few of us follow, is to save our loyalty for good people—and maybe good ideas? We waste too much precious allegiance on our schools, teams, communities, states, ethnic and fraternal groups and yes, even the nations that issue our passports.

Yet patriotism persists in nearly all of us, a stubborn residue from a lifetime of flags and songs and Memorial Day parades. I'm still surprised when a disillusioned liberal swears he'll move to Portugal if Donald Trump wins the presidency. I couldn't do that, for some reason other than my advanced age. The burning question, in this election year of stark contrasts and critical decisions, is "How do I make the best use of this patriotism I can't seem to set aside?" This is the year the United States of America needs all the love and concern you've got to share.

The creeping fascism that has ensnared the Republican Party is a particularly nasty strain, and one that in this digital age of fragmented media is painfully resistant to the truth. Journalists of previous generations — like mine — were raised on an almost religious belief that the truth was out there somewhere, that it could be found and shared, and that it would set us free. The internet with its social media, which have turned every idiot with a keyboard into a pundit with a bullhorn, have to be held responsible for cults like MAGA, for millions of citizens who will believe, manufacture and circulate damn near anything. Where

the search for facts once held sway, there's little now but a scorched landscape of lies, propaganda, "memes" and preposterous conspiracies.

Journalists grapple with despair, faced with the reality that nothing they write or print could change the minds of the MAGA faithful, even if it reached them. The art of persuasion, in a nation so spectacularly polarized, has become a thing of the past. From a sprawling smorgasbord of truculence and nonsense, digital slaves savor their favorite bits and swallow things that turkey vultures wouldn't touch. Outrageous conspiracy theories abound and thrive. But it would be hard to find one more insane and indigestible than "Pizzagate," which accused elite Democrats including the Clintons of Satanism, pedophilia and torturing children in the basement of a Washington pizzeria. One of the prominent lunatics who circulated that one is named Jack Posobiec, a fugitive from the outer reaches of the psychedelic Right. And he's back in the news.

According to Michelle Goldberg of *The New York Times*, Posobiec and a ghostwriter have published a book titled "Unhumans" which relegates everyone to the left of the authors—that would be you, me, and I hope 98% of the human race — to a loathsome subhuman "subdivision" of creatures who must be deported or annihilated before they destroy everything "good and decent." The heroes of this revised human history include Sen. Joseph McCarthy and the fascist dictators Francisco Franco of Spain and Augusto Pinochet of Chile, "great men of means" who disposed of democracy and eliminated pesky "unhumans" by force. This is, of course, neo-fascism at its most naked, conjuring Brownshirts, Blackshirts and the click of jackboots on cobblestones.

Goldberg claims that this brand of reactionary drivel is not uncommon in the "dank corners" of the internet. It's depressing that a Posobiec can find a publisher when so many talented writers struggle to attract one. But what's most frightening about "Unhumans" is its foreword and the endorsements on its dustjacket. The foreword is by Steve Bannon, America's favorite out-of-the-closet fascist and onetime chief strategist for Donald Trump. And the jacket blurbs? One from the peculiar vice-presidential candidate J.D. Vance, one from the clown prince Donald Trump Jr, and one from the freelance media Nazi Tucker Carlson, who was too toxic even for Fox News.

You couldn't assemble a quartet with closer connections to Donald J. Trump, all endorsing a book that expresses open contempt for democracy. Has American fascism stopped creeping and started sprinting? "Fascist" is a word used too loosely by American politicians, in the tradition of candidate Trump who calls his adversaries both fascists and communists because he doesn't

know the difference, only that they're bad things to be. He also calls rivals pedophiles or terrorists when the mood strikes him, or even things like "liar," "cheater" or "fraud" that reflect his own bursting catalog of sins. But genuine fascism, as maniacs like Posobiec know and approve, is a perverted nationalism that declares some citizens "real" Americans (or Italians or Germans) and all the rest undesirable. And it relies on an authoritarian leader, a dictator/warlord like Mussolini or Franco, to decide who's real and who's disposable.

This is Chapter One in the fascist play-book. In the immortally appalling words of Benito Mussolini, "In every society there is a need for a part of the citizens who must be hated. Substitute immigrants, "woke" liberals and homosexuals for Jews and gypsies and you see that current Republican rhetoric offers a disturbing echo of Joseph Goebbels and the Third Reich. It contradicts everything tolerant and egalitarian, everything that Americans could claim with legitimate pride. It effectively brings down the curtain on the American experiment and the dreams of the Founders. There's been so much drama and chaos in the past few weeks of this presidential year — the cruel defenestration of the aging President Biden, the near-assassination of the aging Donald Trump, the emergence of Kamala Harris — that we need to be reminded again of what's actually at stake, of the historic dimensions of the choice American voters are being asked to make.

It's tedious repeating what everyone knows about candidate Trump. Nearly every Republican with face-to-face experience of this psychopath, including half his cabinet when he was president, has already published a book warning us that Trump is "deranged," "unhinged," "a sleaze," "a moron," etc. His own nephew wrote one calling Uncle Donald "atomic crazy." His niece, a psychologist, wrote another subtitled "How My Family Created the World's Most Dangerous Man." His late sister, a federal judge, declared herself stunned by the recklessness of his lies. From his August press conference alone, NPR tallied 162 lies and distortions, a drop in the bucket compared to the 30,000 the *Washington Post* counted when he was in office.

He's a multiply convicted felon, a sexual predator, a credibly accused rapist. And so on. How did a major political party sink to this? And now his anointed successor, Sen. J.D. Vance, is someone who holds hands with fascists like Jack Posobiec? Vance seems to be an alarmingly odd man, a human weathervane who never knew who he was or wanted to be, except that it should be important. Tim Walz's controversial response to Vance and the Republican ticket — "weird" — seems honest and appropriate to me. A second Trump administration would

be manned entirely by sycophantic flunkies and parasites, drawn to the rank smell of power, who know that Trump is nuts—and by eager fascist fanatics who are glad that he is. Who else would benefit from a MAGA restoration? The nation's most urgent crises are global warming and gun violence, and candidate Trump has already pledged his undying loyalty to the NRA ("I'm the most pro-gun president in history") and to Big Oil and the fossil fuel lobby. There's a suicidal element to the Republican agenda. I'm not sure why the media have failed to press the irony that Trump was shot in the head by the same assault rifle so dear to his friends at the NRA.

I'm aware that a Republican will dismiss anything I write as a partisan screed, in spite of my chronic exasperation when the "woke" left crusades to close all the prisons or celebrates Hamas terrorists as freedom fighters. But the habit of rational argument dies hard. Does anyone actually buy Donald Trump as the savior of blue-collar America? Does the working class really think educated "elites" are contemptuous of poor people? The ones I know are only contemptuous of people who buy what Trump is selling. Do less educated Americans really like him because, as one man told a reporter, "He talks like us." Does that mean these people are proud to speak like boors, bigots and bullies?

My questions will be answered, I guess, on Nov. 5. If you have any doubt about how you'll vote, I can offer you one piece of non-partisan advice that might save this or any democracy:

Never cede power to anyone who seems to want it too much.

In the meantime, if your patriotism was accelerated by all those flag-wrapped athletes in Paris, you can put that to good use in the next two months. Uncle Sam needs you, as the recruiting posters used to say. It's time for us "unhumans" to take a stand. Put up Harris/Walz signs. Turn your car into a free taxi, your family into taxi drivers, and make sure all the students, outcasts and invalids who might not vote can make it to the polls. Volunteer to speak at schools, book clubs, retirement communities. Embrace your "unhumanism." Tell the truth. Pray. The stakes are overwhelming.

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

If We Want Better Care, We Need a Better Tax Code

If the wealthiest paid their fair share, we could easily fund better child care, elder care, and health care for the rest of us.

By AMY HANAUER

Vice President Kamala Harris and former President Donald Trump have starkly different views on taxes and how the tax code can support families.

Harris voices strong support for families through investments in the care economy. She's vowed to advance paid family leave, affordable child care, care for disabled or aging family members, and health care. This could be funded with a better tax code.

These policies would help all of us care for our families and strengthen our communities. Investing public dollars in care could also narrow racial and gender pay gaps by boosting the pay of care workers — who are mostly women, and many of them women of color.

The Trump campaign has been largely silent on care investments. But his campaign has signaled support for more tax cuts at the top. Such cuts would increase inequality and reduce the availability of federal funding to strengthen the care economy.

We saw this in the 2017 tax law that former President Trump signed. It cut taxes for the wealthiest people and corporations, including cutting the effective tax rate for our largest corporations from an average 22% to an average 12.8%. It also preserved loopholes that allow some of the wealthiest corporations to avoid taxes on most — if not all — of their profits.

These tax cuts for the ultra wealthy led to huge losses in federal tax revenue and spiked the national debt, making it harder for the government to fund new investments in priorities that are important to families.

If re-elected, Trump has said he wants to slash corporate taxes further — even though some billionaires pay a lower share of their income in taxes than nurses and teachers do.

By contrast, the Biden-Harris administration created a minimum corporate tax so the wealthiest corporations could no longer pay nothing, added a modest tax on stock buybacks, and funded the IRS to better collect taxes from corporations. These policies raised revenue for care investments and other priorities.

Going forward, Harris has signaled support for raising corporate tax rates, which are at historic lows, and closing loopholes.

Harris and Trump also have different priorities on taxes for families. As a senator, Harris championed a tax credit of \$6,000 for married couples and \$3,000 for single people in her Lift the Middle Class Act. This would have delivered 88% of its benefits to earners under \$119,000.

Harris might not promote this specific plan going forward, but it suggests she'd aim to direct benefits to moderate earners instead of the wealthiest. More recently, she's proposed expanding the Child Tax Credit and adding a \$6,000 credit for families with newborns.

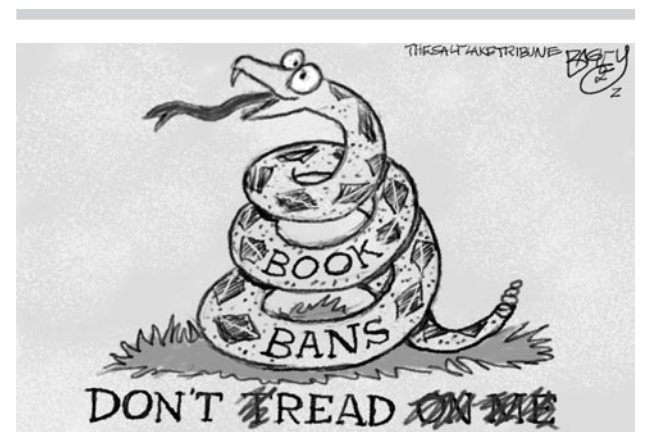
By contrast, the tax bill that Trump signed delivered

more than half its benefits to the top 5% of households — those with incomes over \$263,000. (Like Harris, Trump's vice presidential nominee, J.D. Vance, has suggested a bigger Child Tax Credit. But Vance has also floated making people without children pay more taxes.)

Taxing the wealthiest and big corporations would support care investments and make our tax code more fair. Strengthening care infrastructure would help us all thrive and make the economy stronger. But we need to collect sufficient revenue to support those transformational policies.

There is strong public support for better care and for fairer taxes. Tax justice advocates should call on both the Harris and Trump campaigns to commit to a fairer tax system — and to use the money it would raise to invest in the child care, elder care, and health care our families need.

Amy Hanauer is Executive Director of Citizens for Tax Justice. This op-ed was distributed by OtherWords.org.



Thanks to the Cult and Its Aging Criminal, Kamala Can Run on Patriotism, Democracy and Decency

By DICK POLMAN

Amidst all the damage that Donald Trump has wreaked on the supine GOP, one political felony stands out: By narrowing and shrinking its ranks to assorted cultists, dolts, and insurrectionists – in essence, by practicing the politics of subtraction – he has ceded the American mainstream to Kamala Harris.

She had only one month to get her act together, an unprecedentedly herculean task all by itself, but lo and behold, the aging criminal made her job easier. Thursday night, Aug. 22, in a fervent acceptance speech that plucked at our heartstrings and sang to the better angels of our nature, she capitalized big time and captured the flag.

She laid claim to the all-American virtues that MAGA has left on the table – in her words, “freedom, opportunity, compassion, dignity, fairness and endless possibilities.” Plus “optimism and faith.” Plus patriotism (“I love my country with all my heart”). Plus fealty to democracy, not to foreign dictators. Plus respect for our military (“I will ensure America always has the strongest, most lethal fighting force in the world ... I will always honor and never disparage their service and their sacrifice”). Plus “the rule of law.” Plus “free and fair elections.” Plus “the peaceful transfer of power.”

Plus “country over party.” Let’s linger on that one.

All week long, Democrats sent up signal flares to disaffected Republicans, urging them to join with Harris to save the American experiment. Harris, in her speech, buttressed that invitation. For instance, “I know there are people of various political views watching tonight. And I want

you to know, I promise to be a president for all Americans.” She accepted her party’s nomination “on behalf of every American, regardless of party.” She said we should view each other “not as members of any one party or faction, but as Americans.”

Granted – and I can say this, having watched and/or covered every convention since the 1980s – virtually every presidential nominee makes rhetorical overtures to the opposition. But this convention was unique. A parade of Republicans and MAGA drop-outs were given air time, typically in prime time, to prosecute the case against Trump and invite old allies into the fold. The MAGA convention was a cultists-only affair; Kamala’s confab exuded outreach, in the spirit of Casablanca’s Victor Laszlo: “Welcome to the fight. This time I know our side will win.”

Dems rolled out the welcome mat for Stephanie Grisham, a former Trump press secretary, who told the national audience that her ex-boss “has no empathy, no morals, no fidelity to the truth,” and denigrates his own followers as “basement dwellers.” Dems welcomed ex-Mike Pence aide Olivia Troye: “Being inside Trump’s White House was terrifying, but what keeps me up at night is what will happen if he gets back there.” Dems gave podium time to Jeff Duncan, a former Georgia Republican lieutenant governor, who addressed his “Republican friends at home watching. If you vote for Kamala Harris in 2024, you are not a Democrat, you are a patriot.”

And Dems gave a prominent speaking slot, on the climactic final night, to ex-Republican Congressman Adam Kinzinger, a lieutenant colonel in the Air National Guard: “My fellow Republicans ... Democracy knows no party. It’s a living, breathing ideal that defines us as a nation. It’s the bedrock that separates us from tyranny ... If you think those principles are worth defending, then I urge you, make the right choice.”

Generations of Republicans have flocked to candidates who flex strength on the world stage. Trump, given his penchant for groveling to dictators, has ceded that ground to

Harris as well. One of her tasks was to pass muster as a credible Commander-in-Chief. Republican-leaning voters (perhaps enough to swing a district or state) may well have been pleased to hear passages like this, delivered with badass fervor:

“I will never hesitate to take whatever action is necessary to defend our forces and our interests against Iran and Iran-backed terrorists. I will not cozy up to tyrants and dictators like Kim Jong-un, who are rooting for Trump. Because they know he is easy to manipulate with flattery and favors. They know Trump won’t hold autocrats accountable – because he wants to be an autocrat himself. And as president, I will never waver in defense of America’s security and ideals, because in the enduring struggle between democracy and tyranny, I know where I stand and I know where the United States belongs.”

This race is not a slam dunk, despite all the blue exuberance of the moment. But now that Harris has cornered the market on the key American verities, she can potentially expand her electoral map – charting a victory path through the Rustbelt and the Sunbelt, and making a play for North Carolina, which has gone red for decades except for Obama in ’08. Harris has long been underestimated, but no longer.

As for Trump, he was reduced to phoning the friendly co-hosts at Newsmax and babbling this: “Caracas was a very unsafe city, and now it’s safe. In fact, some day the three of us will have to go there – let’s bring your husband with us also, right? – and we’ll bring some of the other people that are with you because I like the people that are with you.”

Great idea! To avoid being eviscerated by a Black woman in the impending debate, Trump has 18 days to flee to Venezuela.

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.

Military Service, Partisan Smears and the Parody of Patriotism

BY JOE CONASON

The Trump campaign’s attack on the military record of Minnesota Gov. Tim Walz – who served honorably as a volunteer in the National Guard for 24 years – invites us to remember the military service of former President Donald J. Trump.

Except there isn’t anything to remember concerning Trump’s military service since he never served. Neither did his two older sons, nor his father, Fred, nor his grandfather Friedrich Trump, who originally came to this country to avoid the draft in his native Germany and was barred from returning there as a penalty for evading military service. It is a fact that Donald and his offspring grew up in the United States, with all the benefits thus accrued, as a direct result of old Friedrich’s draft dodging.

That spotty history won’t discourage Trump and his minions from their ongoing assault on Walz – the latest cycle in a long Republican history of denigrating the service of political opponents, nearly always

with a barrage of falsehood. The practice is known as “swiftboating,” a term that arose from the 2004 propaganda blitz of lies about Democratic presidential nominee John Kerry’s courageous, highly decorated Vietnam service.

One of the principal authors of that slimy chapter, GOP operative Chris LaCivita, is now running the Trump campaign’s mugging of Walz. These are the same kind of “patriots” who once mocked Sen. Max Cleland, the late Georgia Democrat who lost three limbs in Vietnam and earned the Bronze and Silver stars – and who smirked when Trump derided the POW ordeal of the late Sen. John McCain.

Trump may think he can smear Walz without consequence by hiding behind his running mate, Sen. J.D. Vance, who enlisted in the Marines and served, however briefly, in Iraq. Ever the useful tool, Vance has aggressively insulted Walz over a few minor footnotes to the Minnesota governor’s service, including whether he carried an assault weapon “in war”; when he chose to retire from the Guard; and what rank he could legitimately claim upon retirement.

None of this amounts to a substantial criticism of Walz or his service – which is why Republican repetition of these same tired charges every time he stands for office has failed to wound him. (The claims against Walz didn’t gain any credibility when Minnesota media revealed that two former National Guard officers had been

paid by Republicans to make them.)

As for Vance, the Ohio senator is surely one tough weenie. He deserves thanks for his service. But his record doesn’t suggest any zeal for actual battle. During four years in the Marine Corps, he spent six months in Iraq as a “combat correspondent,” meaning he interviewed actual combatants and wrote up their stories for service publications. As he acknowledged in his memoir, “Hillbilly Elegy,” “I was lucky to escape any real fighting.”

Trump was lucky too, in a different way: His wealthy father arranged for young Donald to escape the Vietnam draft, just as George Herbert Walker Bush did for his son George W., who obtained a safe state-side berth in the Texas Air National Guard.

When Trump could no longer rely on student deferments, he abruptly developed a medical condition that made him ineligible for service: bone spurs in one or both of his feet. (He no longer recalls which foot allegedly suffered from this painful ailment.) As a lifelong athlete who has often boasted of his sporting prowess, Trump was no doubt anguished by this sudden crippling condition.

Or was he? As reporters later discovered when he ran for president, both podiatrists who attested to those disqualifying bone spurs had leased office space from the Trump Organization. By 2016, when questions emerged, those doctors had passed away and their records were no longer

available. But the daughters of one of them told *The New York Times* that their entire family knew her father had delivered Donald’s diagnosis as “a favor” to landlord Fred – and that he had been rewarded with exceptional service as a Trump tenant.

Isn’t that special? No wonder Trump feels obliged to hug the flag wherever he goes.

Such is the parody of patriotism we have come to expect from the Republican Party, especially under Trump. Actual service to the nation – a calling to which men like Walz have devoted their entire lives as schoolteachers, Guard officers and public servants – is dismissed and scorned for partisan gain. Grifters and scammers, who have spent a lifetime serving only themselves, are somehow elevated to cult status.

In this election, those con artists are testing the gullibility of voters yet again. Their success would be America’s failure.

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.

In and Out of California’s Prisons

By SETH SANDRONSKY

“I was due to go to a parole board hearing in mid-2022, when a coworker at a California state prison mentioned a recent seminar from the Creating Restorative Opportunities and Programs,” says Lamar Simms. That was then for him.

Today, Simms is a wage-earning service worker in Oakland, Calif., and a recent graduate of CROP’s Ready 4 Life initiative, a yearlong reentry program. It provides supportive housing and equips justice-involved workers with practical training to successfully transition from living behind bars to life outside, where employment with a livable wage is necessary to pay one’s bills.

That is no mean feat for ex-prisoners. According to the Prison Policy Initiative: “Our analysis shows that formerly incarcerated people are unemployed at a rate of over 27% – higher than the total US unemployment rate during any historical period, including the Great Depression.”

With California state funding, CROP provides a multi-tiered support system for a successful career as reentry individuals, female and male, leave prison and reintegrate

into communities in Oakland and Los Angeles, Calif. The Golden State operates 32 state prisons, two of which hold women, with the remainder for males.

The application process to enroll in Ready 4 Life is robust. “We want to know what applicants have been doing with their time,” according to Jason Bryant, a co-founder of CROP, and a former state prisoner. Formerly incarcerated persons help to evaluate the applications for prospective ex-prisoners seeking to enroll in Ready 4 Life.

The evaluators use their experiences in Calif. prisons as a special focus choosing participants. Eric Hudson began the Ready 4 Life a few days after release from the state prison system following a 19-year sentence.

“It’s been a transformative time,” said Hudson. “When it comes to the CROP curriculum, it stands alone from the self-help groups that I participated in while imprisoned.”

The Ready 4 Life curriculum features four phases. Phase one focuses on participants’ mindsets.

“It’s a self-help group to redirect mentally and emotionally,” according to Simms. He for example entered state prison at age 18, and in three decades there never drove a car, had an ID card nor been a member of the civilian labor force.

The Ready 4 Life curriculum also provides digital literacy and financial wellness training. Such a practical

grounding helps graduates such as Simms get by in the San Francisco Bay Area, which has a low supply of affordable rental housing.

In the meantime, a unique “back to school” process is underway in Oakland and Los Angeles classrooms for recently paroled state prisoners enrolled in CROP’s “Ready 4 Life” program. The startup funding for this reentry makes budgetary sense.

Someone had to step up. She did.

Democratic Assemblymember Wendy Carrillo (Los Angeles) helped CROP secure \$27 million for the Ready 4 Life program from the 2021-22 state General Fund for programming and housing costs, and another \$1.5 million to support improvement and renovations.

There are 95,600 California state prisoners. The annual cost to hold them is \$12.7 billion.

We are talking real money. Do the math.

“The cost of imprisoning one person in California has increased by more than 90% in the past decade, reaching a record-breaking \$132,860 annually, according to state finance documents.”

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Harris Delivered on Jobs

By DAVID McCALL

Anthony Vergara took a job at the Gallo Glass plant in Modesto, Calif., years ago because it offered good wages, family-sustaining benefits and the support of co-workers as committed as he was to building a stronger community.

Together, they've bounced back from a series of fires, weathered global competition and triumphed over other challenges to keep America's largest glass container factory operating around the clock.

But while they take pride in driving Modesto's present prosperity, Vergara said he and 700 other members of United Steelworkers (USW) Local 17M realize that only a transformational "reset" will ensure the factory's long-term survival in a highly competitive, ever-changing worldwide industry.

Fortunately, they're now able to forge that path forward because of cutting-edge technology funded by the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA).

Vice President Kamala Harris cast the tie-breaking vote in the Senate two years ago to pass the IRA and unlock billions for an advanced manufacturing economy.

Not a single Republican in either chamber of Congress voted for this historic legislation, which is revolutionizing the cement, chemical, glass and steel sectors along with

other traditional core industries.

IRA-funded projects are increasing efficiency, reducing costs and shoring up supply chains, better positioning the nation to manufacture the goods needed both for domestic consumption and to trade with the world.

J.D. Vance, the Republicans' vice presidential candidate, made statements on the campaign trail showing he neither understands the IRA nor knows what it does.

But America's working people get it.

The IRA created more than 170,000 jobs at home so far. And it's projected to create at least 1.5 million more in coming years, including dozens of new positions at the Gallo plant under a Department of Energy (DOE) demonstration grant program also funded partly by the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act.

In April, the DOE awarded Gallo up to \$75 million to build a new, hybrid electric gas furnace, to be fueled by locally produced renewable energy.

The furnace will cut emissions, reduce costs and increase the use of recycled material in the manufacturing process. And it will help to keep the facility—where workers make bottles for wine, olive oil, sparkling waters and other products—viable and competitive for generations.

"It's exciting to see the future and what that's going to look like," said Vergara, the Local 17M president, noting the lower emissions will help to make Modesto a better community to call home.

"We live here," Vergara said of USW members. "We raise our kids here. None of us works for any reason except to provide for our families."

Besides bringing additional jobs, the new furnace will save Gallo money and af-

ford the union more bargaining power during the next round of negotiations, noted Vergara. Just as important, the project reinforces union members' solidarity with the community by involving local schools and civic groups in job training and glass recycling initiatives.

The investments in Modesto and other parts of California mirror the IRA's impact on the rest of the country. For example, the DOE is providing millions for similar capital upgrades at the O-I and Libbey glass plants in Ohio, Vance's home state.

And it's providing up to \$550 million for the construction of two electric melting furnaces at the Cleveland-Cliffs complex in Middletown, Ohio, Vance's hometown, a project aimed at slashing emissions while boosting America's position as the most efficient, highest-quality steel producer in the world.

This project alone will create hundreds of construction jobs and nearly 200 permanent positions while helping to sustain demand for iron ore produced by USW members working at mines in Michigan and Minnesota.

"Keeping steel and other products made in this country is critical," observed Ronnie "Pup" Wardrup, a member of the Steelworkers Organization of Active Retirees (SOAR) executive board, who worked for a steel slitting facility in Middletown and recalled being laid off numerous times during the industry downturn of the 1980s.

While Vance talks about the need to provide brighter futures for communities like Middletown, Wardrup said, Harris and the IRA are already doing exactly that.

That's why growing numbers of Ohio mayors, Republicans and Democrats alike, brag about what the IRA helps them ac-

complish. And even congressional Republicans who refused to support the legislation two years ago—an obstructionism that prompted Harris to step forward and cast her tie-breaking vote—now support the IRA because of how it's transforming their districts.

"What this says about Biden and Harris to me is that their focus is where it needs to be—creating jobs," Wardrup said. "They're pretty much lasered into that effort. The Inflation Reduction Act is just one example."

Even as the IRA builds out core industries, it's also expanding America's foothold in solar, wind, electric vehicles and other new sectors, creating even more jobs.

In Ravenswood, W.Va., for example, the DOE this spring announced up to \$75 million for a first-of-its-kind advanced aluminum casting plant at the Constellium complex employing members of USW Local 5668.

At the same time, USW-represented construction workers right now are helping to build a new titanium ingot plant in Ravenswood that's going to be powered by a solar field—yet another project made possible by the IRA.

"People are going to come in here," said Dave Martin, a USW activist and the president of the Mason-Jackson-Roane Labor Council, referring to the need for workers and suppliers fueled by the IRA.

"They're going to spend money in the area," he continued. "It's a big change for the local economy. It's starting to make a comeback."

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

Democrats Trying to Reverse Election Losses in Rural America Urge Focus on Economy

Kentucky Governor Andy Beshear urged rural Democrats to talk about what worries people: jobs, health care, transportation, schools and safety.

By JACOB FISCHLER / States Newsroom

Democrats should focus on pocket-book issues to win back rural voters, speakers including Kentucky Governor Andy Beshear said at a Rural Council meeting at the Democratic National Convention Aug. 20.

Beshear urged the group of rural Democrats to reject social issues and a left-right ideological framing. Most voters, he said, were not worried about political labels, but about jobs, health care, transportation, school quality and safety.

The Republicans dominating rural districts and states, Beshear and other speakers said, were not delivering on those issues.

"With Republicans going through the extreme ends that they are on every issue, now is our time to both run and govern on those issues that matter the most," he said. "And when we do that, we don't move a state or the country to the right or the left. We move it forward for every single American."

The event, one of the dozens of official events for party delegates and candidates a few miles from the national program broadcast from the United Center, was infused with the idea that rural campaigns are not Democrats' strongest, with hints that rural issues may be outside the mainstream of an increasingly urban Democratic Party.

"I think we're the most courageous Democrats in America," former Senator Heidi Heitkamp of North Dakota said.

But speakers also projected hope that the party could reverse a decades-long trend of losses in rural areas, including in

November's presidential election, largely through the selection of Minnesota Gov. Tim Walz as Kamala Harris' running mate.

Walz, several speakers said, is uniquely able to reach voters in rural areas.

"I dare the Republicans to say we are the elite party," Heitkamp said. "I dare them to say that we don't know and we don't have people in our party who care about rural America. I dare them to say that we are not rural."

Beshear acknowledged he had been considered for Harris' running mate, for which he said he was grateful.

"I'm proud that a governor from rural America was a candidate in that veepstakes," he said.

But he called Walz "a great governor" who would be "a great vice president."

The speakers urged Democrats not to abandon rural areas as unwinnable, but to contest every election.

"We have to keep organizing and investing in red states and rural America," Caroline Gleich, a candidate for U.S. Senate from Utah, said. "Because we can and we will win."

Not Served by Republicans

Despite their dominance in rural elections, Republicans have let down constituents from those areas, Beshear, Heitkamp and other speakers said.

U.S. House Republicans are delaying passage of a new farm bill, the once-five-years law authorizing farm subsidy and education programs, Heitkamp said. A bloc of far-right Freedom Caucus members never vote for the farm bill because of its price tag, despite its importance for rural communities, she said.

Former President Donald Trump started trade wars, which hurt U.S. farmers' capacity for exports, and botched the response to the COVID-19 pandemic, U.S. Deputy Agriculture Secretary Xochitl Torres Small said.

Torres Small won a New Mexico House seat in 2018.

"I was elected in the middle of the time when Donald Trump was president," she said. "In the middle of the trade wars that were causing farmers to lose money, in the middle of rural hospitals worried about closing their doors because Donald Trump took too long to recognize the crisis of COVID."

Alternative Democratic Messaging

Explicit in the message from the event was that overtly partisan messaging could turn off rural voters, who are often not strongly political.

And implicit was that national Democrats' shift to the left on social issues this century could distract from messaging rural voters might find more appealing.

Beshear, a popular Democrat who twice won gubernatorial elections in a red state, called himself a "proud pro-choice governor" and a "proud pro-diversity governor" at the top of his remarks before describing nonpartisan appeal.

"We run as proud Democrats — and folks, aren't we proud Democrats?" Beshear said, prompting cheers from the crowd. "But the moment we take those hats off we serve every single American."

"This is our chance, yes, to be proud Democrats, but to show everyone in this country, Republican, independent, Democrat or other, that there is room for them in this campaign," he said. "That there is room for them with us."

And Heitkamp, in communicating support for LGBTQ rights, demonstrated some unfamiliarity with the subject, stumbling over the phrase "LGTBQ+ neighbors."

Speaking with reporters after his remarks, Beshear said Harris and her agenda represent the people who'd attended the

meeting.

"Kamala Harris represents working people," he said, praising her recently released economic policy plan. "The plans that I see are plans that will work for everybody."

Warm Welcome for Gwen Walz

Walz's wife, Minnesota first lady Gwen Walz, made an unannounced visit to the event.

She received a warm reception from the crowd as she told of growing up in a small town and meeting her husband when both were public school teachers.

And she related a story meant to display small-town values.

As a high school English teacher, she tutored a star player on the football team coached by Tim Walz. The student, once a problem in class, continued his tutoring and eventually graduated.

"Tim Walz and I see education and see people one individual at a time, making a difference, one person by one person, and letting that ripple out," she said. "We cannot underestimate the power of seeing and recognizing individuals."

Jacob Fischler covers federal policy and helps direct national coverage as deputy Washington bureau chief for States Newsroom. This story was originally published by the Kentucky Lantern (KentuckyLantern.com).



MARY SANCHEZ



Republicans hope that by attaching the nickname 'Tampon Tim' to Tim Walz, they can make his candidacy about sex, gender and reproduction.

Yes, Good Guys Like Gov. Tim Walz Buy Tampons

“Tampon Tim” just isn’t sticking as a grade school-level slur on Democratic vice presidential nominee Minnesota Gov. Tim Walz.

The desperate hope of his antagonists is that by attaching a nickname to Vice President Kamala Harris’ running mate, they can also make his candidacy salaciously about sex, gender, and reproduction.

You know, all the things about human anatomy that simultaneously enthrall and confuse so many of the most vocal far right of the GOP.

Seriously, the Republican party’s hyper-attention to concerns about the bathroom and bedroom habits of Americans is an obsession to behold. It is, as Walz declared, more than a little “weird.”

Now that label, the “weird” taunt, is sticking – for now. But “Tampon Tim” just isn’t. And it’s for all the right reasons. People are beyond such childishness.

The problem is that too many people in America took Biology 101 or were taught some kind of reproductive health class, like in the high school where Walz once taught social studies for 20 years before entering into political life.

Many Americans have sisters who have periods. While in a public restroom, many of us have experienced a stranger desperately asking: “Do you happen to have an extra tampon I can use?”

Believe me, you’re always grateful if you can accommodate. We know the panic when an unexpected period arrives or when it is heavier than anticipated.

So it’s hardly a ding that as governor, Walz signed legislation making Minnesota one of 28 states that provides free tampons and pads to students in public schools. In

fact, it bolsters his good-guy coating that he signed this into law, providing menstrual products for grades four to 12.

It’s almost a test these days, a considerate boyfriend checkoff, if in a pinch, a man will purchase that iconic blue box of tampons for his girlfriend, wife, or daughter. Real men do.

Thoughtful governors of more than half the states saw this as the right thing to do for students. And surely, it took bipartisan effort to pass that much legislation.

Moreover, it’s a kind gesture. And it’s a matter of dignity for states to acknowledge that students who can’t afford such necessary health products can miss out on class or unnecessarily suffer through embarrassing situations.

Public bathrooms provide free toilet paper and hand soap. Why not free tampons and pads, too?

Critics should consider that many country clubs or public bathrooms in well-heeled spaces often provide these products, for free.

The cliff that some members of the GOP fell off in this conversation was the bathroom part.

The legislation that Walz signed in 2023 allowed for tampons and pads to be provided in all public school bathrooms, including those used by all genders.

That opened the door for critics to

begin ruminating on the possibility that a transgender student could benefit. And then these critics went down the rabbit hole of befuddlement about gender dysphoria, when a biological sex is a mismatch with how a person deeply feels about their gender identity.

There is much about gender identity that the average person wouldn’t understand without some open-minded study of expert opinions and studies.

Stepping back, pausing and being thoughtful is necessary.

The “Tampon Tim” nickname seems silly at best, a bit slapstick, school-yard style.

He has received much attention in his first week in the spotlight for his comedic timing.

His delivery of short quips, little verbal bites and waiting for the applause of a crowd is a skill. But playing the snarky sidekick to Harris is just one of his talents.

There will be plenty of attempts to paint him other than as he sees himself.

“Tampon Tim” is just the first test that he’s passed. There will be more.

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Economics According to Harris

Addressing corporate price-gouging, building housing, helping families. Good stuff and smart politics.

By ROBERT KUTTNER

Kamala Harris, as widely previewed, gave her first major economic address Aug. 16. Two key themes were cutting housing costs and resisting corporate price-gouging of consumers. She also proposed restoring the refundable Child Tax Credit and topping it up to \$6,000 a year for new parents in the first year, as a baby bonus. Take that, J.D. Vance.

The toughest of these policy areas is housing. Unless the federal government spends massive sums to increase the supply of affordable housing, the cost of both rental and owner-occupied homes will continue to outstrip incomes.

In the absence of a supply strategy, Harris’s proposal of a \$25,000 subsidy for first-time homebuyers, though beneficial, will bid up prices. Her commitment to build three million new affordable units over four years, using a mix of tax incentives and grants to local governments for innovative approaches, is a decent start, but only a start. Two other good housing ideas that chime with her attack on predatory corporations are measures to remove the tax advantage from Wall Street speculators in housing and stopping predatory AI tactics for raising rents.

Harris’s general emphasis on price-gouging is a policy area where government can make a huge constructive difference without spending large sums. It is good economics and smart politics on several counts.

First, it vividly connects with the issue of inflation where ordinary people feel it. Grocery store prices have increased only slightly over the past year, but consumers remember exactly what a quart of milk or a dozen eggs cost before the supply shocks of the pandemic. In addition, supermarket profits are notably higher than before the pandemic, which means that prices should have moderated more.

Second, the plan reframes the issue from whether Biden or Trump was better at containing an abstraction known as inflation to how corporate concentration opportunistically

drives price hikes. The right remedy for that ill is not slowing the economy generally, as the Federal Reserve has done, but going after the root cause. This is also a useful shot across the Fed’s bow.

Third, the approach recasts the struggle as ordinary people vs. predatory corporations rather than impersonal forces, with Harris in the role of champion of beleaguered consumers.

Is Harris right on the economics? A detailed study by Groundwork Collaborative found that corporate concentration and increased profits accounted for more than half of the inflation felt by consumers in 2022 and 2023.

There has been a lot of chatter about whether Harris is positioning herself to the left of President Biden and whether that is a good idea. Supposedly, by moving left, Harris risks alienating swing voters. But swing voters also buy groceries. The only voters whom Harris risks alienating by championing consumers are large corporations and their allies. They have few votes.

Far from being notably to the left of Biden, Harris’s economic program looks much like the one that Biden began, which was short-circuited only by the lack of a working majority in Congress and some hostile court decisions. If Harris wins big, she will pick up where Biden left off, and that includes court reform. Her housing plan and her proposed restoration and expansion of the Child Tax Credit build on Biden, and go a little bigger. Likewise her proposed expansion of price controls for drugs. It’s all about constraining corporate excess and helping working people—and connecting the two goals.

The turn to pocketbook progressivism by both Biden and Harris has one great thinker and political strategist in common, and that is Sen. Elizabeth Warren. Early in Biden’s administration, Warren was a source of both ideas and people. Some of Biden’s best and most effective appointees were part of Warren-world. They include Rohit Chopra, who heads the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau, which was Warren’s idea, and FTC Chair Lina Khan, who resurrected antitrust. To the extent that there has already been progress against opportunistic price hikes, the CFPB and the FTC get a lot of the credit.

Former Warren senior staffer Bharat Ramamurti, formerly part of Biden’s National Economic Council, has now joined Harris’s economic team as a senior economic adviser. So Warren’s influence will continue, not because she is a crafty

inside player, but because these ideas have political legs and because the people she recruits to top jobs are superb in their own right.

As for Harris’s commitment to go after opportunistic price-gouging by corporations using concentrated market power, that is also pure Warren. As Warren likes to say, she has a plan for that—her Price Gouging Prevention Act of 2024. Warren’s bill would authorize the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) and state attorneys general to investigate and enforce a federal ban against grossly excessive price increases in times of exceptional market stress (think the pandemic). It would also require disclosure to the SEC of changes in a corporation’s pricing strategy.

IF SHE WINS, KAMALA HARRIS WILL HAVE MORE FREEDOM to define her own politics and her own program than any president in recent memory, because she doesn’t really owe anybody. She abruptly became the Democratic nominee without having to cut messy deals to win primaries, and she quickly enjoyed near-universal support. Her financial backing is also broad. So the usual interest groups have no IOUs to call in.

So if she does bring Congress with her, Harris could be a great progressive president. Given the massive tilt of the American economy to corporate elites in recent decades and the cost to ordinary people, progressivism is overdue economics and smart politics.

One other noteworthy aspect of Harris’s emerging progressivism is its paradoxical connection to race and gender. Barack Obama, as the first Black president, was uneasy about triggering the “angry Black man” trope. Faced with the most severe economic crisis since the Great Depression, Obama pulled his punches, did not attack Wall Street, and brought back the team whose policies of “anything goes” had caused the collapse.

Harris flips that script. The more she champions the defense of working people against corporate predation, the more the spotlight is on her policies and the less on her race and gender. We need Harris, not to be the first Black woman president, but the next great progressive.

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Beyond the Fanfare at the DNC

As the Democratic National Convention unfolds in Chicago, the speeches are full of enthusiasm, but where’s the action plan for everyday Americans?

By CLAIRE CARLSON

Monday, Aug. 19, marked the first day of the Democratic National Convention (DNC) with speeches

from big names like Representative Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, and President Joe Biden kicking off the four-day event. It’s an important gathering, which is why I’m talking about it. At time of writing we’re only about a day and a half in, but – paradoxically – the most interesting thing about the DNC so far is that there isn’t really much substance to dig into.

In each of the speeches there was a through-line of gratitude for President Biden (or in Biden’s speech, gratitude for the core members of his administration), enthusiasm about the promise of soon-to-be Democratic presidential nominee Kamala Harris, and jabs at Republican nominee Donald Trump, whose “Project 2025” playbook was referenced several times by worried Democrats.

The speeches were held in Chicago’s enormous United Center arena, where al-

most every seat appeared to be filled with a whole bunch of excited Democrats waving posters with “We Fight, We Win,” and “Thank You, Joe!” printed on them.

Every four years, thousands of people flock to major cities to witness the nomination of their party’s presidential candidate and talk about how to win the upcoming election. At this year’s DNC, council meetings about youth voters, Black voters, veteran voters, and, yes, rural voters, are being hosted by different advocacy organizations.

Correspondents in Chicago have reported that energy is high amongst attendees, which makes sense: the whirlwind of the past month’s political news, starting with President Biden’s departure from the race and the new Harris-Tim Walz ticket, has certainly grabbed the attention of voters who one month ago weren’t even sure they’d show up to the polls.

But for me, a person who is generally suspicious of political spectacle and the fanfare that comes with it, the DNC (and the Republican National Convention that came before it in July), feel akin to what my high school pep rallies before football games were like: relevant to a select few.

Of course these conventions are important because you get a candidate out of them, but for the general public, I worry they seem like a closed-door event for politicians and their fans. The speeches are meant to inspire voters, but I think the average working-class American isn’t looking for inspiration. They’re looking for tangible action that can address the economic precarity that defines many people’s lives. Certainly in rural America, transparent and specific messaging goes a long way toward connecting with voters.

Continued on page 21

'We're Not Going Back': Seniors Agree with Kamala Harris and Tim Walz

We're not going back on Social Security. We're not going back on Medicare. We're not going back on lower drug prices.

By NANCY J. ALTMAN

Vice President Kamala Harris and her running mate, Governor Tim Walz, have proclaimed, "We're not going back!" Seniors and our families agree. We are definitely not going back on Social Security, Medicare, or drug prices. Rather, we are going forward. Forward to expanded Social Security, expanded Medicare, and lower drug prices.

We're not going back to half of all seniors with below-poverty incomes. Before Social Security, people worked as long as they could, but the fast pace of many jobs "wears out its workers with great rapidity," a commentator noted in 1912. "The young, the vigorous, the adaptable, the supple of limb, the alert of mind, are in demand," he explained. "Middle age is old age."

Once a job was lost, an older worker could seldom find a new one. Parents, as they aged, routinely moved in with their adult children. Those who had no children or whose children were unable or unwilling to support them wound up in the poorhouse. Literally. The poorhouse was not some ancient Dickensian invention; it was a very real means of subsistence for elderly people in the world before Social Security.

When Social Security became law,

every state but New Mexico had poorhouses. The vast majority of the residents were elderly. Most of the "inmates," as they were generally labeled, entered the poorhouse late in life, having been independent wage earners until that point. In 1910, a Massachusetts Commission found that 92% of the residents entered after age 60.

The poorhouse was a fate to be dreaded. Even in as progressive a state as New York, the conditions were abysmal. In 1930, the New York State Commission on Old Age Security found that "worthy people are thrown together with whatever dregs of society happen to need the institution's shelter at the moment... Privacy, even in the most intimate affairs of life, is impossible; married couples are quite generally separated; and all the inmates are regimented as though in a prison or penal colony."

A return to that may seem impossible, but it is not. If Social Security did not exist today, more than 40% of those aged 65 and over would once again have below-poverty incomes.

We're not going back! Before Social Security, the death of one parent frequently meant the breakup of a family. Orphanages housed children with a living parent who had been unable to afford them, when the other parent died. People who became disabled and could no longer work routinely could be found begging in the street.

Those families now have guaranteed monthly benefits, thanks to Social Security, which lifts almost a million children and more than 5.3 million adults between the ages of 18 and 65 out of poverty. And our Social Security system lessens the depth of poverty for millions more.

But Republican politicians want to take us back. They have put out plans that not only would cut Social Security, but end it as we know it. We cannot let them take us back.

Instead of going backwards, we can and must go forward. Vice President Kamala Harris and her Democratic Party have plans

to expand Social Security for seniors, for those with disabilities and for families experiencing the death of a provider.

In fact, when Harris was in the Senate, she was an original cosponsor of the Social Security Expansion Act, and when her running mate, Governor Tim Walz, was in the House of Representatives, he was an original cosponsor of the Social Security 2100 Act. Both bills expand benefits across-the-board, update the cost of living adjustment, so benefits don't erode over time, expand benefits in other important ways, and ensure that those benefits can be paid on time and in full for the foreseeable future, by requiring the uber-wealthy to pay their fair share.

And we're not going back to a time without guaranteed government-provided health insurance for seniors and people with disabilities. Before President Lyndon Johnson signed Medicare and Medicaid into law in 1965, most seniors were not able to find health insurance at any cost. For those who could, the coverage was inadequate and the cost was exorbitant.

We can and must go forward. Harris and her Democratic colleagues want to expand Medicare. The essential benefits of vision, hearing and dental services must be added and the need for supplemental insurance must be eliminated. And Medicare should be extended to children and all ages in between.

We're not going back to Big Pharma ripping off Medicare beneficiaries. For years, politicians promised to rein in Big Pharma and empower Medicare to negotiate lower prescription drug prices. The Biden-Harris administration got it done.

Republicans want to take us back. They want to end Medicare as we know it. They want to replace it with vouchers, forcing seniors to fend for themselves in a hostile marketplace. Additionally, they have promised to repeal the Inflation Reduction Act and let Big Pharma charge whatever outrageously high prescription drug prices they decide.

We're not going back to Medicare beneficiaries paying more than \$35 per month out-of-pocket for insulin. We're not going back to Medicare beneficiaries paying more than \$2,000 out-of-pocket per year for Medicare Part D prescription drug spending.

Instead, we will go forward to a future of even lower prices for even more prescription drugs. And that future must include providing those lower prices for all Americans.

We're not going back to a world without the Affordable Care Act. We're not going back to a world without Medicaid expansion, without coverage for "pre-existing conditions."

That is just some of what is at stake in November.

We're not going back to a world where Republicans hand out tax breaks to billionaires. We want to protect Social Security and expand benefits, paid for by requiring billionaires and other uber-wealthy to pay their fair share.

Social Security Works is proud to stand with Vice President Kamala Harris and Governor Walz in the fight for freedom. The freedom to retire with dignity and independence. The freedom to get the medical care we need. The freedom to get the drugs our doctors prescribe.

If you too are determined to not go back on these important freedoms, the choice in November is clear. Let's unite and usher in a future that takes us forward together.

Nancy J. Altman is a writing fellow at the Independent Media Institute. She has a 40-year background in the areas of Social Security and private pensions. She is president of Social Security Works and chair of the Strengthen Social Security coalition. Her latest book is The Truth About Social Security. She is also the author of The Battle for Social Security and co-author of Social Security Works! Follow Altman on Twitter @SSWorks. This appeared at CommonDreams.

Stop the Steal is Here Again

As Trump builds the permission structure for political violence, this time, the stakes are even higher

By SABRINA HAAKE

When Donald Trump tells 150 million followers that Kamala Harris is lying about her crowd size, mainstream media and the State Department should pay close attention. Trump isn't just licking his wounded ego, he's test marketing "Stop the Steal" redux.

Trump began spreading false claims about the November 2020 election in April, 2020, months before the first vote was cast. Less than a year later, his false claims crescendoed in a violent attack at the U.S. capital, costing five people their lives, causing \$3 billion in damages, and wounding American democracy.

J6, the first and only such attack in U.S. history, was based entirely on Trump's persistent lies that the Biden campaign engaged in voter fraud and election interference, even as Trump himself committed the crimes he projected. As he begins to chant the same fact-free mantra against Kamala Harris in 2024, Act Two has begun, only the names have been changed.

Fake Trump cries about fake Harris supporters

In early August, after Harris and Minnesota Gov. Tim Walz landed at a Detroit aircraft hangar, they were greeted by thousands of supporters as they stepped off Air Force Two. In response to photos of the crowd, Trump claimed on his vanity social media platform that Harris was using Artificial Intelligence to generate fake pictures of fake crowds:

"(Harris is) a CHEATER. She had NOBODY waiting, and the 'crowd' looked like

10,000 people! Same thing is happening with her fake "crowds" at her speeches.

"This is the way the Democrats win Elections, by CHEATING - And they're even worse at the Ballot Box. She should be disqualified because the creation of a fake image is ELECTION INTERFERENCE. Anyone who does that will cheat at ANYTHING!"

Harris' crowds have since been verified. Trump is not only gaslighting his supporters over Kamala's crowd size, he's building the narrative that the only way Harris will defeat him—as Biden defeated him in 2020—is if she cheats.

More than mere gaslighting, this narrative will provide the crucial permission structure for MAGA to engage in political violence if and when Trump loses again.

A sickening sense of déjà vu

Trump's legal team argues that, even though his 2020 election challenges were defeated in over 60 separate courts of law, Trump's lies about a stolen election were political speech protected by the First Amendment.

Although the First Amendment gives broad protection to political speech, and a Trump-packed Supreme Court gave some credence to his outrageous Presidential immunity claims, the First Amendment has never protected fraud: "(T)he prevention and punishment of fraud has never been thought to raise any Constitutional problem;" "(F)raudulent representations through speech for personal gain" are "not protected by the First Amendment."

This November, Trump will fraudulently claim he won in states he lost, invent problems with voting equipment, and challenge results in Democrat-run cities. It's déjà vu all over again.

Only this time, Trump isn't just lying to cling to power after 81 million voters rejected him. This time he's lying to stay out of prison.

If MAGA believes Kamala's crowds are fake, they will believe the results are stolen

There's a method to Trump's madness, and there's madness with his methods, made plain with J6 hindsight.

Trump, with the help of Fox News and similar propaganda outlets, was able to convince enough followers that the 2020 election was stolen that they breached the capital looking to hang the Vice President. Because the personal stakes to Trump are much, much higher this year due to his felony convictions and pending criminal indictments, the risks to the Capitol Police, the District of Columbia, security agencies and the American public in general are also higher.

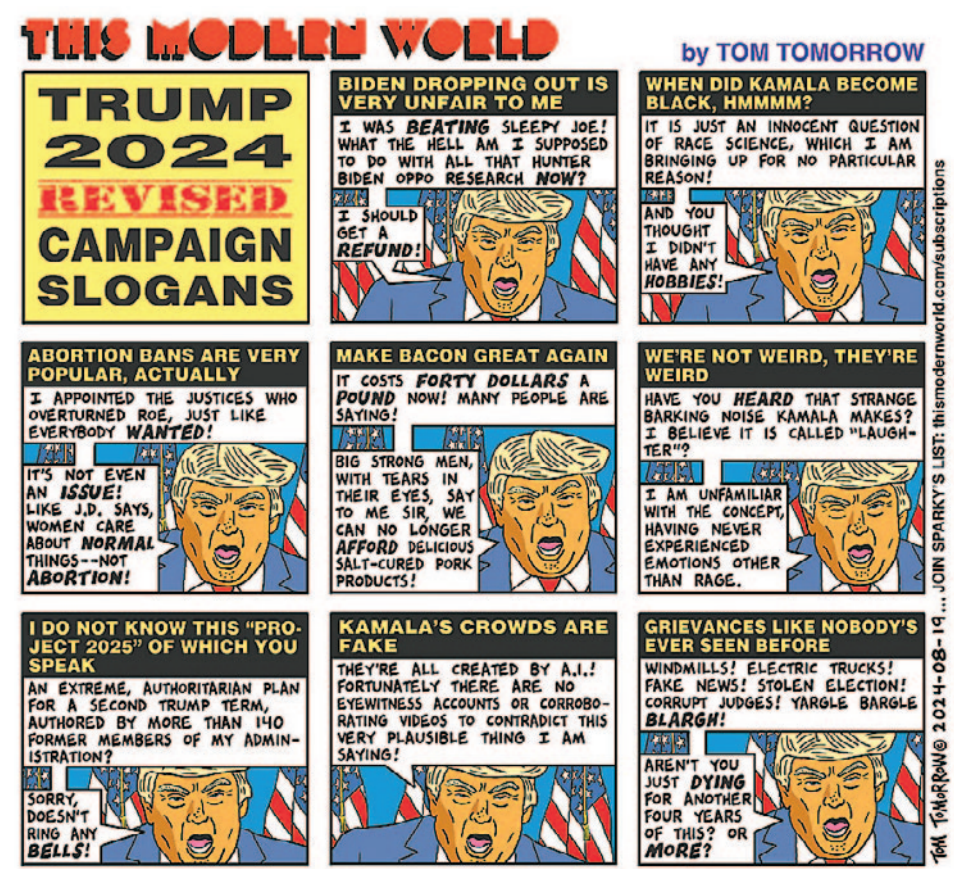
There's a reason Trump keeps talking about pardoning violent J6 protesters; it's the same reason he opened his 2024 inaugural rally performing with the Jan. 6 Choir. He's trying to repackage and market his election crimes as laudatory acts of patriotism, in hopes his zealots will re-enlist despite hundreds of criminal convictions that followed J6.

Trump knows that if MAGA believes Harris-Walz crowds are "fake," they will believe Trump's 2024 loss is also fake. Hopefully, national security experts also know that a cornered, frightened, and criminally convicted rat will stop at nothing to save itself.

Election deniers now control local elections in Arizona, Georgia, Michigan, Nevada, North Carolina and Pennsylvania. More than 70 election officials around the country have already announced they will not certify the results if Harris wins.

The State Department, Justice Department, National Guard, State Police, and Capitol Police had best gear up, and get prepared for anything. It will be wild.

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



Will Democracy Survive the Tsunami of Rightwing Dark Money Coming This Fall?

If Democrats survive the onslaught that's coming and emerge victorious at the federal level, the first order of business next year must be to strip the cancer of dark money out of our body politic.

By THOM HARTMANN

Get ready: massive pools of dark rightwing money are soon going to clobber us. Will Democracy survive this onslaught by the morbidly rich?

Democrats are giddy right now; the substantial lead that Donald Trump had held over Joe Biden for months has largely vanished as the match-up has changed to Kamala Harris and Tim Walz. In the 10 polls aggregated by RealClearPolitics since Biden's withdrawal, Trump has lost 3 points and only leads by one. In the DailyKos/Civiqs poll Harris leads Trump 49/45, Reuters puts the race at 43/42, and Morning Consult has it at 47/46.

Trump is blustering in ways that indicate he thinks he's losing (the Aug. 8 presser at his shabby golf motel was particularly pathetic), while J.D. Vance's poll numbers are in the toilet ... or the couch ... and showing no indication of recovery any day soon.

That said, other lessons from this and recent past years should keep Democrats from easing up or becoming overconfident. The official beginning of the election season is still almost a month away, and the big money pledged by rightwing and neofascist billionaires hasn't even shown up yet.

While over a hundred million pissed off women and the widespread concern that Trump and the GOP are determined to destroy the American system of government seem like a powerful force, history tells us big dark money could overcome even those substantial tailwinds.

We saw this played out here in Portland in July. Susheela Jayapal (sister of Pramila) was a well-thought-of and successful Oregon politician, on the board of the Metro government that oversees the three counties that make up the Portland metro area. She had a long list of great accomplishments, was well liked, and was a shoo-in to replace retiring Democratic Congressman Earl Blumenauer.

Until AIPAC (America Israel Public Affairs Committee) came into our district and dropped millions into the race with a deeply dishonest smear campaign.

I was getting a large 4-color hit-piece flyer about every three days in my mailbox; local radio and TV were saturated with the ads that essentially portrayed her as either evil or incompetent or both. And, right up until the election, nobody knew that AIPAC was funding the campaign; they'd set up a front group and carefully timed its incorporation so it didn't have to disclose its funder until after the election was over.

As Jayapal noted the day after it was announced that she'd lost the election:

"This race showed so clearly why we need to have real campaign finance reform. Outside super PACs came in and spent an unprecedented \$6 million, even timing their contributions so that they wouldn't have to show who was trying to buy this election until well after the votes were cast."

AIPAC also reportedly spent more than \$14 million to take down New York's Jamal Bowman and, Aug. 6, knocked out Missouri Congresswoman and Squad member Cori Bush with \$8 million. As the pro-Israel PAC notes on their home page, big money dropped into a race in the last weeks before the election works: "98% of AIPAC-backed candidates won their general election races in 2022."

But AIPAC is a piker compared to what's going to be coming down the road as the tech, banking, insurance, and

fossil fuel billionaires and their companies weigh into the presidential race this fall.

A previous campaign by the fossil fuel industry is instructive, particularly since that industry sees Kamala Harris and Tim Walz as enemies; Harris signed off on the largest climate legislation in world history, and Walz has required the utilities in Minnesota to be 100% carbon free by 2040, a mere 16 years from now.

In 2018, Washington Governor Jay Inslee got Initiative 1631 on the ballot; it was a modest carbon tax with a rebate attached so drivers wouldn't be penalized. It was widely popular when it was rolled out, and everybody in the region was excited that Washington State was about to blaze a new climate-friendly path, an example for every state in the union.

That was, until the fossil fuel industry weighed in, just weeks before the election, dropping \$17 million into what many called a hugely dishonest (and frightening: they claimed the tax would destroy the state's economy) advertising campaign that blanketed the state. The ballot measure, previously seen as inevitable, was destroyed at the polls.

This is the brave new world Clarence Thomas' tie-breaking vote brought America when the Supreme Court, in their 2010 Citizens United decision, legalized both political bribery and massive intervention in elections by corporations and billionaires.

Prior to Thomas' vote on that decision, Harlan Crow — who helped finance the original Swift Boat attacks on John Kerry in 2004 — and other billionaires had lavished millions on him and his family.

Crow gave the group Thomas' wife, Ginni, started a half million dollars; he bought Thomas' mother's home and others in the neighborhood so she could live rent-free for the rest of her life; he put Thomas' nephew through an expensive prep school. Another billionaire bought Thomas a quarter-million-dollar luxury RV.

It was a remarkably successful investment for Crow, his family, and his billionaire buddies. Just his own family's po-

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ROBERT REICH



Joe Biden's singular achievement was to change the economic paradigm that reigned since Reagan and return to 'democratic capitalism.'

We Thank You, Joe

The opening night of the Democratic National Convention in Chicago was an opportunity for the Democratic Party and the nation to take stock of Joe Biden's term of office and thank him for his service.

He still has five months to go as president, of course, but the baton has been passed.

Biden's singular achievement has been to change the economic paradigm that reigned since Ronald Reagan and return to one that dominated public life between 1933 and 1980 — and is far superior to the one that has prevailed since.

Biden's democratic capitalism is neither socialism nor "big government." It is, rather, a return to an era when government organized the market for the greater good.

The Great Crash of 1929 followed by the Great Depression taught the nation a crucial lesson that we forgot after Reagan's presidency: markets are human creations. The economy that collapsed in 1929 was the consequence of allowing nearly unlimited borrowing, encouraging people to gamble on Wall Street, and permitting the Street to take huge risks with other people's money.

Franklin D. Roosevelt and his administration reversed this. They stopped the looting of America. They also gave Americans a modicum of economic security. During World War II, they put almost every American to work.

Subsequent Democratic and Republican administrations enlarged and extended democratic capitalism. Wall Street was regulated, as were television networks, airlines, railroads, and other common carriers. CEO pay was modest. Taxes on the highest earners financed public investments in infrastructure (such as the national highway system) and higher education.

America's postwar industrial policy spurred innovation. The Department of Defense and its Defense Advanced Research Projects Administration developed satellite communications, container ships, and the internet. The National Institutes of Health did trailblazing basic research in biochemistry, DNA, and infectious diseases.

Public spending rose during economic downturns to encourage hiring. Antitrust enforcers broke up AT&T and other monopolies. Small businesses were protected from giant chain stores. Labor unions thrived. By the 1960s, a third of all private-sector workers were unionized. Large corporations sought to be responsive to all their stakeholders.

But then, America took a giant U-turn. The OPEC oil embargo of the 1970s brought double-digit inflation followed by Fed Chair Paul Volcker's effort to "break the back" of it by raising interest rates so high that the economy fell into deep recession.

All of which prepared the ground for Reagan's war on democratic capitalism. From 1981 onward, a new bipartisan orthodoxy emerged that markets functioned well only if the government got out of the way.

The goal of economic policy thereby shifted from the common good to economic growth, even though Americans already well-off gained most from that growth. And the means shifted from public oversight of the market to deregulation, free trade, privatization, "trickle-down" tax cuts, and deficit reduction — all of which helped the monied interests make even more money.

The economy grew for the next 40 years, but median wages stagnated, and inequalities of income and wealth surged. In sum, after Reagan's presidency, democratic capitalism — organized to serve public purposes — all but disappeared. It was replaced by corporate capitalism, organized to serve the monied interests.

Joe Biden revived democratic capitalism. He learned from the Obama administration's mistake of spending too little to pull the economy out of the Great Recession that the pandemic required substantially greater spending, which would also give working families a cushion against adversity. So he pushed for and got the giant \$1.9 trillion American Rescue Plan.

This was followed by a \$550 billion initiative to rebuild the nation's bridges, roads, public transit, broadband, water, and energy systems. He championed the biggest investment in clean energy sources in American history — expanding wind and solar power, electric vehicles, carbon capture and sequestration, and hydrogen and

small nuclear reactors. He then led the largest public investment ever made in semiconductors, the building blocks of the next economy. Notably, these initiatives were targeted to companies that employ American workers.

Biden also embarked on altering the balance of power between capital and labor, as had FDR. Biden put trustbusters at the head of the Federal Trade Commission and the Antitrust Division of the Justice Department. And he remade the National Labor Relations Board into a strong advocate for labor unions.

Unlike his Democratic predecessors Bill Clinton and Barack Obama, Biden did not reduce all trade barriers. He targeted them to industries that were crucial to America's future — semiconductors, electric batteries, electric vehicles. Unlike Trump, Biden did not give a huge tax cut to corporations and the wealthy.

It's also worth noting that, in contrast with every president since Reagan, Biden did not fill his White House with former Wall Street executives. Not one of his economic advisers — not even his treasury secretary — is from the Street.

The one large blot on Biden's record is Benjamin Netanyahu. Biden should have been tougher on him — refusing to provide him offensive weapons unless Netanyahu stopped his massacre in Gaza. Yes, I know: Hamas began the bloodbath. But that is no excuse for Netanyahu's disproportionate response, which has made Israel a pariah and

endangered its future. Nor an excuse for our complicity.

One more thing needs to be said in praise of Joe Biden. He did something Donald Trump could never do: He put his country over ego, ambition, and pride. He bowed out with grace and dignity. He gave us Kamala Harris.

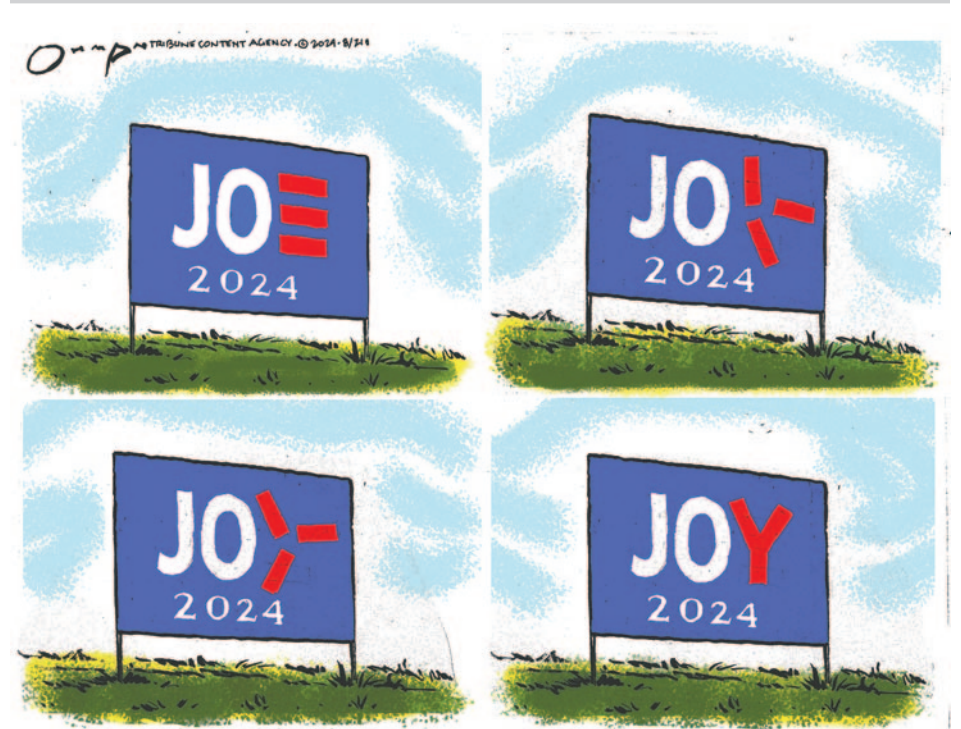
Presidents don't want to bow out. Both Richard Nixon and Lyndon Johnson had to be shoved out of office. Biden was not forced out. He did nothing wrong. His problem is that he was old and losing some of the capacities that dwindle with old age.

Even among people who are not president, old age inevitably triggers denial. How many elderly people do you know who accept that they can't do the things they used to do or think they should be able to do? How many willingly give up the keys to their car? It's not surprising he resisted.

Yet Biden cares about America and was aware of the damage a second Trump administration could do to this nation, and to the world. Biden's patriotism won out over any denial or wounded pride or false sense of infallibility or paranoia.

For this and much else, we thank you, Joe.

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.



Maybe It's In the Air. A Timely Step Toward Semiretirement.

By CLARENCE PAGE

As one who sympathized and empathized with President Joe Biden, I was relieved when he decided to step aside for a younger generation of presidential contenders.

Seeing the unmitigated joy — and relief — that seemed to erupt nationwide, suddenly I, too, decided to take a symbolic step toward semiretirement just in time for this year's Democratic National Convention in Chicago.

The thought became more real as the friends and well-wishers gathered at Rainbow/PUSH the weekend before the convention to celebrate 40 years since the organization's founder, the Rev. Jesse Jackson, delivered the "Rainbow Coalition" speech that outlined themes that would later shape the Democratic Party platform.

I remember that speech. I was just beginning my career at the *Chicago Tribune*. Little did I know I would later cover the Black Panthers, Harold Washington's election as the city's first Black mayor and, among other adventures, the election of Barack Obama as the nation's first Black president.

As the Grateful Dead used to sing, "What a long, strange trip it's been."

Now, it seems, the sun has come out and the world reminds me of the theme song from "Annie," although I won't try to sing it for you.

I'm far more intrigued by how much it now has become Donald Trump's age and health that are getting more scrutiny. Remember how the former president in mid-July mockingly offered to accompany Biden to a doctor's office to take a "unity" cognitive test?

No such talk now. Ironically, Biden's withdrawal instantly turned Trump's big age advantage into a liability. As the oldest presidential nominee in U.S. history, if Trump wins in November he will end his term just short of his 83rd birthday, making him two years older than Biden is now.

Suddenly Biden's age problem has become Trump's age problem. Will media and Republican leaders treat Trump's age concerns as seriously as they did in Biden's case?

I already have — and I'm not alone.

Trump asked for that when he made issues of age and appearance — and precious little substance — the subject of more airtime than they otherwise might have deserved.

Now that the deeply unpleasant schoolhouse-bully side of Trump's personality gets nudged into center stage, even his own advisers see the barely hidden dangers.

Since replacing Biden in late July, Harris rallies draw crowds so enormous that Trump's campaign has accused her campaign of faking the crowds with AI, a notion knocked down by media and other witnesses.

Deposed House Speaker Kevin McCarthy, a California Republican, urged Trump to stop grumbling about the size of Harris' crowds and focus instead on policy. Similarly, says

former primary rival-turned-supporter Nikki Haley, Trump isn't likely to win talking about Harris' race or whether she is "dumb," a card that Trump has pretty much worn out through excessive use.

As Republican pollster Frank Luntz observed in a CNN interview, "If it's about issues," he said, "Trump is much more likely to be successful."

Polling by *The New York Times*/Siena College, for example, showed her up 4 points in three battleground states — Michigan, Wisconsin and Pennsylvania.

And this good news for Harris' campaign comes, it's significant to remember, after the doldrums that the Biden campaign suffered through before Biden stepped aside.

Trump has not been taking it well. He's been calling Harris "nasty," a word he used to reserve pretty much for the likes of Hillary Clinton, who celebrated with fellow Democrats at the party's convention.

For now, I appreciate Biden's relentless spirit, but I also need a break. I don't have to be dragged, kicking and screaming into retirement. A nice beer and bratwurst on the beach is good enough for me.

But I'm not quitting journalism. I plan to cut my columns in half from two per week to one, and if all works out well enough, I'd like to explore some of these new media that my son has tried to explain to me.

The gadget they call YouTube sounds interesting.

As they used to say in the days of the old media, stay tuned.

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

The Big Picture

Can Joy Beat Hate? Let's Hope So

By GLYNN WILSON

CATOCTIN MOUNTAINS, Md. — I heard the Marine One helicopter landing at Camp David on Friday, Aug. 16, after flying overhead. President Joe Biden was there for another weekend preparing his speech for Monday night, Aug. 19, at the Democratic National Convention in Chicago.

It was a sad speech in a way marking the end of an era.

"It's been the honor of my lifetime to serve as your president," he said in a 52-minute speech capping the first night of a convention. "I love the job, but I love my country more. I love my country more. And all this talk about how I'm angry at all the people who said I should step down — it's not true."

"We love Joe! We love Joe!" the crowd chanted.

"I love my country more," Biden repeated, "and we need to preserve our democracy."

The rest of the week was a joyful love-fest for Kamala Harris, an event with much hope for a better future for women, minorities and young people, as well as poor people and the working middle class. That is if the Kamala Harris-Tim Walz campaign can find

a way to beat Donald Trump and J.D. Vance in that state on election night. How many days and how many recount demands and lawsuits will we have to endure this time if this is not a massive landslide blowout?

Then a story came out about ongoing plans by the Three Percenters, the radical, far right militia group that is planning much more than the insurrection on Jan. 6, 2021, if their White nationalist dictator does not regain power in Washington. Talk of another civil war made the rounds one more time, as I took a day to tour Gettysburg again, just as a reminder of the losses that happened back then.

Meanwhile, after narrowly dodging an assassin's bullet, Donald Trump seemed to lose it even more than usual, spouting more personal insults and selfish, hateful bile and nonsense, while Republican Party leaders tried to get him to focus on the issues. It didn't take. He can't do it. It's just not in him. Millions of people watched a conversation on video between Harris and Walz about how to treat other people, with an emphasis on not letting anyone fall through the economic cracks because of a lack of money or education. Many people are already falling through the cracks, and this would get much worse if the Heritage Foundation and the Catholic cult Opus Dei have their way with a new Trump administration implementing Project 2025.

The United States of America will no longer be a democratic republic if that comes about. I wish they would just come out and say what they want: A theocracy, not a government of, by and for the people. Let the

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America's Nuclear 'Downwinders' Deserve Justice

Countless Americans were poisoned by the nuclear arms race — and their federal compensation just expired. That's an outrage.

By ASPEN CORIZ-ROMERO and ANILA LOPEZ MARKS

It's been nearly 80 years since the first atomic bomb was tested in New Mexico. Communities have been reeling ever since.

For generations, Americans who live "downwind" of nuclear testing and development sites have suffered deadly health complications. And this summer, funding for the Radiation Exposure Compensation Act (RECA) expired, putting their hard-earned compensation at risk.

Coming alongside sky-high spending on nuclear weapons development, this lapse

is an outrage. Funding for these communities, which span much of the country, should be not only restored but expanded.

Alongside New Mexicans, people in Nevada, Idaho, Arizona, Utah, and beyond have suffered health complications from nuclear testing in Nevada. And fallout from decades of tests ravaged the Marshall Islands, which were occupied by the U.S. after World War II.

Communities in Colorado were exposed to radiation from the Rocky Flats weapons plant. And people in Coldwater Creek, Missouri were exposed when World War II-era nuclear waste was buried there.

Over the generations since, tens of thousands of people have been affected. Health impacts include respiratory illnesses, cardiovascular diseases, birth defects, and elevated rates of cancer.

We're from New Mexico, the only "cradle-to-grave" state in which all steps of the nuclear production process — mining, testing, and disposal — occur together. We've lived near impacted communities our entire lives.

Tina Cordova, co-founder of New Mexico's Tularosa Basin Downwinders Consortium, says five generations of her family have suffered health and economic impacts from nuclear testing. "We are forced to bury

our loved ones on a regular basis," she said.

Uranium mining in the Navajo Nation has also taken a terrible toll. Between 1944 and 1986, 30 million tons of uranium ore were extracted from Navajo land. Indigenous miners were exposed to radiation without proper safety protocols, resulting in aggressive cancers, miscarriages, lung diseases, and other illnesses.

After decades of struggle to get compensation, communities impacted by nuclear weapons development finally won passage of RECA in 1990 — 45 years after the first atomic bomb was dropped.

The initial law provided \$2.6 billion to around 41,000 individuals, limiting coverage to onsite participants and downwinders within designated areas of the Nevada Test Site. The bill was amended in 2000 to include those who contracted cancer or other specific diseases from working as uranium miners between 1942 and 1971.

Since then, there have been bipartisan efforts to expand the bill's narrow scope to other impacted communities. In response to years of advocacy, an extended and expanded version of RECA successfully passed the Senate this spring with 69-30 in favor — and President Biden's backing.

The bill would have expanded RECA eligibility to all downwinders in Idaho, Mon-

American people in on the plan, so we can have an open debate.

Even in his address to the nation upon announcing he would not seek a second term, in addition to talking about Trump being supported by an unhooded Ku Klux Klan, President Biden quoted Benjamin Franklin.

I told this story best after a visit to Independence Hall in 2018, right before the Democrats seized control of the House under Speaker Nancy Pelosi. You know the famous true story of what Dr. Benjamin Franklin said at the close of the Constitutional Convention in 1787 as he left Independence Hall on the final day of the deliberations of the Continental Congress before heading over to City Tavern for a cool ale.

"Well, Doctor, what have we got?" a woman asked. "A Republic or a Monarchy?"

"A Republic," Franklin replied. "If you can keep it."

We will see how much sway Trump and his MAGA movement still have on the mostly uneducated, rural masses come Nov. 5 (and the days fighting over the vote count afterward).

Can the joyful movement of Harris and Walz overcome all the negativity and hate and sweep enough people in this country off their feet?

Dog damn I hope so. Otherwise I will be joining the massive RV caravan headed north toward Canada.

Glynn Wilson is editor and publisher of *New American Journal* (NewAmericanJournal.net).

tana, Colorado, New Mexico, and Guam, along with previously excluded areas of Nevada, Arizona, and Utah. And it would have included miners exposed to radiation until 1990.

But Republican House Speaker Mike Johnson blocked a vote in the House, abandoning the unseen victims of the U.S. nuclear arms race. Now RECA has expired altogether.

It's not for lack of money. The U.S. is projected to spend over \$750 billion on nuclear weapons over the next decade — a fact it feels impossible to reconcile with the abandonment of the people affected by that spending.

Meanwhile, people are still being exposed to radiation.

Even now, 523 abandoned uranium mines containing waste piles remain on Navajo territory — and companies continue to haul uranium through Navajo land, despite a nearly two-decade old ban on uranium mining there.

Mismanagement of nuclear waste is another ongoing concern. In 2019, 250 barrels of waste were lost en route to the Waste Isolation Pilot Plant in New Mexico.

To protect future generations — and our own — the ultimate goal should be an

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The Clorox Candidate: A Eulogy for His Right-to-Try Act

All those PhDs plugging away in laboratories. All those tests that take forever. Common sense should reign. Let people try whatever they want to try. Freedom to drug yourself whenever, with whatever you wish. You can take your inspiration from the web, from friends, from infomercials on late-night television. Thus spake Donald Trump, a.k.a. the Clorox President, who advised Clorox as a prophylactic for COVID. (Most Americans had enough common sense to reject Clorox, but his enthusiasm for other elixirs boosted their sales, though not anybody's health.)

So now we have the eulogy for the Clorox President's much ballyhooed 2018 "Right to Try" legislation. He pushed it, to the cheers of desperate patients and politicians swooning to woo those patients. His supporters pushed it through Congress, to the backdrop of dreary scientist-nay-sayers. Thanks to the energetic Goldwater Institute, six states — Arizona, Louisiana, Maryland, Mississippi, Nevada, and North

Carolina — passed their own Right-to-Try clones. Pitting the FDA against the common sense of patients, the head of the Goldwater Institute says of Mississippi's law: it "signals to the rest of the country that states don't have to wait on the FDA to put patients first."

The naysayers argued for science. Those time-consuming trials aim to discern not only whether a drug is harmful, but whether it helps. The tests look for the diagnoses that would render the drug either more harmful, or less helpful. "It works" is not a simple Eureka moment. The age and the gender of patients, their co-morbidities, their other medications all matter. So do the incidence, and the severity, of side effects. Even after the FDA approves a drug, the FDA collects the reports of side-effects. Sometimes the FDA reconsiders its judgment, retracts its approval. Time is a factor: a drug that works for six months might not work the same after a patient takes it for five years.

The terminally ill patient who reaches for a non-FDA approved treatment risks not just injury, but foregoes the possibility of a more effective treatment. A desperate patient faces a choice: a treatment with a statistically low chance of success, or a touted "new option." Plenty of entrepreneurs will offer that "new option," one that bypassed the FDA screens. Of course, in reaching for the possible sure-thing, the patient bypasses the drug that just might help.

Finally, the politicians' rhetoric about an intransigent FDA is false: the FDA has long allowed for exceptional instances where terminally ill patients who had tried the standard regimen could try experimental treatments. Thousands

of patients have received the dispensation of "exceptional circumstances." And, in those instances, the FDA collects data on efficacy and side effects.

In short, the Right to Try Legislation was not just potentially harmful, but unnecessary.

But as the Clorox Candidate steps into the ring once again, he is touting his "Right to Try" law. In his standard hyperbole at the Republican National Convention, he praised the law as a "big deal" that "is saving thousands and thousands of lives." He added that nobody else had passed "such a big deal." He promised to expand it to other non-FDA options.

Like other Trumpian boasts (the best economy, the best peacetime, the best ...), this boast is false. (Right to Try Annual Reporting Summary 06/06/2024.) In 2023, the Act supported access to four products; from 2018 through 2022, 12 products. The data, moreover, show only that people underwent experimental treatments, not their efficacy. (The Right-to-Try law does not mandate that kind of reporting.)

The government can help patients. It can bump money into basic research. It can expand the number of clinical trials. It can bolster the efforts of the FDA to put more regimens into the clinical pipeline. Of course, those strategies cost money. Instead, the Clorox Candidate promises hyperbolic nonsense, along with the mega tax cut that would negate any possibility of truly helping patients.

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Trump Wants to Make Religion Great Again, and Elections Unnecessary

By SAM URETSKY

*Queen Mary (The Bloody)
Had an understudy
Who was a Prot:
She was not.
W. H. Auden (Academic Graffiti)*

In 1534 Henry VIII pushed through the Act of Supremacy. The Act made him, and all of his heirs, Supreme Head of the Church of England. This meant that the Pope no longer held religious authority in England, and Henry was free to divorce Catherine of Aragon and so could marry Ann Boleyn. Despite breaking with Rome and overthrowing the authority of the Pope, Henry never became a Protestant himself. However, Edward VI, the son he eventually had with this third wife Jane Seymour, was raised Protestant. When Edward died, his sister, a devout Catholic, wanted England to return to the Catholic church. When anyone refused to rejoin the Catholic Church, they could be, and were, burnt at the stake. It's estimated that 300 people were killed during her five-year reign. Mary's sister Eliza-

beth I, returned to the Anglican church, but only executed about 10 people.

The notion of an official state religion still exists. A study by Pew Research concluded that about 80 nations have either a state religion, or a religion that is favored by the government. Modern England continues to have an official religion and King Charles has the title Defender of the Faith, although in practice there is freedom of religion. When the American colonies were trying to form a constitution, Alexander Hamilton in Federalist #51 wrote "In a free government, the security for civil rights must be the same as for religious rights. It consists in the one case in the multiplicity of interests, and in the other, in the multiplicity of sects. The degree of security in both cases will depend on the number of interests and sects; and this may be presumed to depend on the extent of country and number of people comprehended under the same government."

This was the basis of The No Religious Test Clause, Article VI, Section 3 of the United States Constitution, which states that no religious test can be required to hold public office or a public trust. The clause was introduced at the 1787 Constitutional Convention and unanimously adopted on Aug. 30, 1787. Even so, this clause was controversial during ratification debates, with some delegates were opposed because they believed it would allow non-Christians to hold public office.

George Washington's 1790 letter to the Hebrew Congregation in Newport, Rhode Island, promised that "All possess alike liberty of conscience and immunities of citi-

zenship. It is now no more that toleration is spoken of as if it were the indulgence of one class of people that another enjoyed the exercise of their inherent natural rights, for, happily, the Government of the United States, which gives to bigotry no sanction, to persecution no assistance, requires only that they who live under its protection should demean themselves as good citizens in giving it on all occasions their effectual support."

It was a promise, but also an experiment. Al Smith in 1928 was the first Catholic nominated by a major party for the presidency, and he lost to Herbert Hoover in a landslide. The reason may have been the result of the economic prosperity of the time, but there was anti-Catholic prejudice that affected Smith's candidacy. When John F. Kennedy decided to run for president, he gave a speech, "Are we going to admit to the world that a Jew can be elected Mayor of Dublin, a Protestant can be chosen Foreign Minister of France, a Moslem can be elected to the Israeli parliament—but a Catholic cannot be President of the United States? Are we going to admit to the world—worse still, are we going to admit to ourselves—that one-third of the American people is forever barred from the White House?" Kennedy won the presidency in one of the closest elections in American history—by a margin of 118,000 votes out of 69 million.

Now Donald Trump is trying to revive the religious issue. When he survived an assassination attempt, he said, "It was God alone who prevented the unthinkable from happening. We will fear not, but instead remain resilient in our faith and defiant in the

face of wickedness." Admittedly the remark is non-sectarian, but it is rare to find Trump crediting any force but himself.

This year, Trump charged that Jewish Democrats were being disloyal to their faith and to Israel. Trump opponents accused him of promoting antisemitic tropes while his defenders suggested he was making a fair political point in his own way. Jonathan Sarna, American Jewish history professor at Brandeis University, said Trump is capitalizing on tensions within the Jewish community. The *New York Post*, a Rupert Murdoch publication, headlined "Trump, GOP eye record share of Jewish vote over antisemitism: 'A real issue.'"

Apparently Trump is relying heavily on the Protestant White male vote. A report by Pew research found Jews and unaffiliated voters (atheist, agnostic) show a preference for Democrats. Pew reported, "As they have for most of the past 15 years, a majority of Protestant registered voters (59%) associate with the GOP, though as recently as 2009 they were split nearly equally between the two parties."

Trump said to a gathering of Christian conservatives: "I love you. You got to get out and vote. In four years, you don't have to vote again. We'll have it fixed so good, you're not going to have to vote." Trump has been asked to explain what he meant by "not going to have to vote", but he has not explained and not tried to walk back the statement.

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Tesla Should Fire Elon Musk as CEO

By JOEL D. JOSEPH

Tesla has been a great American success story. The Tesla model Y is currently the best-selling car in the world. For a new company to surpass the sales of all American and German car manufacturers is breathtaking. But now, Elon Musk is ruining a great company by endorsing Donald Trump, and by focusing on other ventures like X, formerly known as Twitter. Musk is killing the Tesla brand by turning off Democrats. Liberal Democrats have for years been his target demographic. Now they are turned off by Musk's million of dollars in donations to Trump and with his recent interview of Trump on his social media site.

Rather than allowing Musk a massive salary as CEO, he should be fired. The compensation package that he has been given includes 303 million options to buy Tesla shares at a drastically reduced price. This package is now worth about \$50 billion, an outrageous gift to the richest man in the world.

While electric car sales are increasing, Tesla had its first sales decline ever in the first quarter of 2024. This was directly caused by Musk's support for Trump. According to the *Wall Street Journal*, Strategic Vision's data found that just 15% of Tesla buyers were Democrats in 2024, compared with 39% two years earlier.

The University of California at Berkeley found last year that electric car sales were closely linked with political affiliation. The study found that one-third of electric vehicles were sold in the top Democratic voting areas.

There are now bumper stickers that read, "I bought this

before we knew Elon was crazy." Any other CEO who caused a business to tank would be fired immediately. Only the board of directors can fire Musk and they should do it.

In addition to being CEO of Tesla, Musk is CEO of Twitter (now X), SpaceX and Neuralink. One man cannot be CEO of all of these companies at the same time and run them all efficiently. His obsession with Twitter demonstrates his lack of focus on Tesla and other companies.

Why is Musk Supporting Trump?

Musk opposed Trump in 2020 and supported Joe Biden for President. Musk now claims that he supports Trump because of Trump's border and immigration policies. But the real reason is that the government, including the Securities and Exchange Commission and the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, are investigating Musk's companies. Further, Musk hates unions and does not want the United Auto Workers to unionize Tesla.

Trump, of course, is anti-union. Trump has also been against electric cars and against federal subsidies for electric cars. In addition, Trump is a climate change denier. But both Trump and Musk primarily only care about two things: money and power.

Musk created America PAC and is providing it \$45 million a month to support Donald Trump's campaign for the White House. The federal election laws, passed in the wake of the Richard Nixon presidency, originally prohibited such outrageous expenditures on behalf of a candidate. However, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled in the *Citizens United* case (a 5-4 decision with conservative justices in the majority) that money equalled free speech and that corporations (and later

Political Action Committees) had First Amendment rights just like people.

Tesla Stock

Tesla stock is now selling for 58 times its earnings per share, an exceptionally high ratio. Growth stocks often trade at high multiples, but with Tesla losing market share its price-earnings ratio should fall dramatically. This will hurt Musk in the pocketbook as his 303 million options will decline dramatically in value.

Consumers can send Elon a message by refusing to buy Tesla cars and trucks. The stock market can give Tesla a wake-up call by selling Tesla stock. These actions will alert the Tesla board that new leadership is necessary to save the company.

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WAYNE O'LEARY

The Democrats' Troubled Road to November

You've got to hand it to the Democrats; they have a knack for messing things up. First, it took them until June to see the obvious, that their presumptive 2024 candidate for president, Joe Biden, was running on empty. Then, instead of an open selection process to choose a successor, they opted for an easy out: standing pat until a closed process became inevitable.

As a result, the party is saddled with a standard-bearer who is not its strongest candidate. The Democrats' best would have undoubtedly been Governor Gavin Newsom of California, but they managed to sideline him for the duration. Possibly, Newsom didn't want the nod; he would have had to take on a fellow Californian, Vice President Kamala Harris, an awkward undertaking to say the least. It's also possible Newsom lacked the requisite fire in the belly for a turbulent, unpleasant nomination struggle.

Whatever the case, the Democratic National Committee quickly foreclosed all options by setting up rules and regulations that made a successful primary challenge to Harris virtually impossible in the time allowed. And the president, ever the party organization man, loyally sealed the deal with an almost immediate endorsement of his v.p. Word has it that ex-President Obama, among others, favored a more open selection process, but his influence has evidently waned.

The succession, in short, was rigged from the start. After calling the GOP a threat to democracy, Democrats themselves engaged in a completely undemocratic nominating process, anointing their candidate after a backroom deal arranged by party pros, who went so far as to transfer previously cast Biden primary votes wholesale to Kamala Harris. That was cute. If the perceived threat (scary Donald Trump) is big enough, the appearance of impropriety apparently doesn't matter.

So the party establishment now has the choice it wanted

all along. In truth, any other selection would have outraged the Black and feminist contingents that now have a lock on present and future Democratic nominations; the former, in particular, regard themselves as the "base" of the party and entitled to special consideration. It's forward with Kamala, then, and we'll see where that leads.

For the moment, it's producing mindless excitement. Harris is the new thing, and Americans always love the new thing (at least for a while). Trump is suddenly the old thing. Sorry, Donald. Despite the initial euphoria — David Axelrod calls it "irrational exuberance" — the vep's poll numbers actually provide scant comfort for Democrats.

Polls taken after June's Biden-Trump debate showed her trailing the Republican nominee by 3% to 4% on average. Some taken more recently in several "battleground" states show a wash, a point or two difference either way. Nationally, the race seems to be a 50-50 contest. But the structure of our Electoral College system means a Democrat must lead by around 5% in the popular vote to win electorally. Harris is not yet close to that margin.

Furthermore, Harris' disastrous record as a presidential candidate in 2020 — the first to drop out of the Democratic race with support only in the single digits — is a cautionary tale. Part of that record was developing a reputation as a flip-flopper on issues, such as reparations and antitrust policy. The worst example was Harris' vacillation on healthcare — from initially backing the single-payer or Medicare for All position of Sen. Bernie Sanders to eventually opposing it as the chance to become Joe Biden's running mate on an anti-single-payer platform became available. Sanders has not forgotten, as his rather tepid and unenthusiastic endorsement of Harris indicated.

In 2019-20, Harris attempted to straddle the Biden-Sanders gap on healthcare, reserving a major role for private insurers in any systemic reform. She finally settled on something akin to Medicare Advantage for those over and under age 65, disingenuously calling it Medicare for All, a label Sanders rightly characterized as bogus.

This is typical of Harris' slickly calculated approach to politics — with one exception. She's been unambiguously out-front in favor of legalized abortion, polling better than Trump on who's best equipped to handle the issue. The problem: Abortion is a primary concern for only a minority of voters, mostly Democratic-leaning women, despite attempts by feminists and liberal activists to create the impression that it's of overwhelming importance to the general public. Some De-

mocrats think they can win on this issue alone; they can't. Most voters do favor reproductive rights and oppose the Dobbs decision, but not to the exclusion of more basic issues that concern them.

Chief of these is the economy, specifically inflation and the cost of living, the priority for 73% of voters in a January Pew Research survey. Harris can't effectively address those concerns because she's been part of an administration that had four years to solve the problem and didn't do so.

Biden, Harris and company left it to the Federal Reserve Board to deal with inflation, but the Fed, which above all represents business interests, took minimal action, allowing conditions to fester. It tinkered around the edges, assuming capitalism would rectify the situation capitalists themselves created; we're still waiting.

In essence, Kamala Harris accurately reflects a centrist Democratic Party that believes wholeheartedly in the existing system and is dedicated to small fixes and incrementalism. This has especially been the case over the last two years, following the party's brief, progressive-inspired, post-Trump activist phase.

The Democrats of 2024 are not the Democrats of 1933 or 1965 or even 2021. Demographically, they represent an odd mix of affluent, socially liberal White suburbanites and poor urban minorities. Notwithstanding Joe Biden's personal, nostalgic courting of labor unions (something that may well lapse under Harris), they are no longer predominantly a workingman's party. Economically, they increasingly represent the priorities of corporate management and the political donor class, with an emerging emphasis on Big Tech and jobs-killing "AI" development. To compensate, Harris will attempt to resuscitate previously rejected social spending included in the Build Back Better agenda, an inadequate approach at best.

Modern Democrats have become a party laser-focused on issues of race and gender, with an overriding concern about identity politics — to the exclusion of the strain of serious interventionist economic populism that influenced its policies from the 1930s through the 1960s. The choice of Kamala Harris as presidential candidate — she checks several requisite current-day boxes — will do nothing to reverse the trend.

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GRASSROOTS/Hank Kalet

Save the Humanities

Fairleigh Dickinson University is closing its low-residency creative writing MFA. It no longer fits within the university's mission, officials say, and it now joins a list of shuttered programs that deserved better.

I received my MFA in 2012. It was an important part of my writing growth and planted the seeds for my shift into creative nonfiction (I'm still a poet). I'm a better writer and teacher because of the experience.

To many, creative writing programs might seem unnecessary, catering to navel-gazers and elites while doing little to improve job prospects. This is not only wrong — writers and artists in these programs come from various backgrounds and cut across racial, class, and gender lines — but misses the larger picture.

These cuts are evidence of the neo-liberal winds that are blowing in academia and that interest with a right-wing effort to neuter what they think of as overly liberal institutions. These ideas are not new. Republican administrations dating back to Ronald Reagan (with help from Democrats in Congress and little clawback from Democratic presidents — have been starving higher education of funding for years. This loss of public revenue — both in direct aid to schools and aid to students — has gone hand in hand with tuition hikes and student debt that, no accident, enriches banks and finance institutions. At the same time, Republicans in

Wisconsin, Florida, and other states have targeted the humanities for more than a decade, arguing that they are not cost-effective and do not prepare students for employment. Proposals have been bandied about that would link tuition to public schools in some states to how well these students do after graduating.

Fairleigh Dickinson follows the shuttering of dozens of smaller MFA programs in recent years, according to Poets & Writers. There is "no single cause" that explains the closures, the magazine speculates, but "they likely stem from a confluence of factors—monetary pressures on universities and waning interest in the humanities being two of the biggest issues."

"Waning interest" is a fuzzy phrase, though, because it seems to imply that this is students' fault and not a result of the neo-liberal winds blowing in academia and a cultural and political emphasis on business and STEM (science, technology, engineering, and math) classes. Students are told early on — by parents, teachers, elected officials, and television — that classes like philosophy and English and American literature are frivolous. "What are you going to do with that?" they asked rhetorically, assuming there is no answer. Students take this to heart, and many are dissuade from entering fields that make us better as a culture.

The ultimate goal is to turn higher education into into a factory for the kind of compliant workers the corporate sector desires. It's hitting private and public institutions — Rutgers gutted its writing program and is targeting foreign languages. Others are engaged in deeper cuts.

Academic unions have taken up the fight, but most of these closures will be permanent, as will the decimation of other humanities classes. Rutgers is laying off dozens of adjuncts and pushing writing instruction onto other disciplines.

This both shortchanges students who are not getting specific writing instruction, the instructors laid off, the new instructors who now must take time from their discipline to teach writing, and the other programs on campus. My union at Rutgers has been fighting the cuts, but academic workers and students hold few cards — especially if they lack union protections (see Florida's targeting of academic unions).

At Rutgers, we have active and unified unions, but the laws make pushing back difficult. So, as strong as we are, it's still a slog and university management continues to hold disproportionate power over our lives and the lives of students. We need to start thinking beyond individual unions and individual schools, beyond public and private, and begin organizing as a sector. We have to think beyond just wages and benefits and work to ensure we have academic freedom and that we can preserve the kinds of classes and programs that give students a deeper sense of life and learning.

Money has distorted the formerly liberal university and the humanities are becoming an endangered species. We can't allow this to keep happening. We are starting to see small efforts at this kind of sectoral unification — from Higher Education Labor United, some of the work from the American Association of University Professors — and more of it is coming. We will not allow the diminishment of American higher education to continue — not without a fight.

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The Purpose of the Post-Menopausal Female

Mystery solved, thanks to a podcast featuring J.D. Vance.

By ALEXANDRA PETRI

Given the choice between a bear and a man who refers to women as "females," I think I would choose the bear.

"Females" is a clear and unmistakable sign: This person is not normal about women.

"Females"! It has all the pseudoscientific

confidence of a proud eighth-grade boy sharing a lewd term he read on Urban Dictionary. "Females"! Turn around, go back; nothing humanizing is at the end of this sentence. We are about to hear a pronouncement that is both insulting and incorrect, delivered as though it was just handed down by God on tablets. If we are unlucky, it will be followed by nods.

If we are even more unlucky, we are listening to a podcast from 2020 and J.D. Vance will be there to interject with a "yes." Grandparents, voluntarily helping raise grandchildren? A lovely thought, until the podcaster, Eric Weinstein, managing director of Peter Thiel's Thiel Capital, observes that it's "the whole purpose of the post-menopausal female, in theory" and J.D. Vance agrees.

"The purpose of the post-menopausal

female" — can't wait to hear where this thought is going! Probably something about J.B. Fletcher solving murders.

The purpose of the female! It is how you get talked about when you aren't in the room, even if you are in the room. It is how you get talked about when you could never be counted among the people in the room, no matter how many children you had.

It is the plural, the nounification, that grates. The same measured and deliberate disrespect as "Democrat Party" but in reverse. People are female; females are not people. Females — we have some of these in the lab, I believe. We are studying them now. We have had great success teaching them to solve mazes. Now we are trying to figure out how to encourage them to reproduce. They don't like it when we feed them pellets. Sometimes, in the right exper-

imental conditions, they look almost human.

"Female" will make you long for the cozy familiarity of "bitch," which at least lets you know that the speaker understands you are capable of perceiving insult.

No, you are being insulted by someone who doesn't realize you're the sort of creature that can hear him. He would be equally surprised if you told him he'd just insulted a side table. Insulted? But I didn't know they could understand language! The language of men? The language of Hemingway? Females?

The same sort of man who refers to "females" without batting an eye will hiss and emit smoke if you try to call someone who is pregnant a person, something I very much preferred when it was my turn. A pregnant person sounds like someone the

Continued on next page

There's Only One Issue in the 2024 Election: The Survival of a Habitable Earth

By JUAN COLE

ANN ARBOR — In mid-July, Nature Climate Change published a global survey of over 9,000 scientists. Its findings should be like the sirens for a 5-alarm fire to our ears.

Scientists are trained to be cautious and to base anything they assert on firm empirical evidence and close analytical reasoning. They want to see a long term, consistent movement in the data before they will rule out random chance as an explanation.

Some 83% of respondents said that they worried about climate change “a great deal” or “quite a bit” and another 14% worried “a moderate amount.” In scientist terms, their hair is on fire. Only 3% are lackadaisical, and 3% of any human group are screw-ups.

There's more. Two-thirds of them felt very strongly that fundamental changes to society, politics and economics are required to deal with the crisis. Another 25% strongly agreed (without the “very”).

Being practical people, these scientists did not expect the mere everyday working of technology or individual “lifestyle changes” to solve the crisis. There has to be big, systemic change — getting rid of gasoline-driven cars and increasing the energy efficiency of homes and buildings. They gave away their conclusion in the very second question they answered. Do we need big “fundamental changes to society, politics and economics?” They said resoundingly, “Yes! Yes we do.” And here's the thing. Only governments operate at the scale and with the resources and nation-wide impact to effect such an enormous alteration.

That's why they largely believe that en-

vironmental activist groups can make an impact, implicitly by lobbying legislators and politicians. That's why they speak out on climate change. But I think we can conclude that most of them know that the carbon economy has to be extirpated root and branch, and fast.

The US government had outlays of \$6.1 trillion in 2023. That is a gargantuan lever. As Archimedes said, “Give me a lever long enough, and a fulcrum on which to place it, and I shall move the world.”

The Biden administration's Inflation Reduction Act dedicated \$369 billion to clean energy and fighting climate change. That sum is bigger than the GDPs of numerous countries in the world, including Egypt, Pakistan, Chile, Greece, etc.

In Europe, the European Union's installation of wind, water, solar and batteries and the turn in some countries to electric vehicles — along with greater energy efficiency — meant that total CO2 emissions from burning fuel in the European Union declined by almost 9% in 2023, even as the economy grew.

This is the kind of thing we need a lot more of. We only have 26 years to get the world to carbon zero. If we stop burning fossil fuels (gasoline, fossil gas, coal) by 2050, then the world will immediately cease heating up. And all the hundreds of billions of tons of carbon dioxide we have put into the atmosphere since 1750 will be absorbed by the oceans. Some 65% to 80% of CO2 goes into the ocean over 20 to 200 years.

But if we go on putting billions of metric tons of CO2 into the atmosphere past 2050, we will outrun the absorptive capacity of the oceans and everything, 100% of what we burn after that year, will stay in the atmosphere for centuries. The average increase in the temperature of the Earth's surface over 1750 could exceed 5.4° F. (3° C.), which scientists are afraid could throw our climate system into chaos.

The changes in the Earth's climate that we are already seeing, including massive wildfires, extreme heat waves, ocean temperatures over 100° F. (37.7° C.), massive hurricanes, and biblical floods, are unex-

pectedly severe for this stage of climate change. These surprises indicate that in the near future climate could get very, very nasty if we don't change our ways. What if all the electricity lines get blown down? Civilization doesn't work without electricity. What if all buildings have to be rebuilt to stand 160 mile an hour winds? What if we are driven underground by unbearable temperatures on the surface?

What can stop the worst of this mounting catastrophe from striking us, our children and grandchildren? Governments.

The 2024 American election is the most consequential in world history. Trump and his Project 2025 have made absolutely clear that they will gut all the climate progress and legislation of the Biden administration. They will put in even more incentives to burn coal, fossil gas and petroleum. They will vastly increase the US carbon dioxide emissions (4.8 billion metric tons in 2023, down from 4.9 bn. in 2022), taking us back to 2007 when we put out 6 billion metric tons of carbon dioxide.

The whole world puts out 36.8 metric tons of CO2 annually. The US, with 4.23% of the people in the world, produces 13% of all the CO2. Moreover, the US is a world opinion leader, for better or for worse, and has enormous political and economic levers to move other countries in a green direction.

In contrast, Kamala Harris and Tim Walz have in recent years become activists against climate change and will build on and expand on Biden's green turn.

You have to rank issues in a two-party system. Maybe we can open up the two-party system over time (states can do this, as Maine has), but for the moment it is what we are stuck with. One party literally wants to destroy the Earth for the present-day grubby profits of a few. The other party is at least somewhat committed to fighting climate change, and is susceptible of being pushed even harder in that direction.

Nothing else matters as much. The war in Ukraine does not matter as much. The US-China confrontation in the South China Sea is not as pressing. The Israeli total war

on Gaza civilians, horrific as it is, and Hamas terrorism against civilians, as horrific as that is, does not matter as much as the fate of the globe. It matters a great deal to me. It gives me nightmares. I've gone blue in the face arguing that this military campaign must cease immediately. But in fact both Israel and Gaza are destined to see significant loss of coastline to sea level rise over the next century (and even as early as 2050), with the potential for massive displacement of populations. Huge Medicanes or Mediterranean typhoons of the sort that washed Libya's Derna into the sea last year will strike their towns. Unbearable heat waves will kill the elderly and children. The region is heating up at twice the global average.

The Israelis and Palestinians will not survive if they do not put away their weapons and cooperate to adapt to these changes. In my view, the main onus for this about-face lies on Israel, which is currently gripped by a far right wing ethno-nationalist expansionism, since it is by far the stronger party. Israeli technology and Palestinian familiarity with traditional methods of making the land flourish will be crucial. But we are speaking about a few million people.

There could be 1.2 billion climate refugees in the world by 2050.

Nothing else is as important. Vote Democratic. Tell your friends. Whip up enthusiasm. Once the Dems are in, if you don't like their policies, argue with them and pressure them and change them. Trump and MAGA are not susceptible to grassroots pressures. They are in the grip of a handful of selfish billionaires and they want to dig your grave and then charge you to be buried in it.

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BOOK REVIEW/Ken Winkes Still Addicted to Oil

I never thought it would happen, but Donald Trump inspired me to read a book.

I'd had “The Petroleum Papers” around for months. Just one more book about how corporations lie and twist facts to protect their profit stream, I thought. I already knew all that. After all, over 10 years ago I'd read “Merchants of Doubt,” which brilliantly documents the methods corporations employed to manipulate public opinion on the harmful effects of smoking, on Ronald Reagan's ill-conceived “Star Wars” defense initiative and yes, on climate change. Why read another book on something I already knew?

Then came Trump with yet another gift. Give me one billion dollars, he said in a meeting with oil executives last April, and I will eliminate tax breaks for electric vehicles, regulatory impediments that stand in the way of your profit, protect the billions in tax subsidies you already have, and reverse the pause in natural gas exports imposed by the Biden administration. What a deal. For only \$1 billion, Trump would sell more of America's and the world's future.

No surprise, really. Trump was already a signatory to the Devil's Bargain fossil fuel corporations made more than 50 years before. Warned by their own scientists about the inevitable effects on the earth's climate of spewing loads of

carbon dioxide and methane into the atmosphere, they ignored the warnings and instead spent millions to contradict and promote uncertainty about what they knew to be true.

While covering the familiar story of Big Oil's decades-long deception, Canadian author Geoff Dembecki devotes a large portion of his engaging book to the people and corporations that opened the Alberta tar sands to exploration and bitumen extraction. Much of that story was new to me.

Sun Oil, which under the name of Suncor became the largest bitumen producer, was the first big company to invest in tar sands development. Profit was, of course, the primary driver, but as it was for other oil company owners, religion and politics also influenced their approach to business. Sun Oil's Pew family was staunchly anti-FDR Republican, firmly anti-communist and committed to a brand of Christianity that believed unfettered capitalism was God's plan.

A more familiar name with similar right-wing politics also reaped riches from the Canadian tar sands bonanza. The Koch brothers' Minnesota refinery equipped to process bitumen into fuel was conveniently located. In the 1960s and '70s, it became Koch Industries' “cash cow,” providing the profit that fueled Koch Industries' rapid expansion and financed its growing political influence. Big Oil and right-wing politics have long gone together.

“The Petroleum Papers” also showcases the men and organizations who created the fossil fuel industry's climate-change-denying machine and shows how the industry's lobbyists have successfully delayed government response to the increasingly obvious climate crisis. In 2024, even as a succession of climate disasters are front page news, we still

subsidize oil companies, we still don't have a federal carbon dioxide cap-and-trade policy, and Justin Trudeau's promised taxes on the tar sands operation have more gaps than teeth.

Dembecki weaves a series of often touching stories of individuals directly affected by climate change into his lively history. A survivor of a typhoon in the Philippines. An Alaskan native village being inundated by rising seas. A Colorado community sickened by the pollution from a nearby refinery. A truth-telling Exxon scientist evaluated out of his job. And that of the lawyer who successfully sued the tobacco companies for lying and is attempting to hold the fossil fuel giants to similar account.

So far, legal action at the federal and state levels has unfortunately yielded little concrete result. Although oil companies now admit the reality of anthropogenic climate change, they have so far escaped financial responsibility for the immense devastation they cause.

In 2023, the hottest year so far on record, the three largest American oil companies made nearly \$22 billion dollars. In early August 2024, 100 homes were flooded in Juneau, Alaska, when an ice dam broke away from the Mendenhall Glacier.

We're still addicted to oil. Our heads are still buried in the oil sands.

“The Petroleum Papers” by Geoff Dembecki, 283 pages, Greystone Books, Ltd. (2022).

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

Petri...

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law values and medical science is invested in protecting! If you are in a situation where you are expecting and they are referring to your embryo as a person but not you, run, don't walk, to the nearest state where that isn't happening! A person gets to determine their own purpose. A female is at the mercy of someone who feels he is inevitably better informed.

Females is how you're referred to when you're not included in the sentence. When someone has accounted for your preferences and purpose without talking to

you once. When someone knows all about you from studying the behavior of marmots. When Project 2025 says that, “When the Founders spoke of ‘pursuit of Happiness,’ what they meant might be understood today as in essence ‘pursuit of Blessedness.’ That is, an individual must be free to live as his Creator ordained — to flourish. Our Constitution grants each of us the liberty to do not what we want, but what we ought. This pursuit of the good life is found primarily in family — marriage, children, Thanksgiving dinners, and the like.”

Happiness for you is something different than your actual happiness; it is something that has been decided on your behalf

by someone else. Just like they determined the purpose of the post-menopausal female! I am so glad someone is here to tell us these things. Tell us: What are these females good for, these post-menopausal females? (Do you mean women? Do you mean people? Do you mean voters? Do you know we can all hear you? We have always been able to hear you.)

Please keep opening your mouth, J.D.!

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).”

Coriz-Romero...

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end to all nuclear weapons development. But as we work toward that goal, repairing the harm to impacted communities — by renewing and expanding RECA — is a necessary next step.

Aspen Coriz-Romero is a New Mexico Fellow at the Institute for Policy Studies from Española, New Mexico. Anila Lopez Marks is an IPS Henry A. Wallace Fellow from Albuquerque, New Mexico. This op-ed was distributed by OtherWords.org.

The Wizard and the Hillbilly: Weird Politics

By JAMIE STIEHM

Picture Vice President Kamala Harris, the Democratic nominee for president, as young, beautiful Dorothy in “The Wizard of Oz,” being blown away in a storm and, in the end, coming face to face with the scary wizard.

And there he is, a blowhard behind a green curtain, shouting into the wind. In the movie, the wizard looks like former President Donald Trump.

In the American archetypal story, Dorothy says, “You’re a very bad man!”

The yellow brick road leads to the wizard: revealed, reduced and demystified. He has lost his power.

Harris has undergone some twists and tornados of fortune, to (almost) arrive at an American happy ending. Don’t you feel it too? The July zeitgeist (wind of fate) took President Joe Biden out of the race and put her in place as the party favorite to succeed

him.

Actually, Harris earned that place within 24 hours. It was a stunning feat of political mastery, showing she was ready for the adventure, the journey toward the West Wing.

Just like that, the whole campaign changed.

Democrats landed like bluebirds on the Chicago convention, sure of a boffo success. Hillary Clinton and Biden crushed speeches that brought tears to some eyes, for their grace and generosity combined with fighting force. They gave way to the next generation, with just a drop of bittersweet.

The delegates embraced the new party darling, a biracial Californian woman who can stare down a criminal on the witness stand.

Harris did make Brett Kavanaugh squirm, stammer and flush when she questioned him on reproductive rights at a Supreme Court confirmation hearing. Named as one of the “Trump three” on the Court, Kavanaugh failed to answer questions truthfully under oath.

Over on the other side, Trump and his running mate, Sen. J.D. Vance, are crossing over to comedy of the absurd.

The Republican ticket is caught off guard, confronted with Harris and a man from the Midwest as her running mate. Minnesota Gov. Tim Walz is salt of the earth

who speaks plainly to the point as a former teacher, coach, soldier and congressman.

Trump and Vance, an old man and a young man, see this common bond in each other: Outlandish personal insults is their brand. So far, they can’t stick the landing on Harris, Walz and their voters.

Exposing his vanity, Trump exclaimed over and over in his wizard voice that he is a “better-looking person” than Harris. Yes, he really seems to think so, which is truly amazing.

Mysteriously, two conservative columnists, Peggy Noonan and Kathleen Parker, wrote that Harris’ beauty is an advantage in the race. They’ve been kind to me, but I’m not sure why they wrote that. Was it to diminish her substance?

Harris shows a certain command as she walks and talks. The “word salads” she was once criticized for are gone.

“Hillbilly Elegy” author Vance’s low opinion of women is coming to light, especially if you have a cat but no child.

Speaking strictly for me, I miss my cat Girlfriend, who is gone now. I’m not over that yet.

And yes, I confess that I’m happily single too. Since when is that a problem? After being unhappily married, I savor my everyday freedom.

What does Usha Vance really think about her husband’s weird putdowns of half

the human race? I’d like to have a girltalk with her.

Vance also takes it upon himself to cut into “childless” women. That is a personal insult not even Trump would say. A sure vote-loser, as if motherhood is at the end of every female quest. As he would have it, older women exist to take care of their grandchildren.

Author Virginia Woolf didn’t have children. Nor did Jane Austen. Nor does Gloria Steinem. There is no choice more personal, and it helps to have time, money, health, security, child care and former President Bill Clinton’s Family and Medical Leave Act.

Many observers, including doctors, think Trump is losing it in a land of his absurdities. Without naming names, Harris spoke of him as cowardly — “Wizard of Oz” language.

As for Vance, the politics of personal insults is not the Appalachian Trail to the White House.

But keep doing what you’re doing.

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.

How Can They Vote for Trump, Part the Infinity

By BARRY FRIEDMAN

According to a June 9, 2016, *USA Today* story about Donald Trump’s business practices before becoming president, “At least 60 lawsuits, along with hundreds of liens, judgments, and other government filings were from contractors claiming they got stiffed. . . . The actions in total paint a portrait of Trump’s sprawling organization frequently failing to pay small businesses and individuals, then sometimes tying them up in court and other negotiations for years.

In some cases, the Trump teams financially overpower and outlast much smaller opponents, draining their resources. Some just give up the fight, or settle for less; some have ended up in bankruptcy or out of business altogether.”

Four years later, in the race between Trump and Joe Biden, according to Yahoo Finance, 53% of business owners surveyed said they supported Trump.

Hope over evidence.

Which brings me to Mondo’s Ristorante Italiano, my favorite here in Tulsa. Owned by the Aloisio family, three brothers, Rob, Michael, and Chris, and their father, “Papa” Lou, it is a place where I not only eat three, four times a week, but have my own sandwich and my own booth.

While Chris is mostly apolitical when

he’s not hating both parties equally, Rob, Mike, and “Papa” Lou are Trump supporters.

Unapologetically.

This, however, is not a piece about how we all need to get along and find common ground, though clearly the Aloisio Family and I have done that.

Sometime between 2016 and 2020, Rob put a “Trump” hat on a shelf over the bar, prompting a customer to trash Mondo’s on Facebook, saying that the hat’s presence, perched where it was, ruined her meal — and she was never coming back. In the thread that followed the post, my name came up, as my friendship with the family and my presence at Mondo’s is fairly well known in these parts. Rob, Chris, Michael, and “Papa” Lou were furious that the woman took her grievance public, which was understandable, but why, I asked, were they putting themselves in this position? People were coming to Mondo’s for pasta — not politics.

Chris agreed, then eventually Rob did, then the others, and a week later, the TRUMP hat came down and a Cleveland Browns’ hat was put in its place.

I have argued in this very space there is no real distinction between the casual Trump supporter and the one marching through town holding a tiki torch and screaming, “Jews will not replace us!”

All of their votes for him count the same.

Rob, Michael, Chris, and “Papa” Lou are not racists, cheats, misogynists or arrogant ignoramus — this I know — but I also know they don’t, by virtue of their support for Trump, think such traits should disqualify him from being president. Once he beat

Hillary Clinton in 2016, he was a winner, and they, like most Republicans — like most Democrats — like winners.

Trump gave (and gives) them 90% of what they want, what any Republican president would give them. Marco Rubio, Ted Cruz, Jeb Bush from 2016; Ron DeSantis, Tim Scott, and Nikki Haley, for that matter, in 2024 all take a pro-business stance, are all pro-guns, all would have appointed Neil Gorsuch, Brett Kavanaugh and Amy Coney Barrett to the Supreme Court, and would have promised to roll back regulations, give tax breaks to the rich, protect the unborn, and throw shade on DEI and Woke.

Rob has told me more than once that he wishes “Trump would shut the hell up,” but he has also posted he would take Trump and his “mean tweets” over high gas prices and inflation, as if those who have a problem with Trump list punctuation and his overuse of caps.

Trump has been to Tulsa twice since 2019 — once, at the height of COVID, as president, when he held a rally; once, after he lost, during an NCAA wrestling tournament. The Aloisio Family no doubt would have been honored had Trump or someone from his staff asked them to cater either event, figuring, as I’m sure other restaurants, plumbers, drapery salesmen, and those who install toilet dividers believed, they’d get a picture for the wall and he wouldn’t stiff them.

A year or so ago, the Aloisio Family recently spent millions to buy a building and open a new Mondo’s location.

The Aloisio Family have their lives in this business.

Donald Trump was convicted of falsify-

ing business records and of conspiracy.

“Papa” Lou served in the Korean War; Rob stands for the national anthem when he hears it — even on television.

Donald Trump just gave the Medal of Freedom to Marion Adelson, a rich donor. Trump called the award “much better” than the military’s top award, the Medal of Honor, because those awarded the latter are, in his words, “. . . either in very bad shape because they’ve been hit so many times by bullets or they’re dead.”

The Aloisio Family hires teenage girls and women in their 20s as hosts and servers.

Donald Trump was found guilty of sexual abuse and bragged about how to grab women.

“All politics is local,” Thomas “Tip” O’Neill once said, filching from Finley Peter Dunne, but these days I’m not even sure it’s personal. Many women, minorities, the disabled, and those in the military will still support Trump. And on November 5th, at least three members of the Aloisio family will vote for a man they would never hire.

*Barry Friedman is an essayist, political columnist, petroleum geology reporter — quit laughing — and comedian living in Tulsa, Okla. His latest books are “Jack Sh*t: Volume One: Voluptuous Bagels and other Concerns of Jack Friedman” and the follow-up, “Jack Sh*t, Volume 2: Wait For The Movie. It’s In Color,” which 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 barrysfriedman.com and friedmanoftheplains.com.*

and opens up his arms. “And, Dugout Dougie, the Commie-lovin’ Christ Killer. You all know that’s what he is, right?”

The crowd hoots, hollers, squeals and wets themselves.

His TV coverage soon wanes, but that doesn’t stop Trump.

“F**ck the Fake News—who needs them? Just look at you, my beautiful people. When they steal YOUR Election, my gorgeous ones, you know what to do, right?”

The crowd erupts: “Fight the Steal. Shoot the Stealers. Fight the Steal. Kill the Stealers! Kill them, kill them, kill them now!”

Trump crosses his arms over his chest, Mussolini style, as he looks over the crowd and smiles.

“Now that’s what I call a rally!”

Rosie Sorenson is a humor writer in the San Francisco Bay Area. Her column is satire and, like Fox “News,” cannot be believed as fact. Email Rosie at: RosieSorenson29@yahoo.com. See RosieSorenson.com

SATIRE/Rosie Sorenson

No More Stinkin’ AI Bots

The Real Donald Trump recently emerged from behind the AI Bot façade created by his current campaign managers to project onto the populace a new Trump, chastened by his near-death experience. And to give the old man a rest.

“That AI Guy is a phony,” hollers Trump during one of his campaign meetings. “He makes me look stupid and stupid I ain’t. I’m a stable genius. Just ask Melania. From now on, I’m in charge of me. With God on my side, I don’t need to rest.” Out of Trump’s line of sight, top staff Chris La

Civita and Susie Wiles, roll their eyes.

“You, my stupid team, wanted me to become softer and more gentle after I got shot—you know, to soothe and to court the independents, whoever the hell they are,” he shouts as his hands flail before him, in an arabesque of accordianesque.

“But people want the Nasty Trump, not the Softie who has rolled out lame things like ‘KaMala is stupid. She just turned Black to get votes. There’s nothing worse than a Childless Cat Lady.’

“No one wants that pablum. They want the REAL DONALD J. TRUMP and I’m gonna give it to them. I’ve just hired Corey Lewandoski, my former campaign manager, to right this ship.

“At Corey’s urging, instead of wussing out on Project 25, I’m going hell-bent-for-leather on their script of pushing women back into aprons and coat hangers, forcing them to take a knee against feminism and to give the middle finger to the Gospel According to a Liberal Jesus.

“That’s what my MAGA crowd wants. That, and a White ethnostate with the elim-

Public Citizen's Robert Weissman Calls for 10 Crucial Public Congressional Hearings

Twenty-four years ago, *Business Week* magazine conducted a poll of the American people on whether corporations have too much control over their lives. Over 70% of them said YES! Since 2000, big businesses and their CEOs have gotten bigger, richer, less taxed and exercised far more power over the lives of workers, consumers, patients, children, communities, the two major political parties and our national, state and local governments.

That reality answers the question of why our corporate Congress has declined to hold public hearings confronting lawless corporate power with proposed legislation – the first step toward shifting more power to the people.

Robert Weissman, President of Public Citizen, demands 10 key Congressional hearings – naming the Committees that can hold them – in the just-published edition of the Capitol Hill Citizen (to obtain a print copy only, go to capitolhillcitizen.com).

Here is a summary of them:

1. Rebuild democracy by ending big money in elections. Besides exploring public financing for elections, the Committees, for example, would make the connections between Big Pharma's money and charging the highest drug prices in the world, despite the large subsidies given to the drug companies. Also, witnesses would give testimony to strengthen voting rights and eliminate partisan gerrymandering, among other measures.

2. Taxing corporations and the Super-Rich at least to the level of the prosperous

1960s. Tax financial speculation (see: greedvsneed.org), close "a raft of loopholes" and impose a wealth tax on "the outrageously wealthy." Weissman writes: "How exactly did Jeff Bezos pay \$1.1 billion in federal tax from 2006 to 2018, as his wealth grew by \$127 billion?" How do so many giant, profitable companies get away with zero income tax for years at a time?

3. Anti-monopoly hearings to strengthen venerable antitrust laws, to catch up with many new forms of monopolization and protect small business, competition and innovation. New legislation should also "restore the rights of victims of anti-competitive practices – whether competitors or consumers – to sue monopolists."

4. Roll back rampant corporate welfare by exposing the hundreds of billions of dollars a year in subsidies, handouts, giveaways and bailouts. From greatly inflated government contracts – as in the defense industry – to giveaways of public land resources, government-guaranteed giant capitalism must stop, and the savings devoted to public services in great need.

5. More and deeper hearings on corporate-driven climate disruptions. Congressional committees have had numerous hearings, but far more should be regularly held on how the corporate-driven climate crisis is harming people and property around the country, how efficient are the ways to mitigate or prevent such fossil-fuel-led disasters, and how the law must be toughened with stronger enforcement and budgets to fore-

Care Act's online marketplace.)

The point is how the ACA as we know it came to pass. Obama, wielding considerable political capital at the start of his first term, decided to make health care reform his first major legislative priority. The public, long struggling under high costs for medical care and prescription pharmaceuticals, was supportive across party lines.

Right out of the gate, Obama negotiated against himself. Though he had promised during this campaign that the ACA would include a "public option," i.e. the right to join what Sen. Bernie Sanders called Medicare for All, he agreed to drop it from the bill because, Democrats explained, they were short one vote in the Senate. Joe Lieberman, a right-wing independent senator from Connecticut, home to many of the nation's major insurers, threatened to scuttle the measure via a filibuster parliamentary maneuver.

Rather than force Lieberman and his Republican allies to go on the record as having rejected a popular bill on a major issue, Obama dropped the public option. Obama noted the public option "has become a source of ideological contention between the left and right." Anyway, he lied, "I didn't campaign on the public option." Good news: the ACA passed. But the lack of a public option was so unpopular (88% of Democrats wanted one) that it was a significant factor behind Sanders' insurgent campaign in 2016. Instead of a towering achievement, Obamacare is widely viewed as a disappointment. The vast majority of Americans say its failure left the problem unsolved.

Shortly before he left office, Obama suggested that Congress add a public option to the ACA. This is what happens when you negotiate against yourself.

The 38% of Americans who oppose capitalism – socialists, communists, left-libertarians and others to the left of the Democratic Party – should take careful note of the Democrats' repeated refusals to seek big changes and the subsequent failures that have followed as a result. Unlike the Democrats, who negotiate in Congress against Republicans who share their basic political values and assumptions on the relationship between workers and their labor, militarism and social priorities, we on the actual Left are fighting to overturn the system entirely.

stall this omnicidal destruction that gets worse every year.

6. "Winning Medicare for All" hearings to show how other countries spend far less per capita and get better patient outcomes with far less paperwork, waste, over-billing and denials of care. Weissman notes how conditions are getting worse with "private equity investors rushing to buy up everything from nursing homes to emergency care companies."

7. Legislative hearings to enact laws that end the over-pricing of prescription drugs in the U.S. that are "roughly three times what they are in other rich countries." This would build on Senator Bernie Sanders' hearings by fundamentally changing the conditions that breed ever-worsening "pay or die" unregulated drug industry price dictates.

8. Hearings that place the most obstructive anti-union formation laws in the Western world under reform spotlights. Union-busting law firms and consultants should be subpoenaed to give testimony, produce documents, and answer questions under oath. Long overdue are hearings on the repeal of the Taft-Hartley Act (1947) to allow card checks and faster procedures between union certification and contracts with employers.

9. Also, long overdue are Congressional hearings that "shine a light on the victims of corporate wrongdoing who have been denied their day in court or the ability to obtain fair compensation." On the table would be a "Corporate Accountability and Civil Justice Restoration Act" that protects the constitutional right of trial by jury that has been severely eroded by corporate lawyers and corporate judges.

10. Hearings by the Senate Judiciary Committee to confront the surging corporate crime wave with a modernized, comprehensive federal corporate criminal law. One that is adequately empowered and resourced to deter, punish and hold corporate crooks and their companies accountable through a variety of proven mechanisms. Present laws are

pathetically weak, easily gamed, and allow ever more widespread immunities for these comfortable fugitives from justice.

Weissman has put together a powerful legislative agenda to restore the rule of law over raw power. He has a Congress Watch group staffed by public interest lobbyists who can swing into action daily on Capitol Hill, equipped with a combination of invincible rhetoric rooted in irrefutable evidence to benefit all the American people.

It is up to you the citizens to demand such investigations by your Senators and Representatives.

I would add serious hearings on the bloated, redundant military budget. Absorbing over half of all federal operating expenditures, this vast appropriation is in violation of federal law since 1992 requiring audited budgets be sent to Congress yearly. The Pentagon is presently out of sight by members of Congress and out of control even by the Army, Air Force and Navy.

Another basic hearing is needed by the Joint Committee on Printing aimed at restoring the printing of Congressional hearings and reports for maximum distribution in depository libraries and use by citizens. Hearing transcripts and very tardy online hearing records give corporate lobbyists an advantage in lobbying Congress. They can afford to pay for rapid access transcripts or personally go to the hearings that citizens may not be able to easily attend. Few citizens can afford such luxuries. (See the February/March 2024 issue of the Capitol Hill Citizen).

By the way, voters should demand that Congress be in session five days a week instead of three days a week with long recesses. More hearings, and the critical information work of our national legislature, requires a full week's work, for which they get fully paid. (We will have additional proposals for blockbuster hearings in the future.)

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

TED RALL

Don't Negotiate Against Yourself, Lefties

Anyone who has experience haggling at a flea market has intuited the basics of negotiating. If a seller offers the item you want at a fire-sale price that you're unlikely to find elsewhere, smile, pay the asking price and walk away before they change their mind. If the requested price is many times higher than you're willing to pay, just walk away. Stratospheric pricing pretty much eliminates the odds that you'll be able to come to terms. Your time is better spent haggling with a different vendor. In other cases, offer a lowball rate and work toward middle ground.

In politics, liberals tend to negotiate against themselves. Rather than pushing for radical change, Democrats begin with an incremental approach that factors in their conservative opponents' counteroffer and begins from there. Since the Right is aggressive, they push back to the point that the resulting change is a smaller improvement that, in many cases, is so tiny as to be a rounding error. Former President Barack Obama's opening gambit in the health care reform debate illustrates this phenomenon.

We know what we wound up with: Obamacare, originally developed by the right-wing Heritage Foundation, is a free-market scheme that prioritizes insurance company profits, relies on economies of scale and assumes robust competition will reduce costs. (In practice, the health care business is *de facto* monopolized to the extent that there is little downward pressure on prices. The industry is disincentivized to participate in the public sector to the point that only a small fraction of the health plans available individually and via private employers can be purchased in the Affordable

Our goal is Revolution. But we are completely, for the time being, disorganized. There is no viable leftist political party with a revolutionary orientation, no well-funded, highly distributed media outlet to disseminate news and opinion with our point of view. We have, even in the so-called progressive "Squad" in the House of Representatives, zero elected representatives who seek to abolish capitalism and prioritize the needs and desires of the people. Absent these basic organizational structures or an as-yet-undeveloped internet-driven organizational strategy that short-circuits traditional grassroots organizing and agitation strategies, emancipation by revolution will continue to elude us.

In the meantime, we must lay the groundwork for revolutionary foment. We must, within the constructs and limitations of the current capitalist system, expose the true nature of a government that claims to be by and for the people but is in truth nothing but a Ponzi scheme that extracts wealth from the poor and the working class upward to the tiny few at the top point of the pyramid. We can and must accomplish this by exposing the system's internal, self-evident contradictions.

This begins by asking why the powers that be repeatedly and continuously find billions of dollars for all manner of destructive nonsense – foreign wars, corrupt defense contractors, tax breaks to for-profit corporations – repeatedly and continuously inform us that there is never enough money to sat-

isfy basic human needs.

We know, when we demand that everyone have enough to eat, that the political elites will refuse or ignore us. We expect, when we demand that everyone be housed, that we will be told to stuff it. We understand, when we demand that a day of work should be paid fairly, that we are asking for something that they will never agree to – indeed, that they cannot because it would destroy them and their self-perceived identity in the power structure.

We make demands, not because we believe they will be achieved under this fake parliamentary-style democracy, but because they will be unreasonably refused, without just cause. We want people to hear us ask, and hear them say no, over and over in order to expose them and the fundamental nature of their system.

We are not, therefore, negotiating. We are demanding. Those who demand should appear reasonable. But we must also be ambitious. Our demands should be aggressive enough that we would genuinely be satisfied were we to achieve them and never so modest that there is a chance the ruling classes would ever seriously consider them.

Nothing less than a perfect world will do.

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



Grumpy Talk On the Trail

By MARJORIE 'SLIM' WOODRUFF

I suppose it's the human thing on a hiking trail to acknowledge one another when passing. But on a well-used trail, the same comments come up time and time again.

"Good Morning." As an introvert I don't understand why I have to say Good Morning to every member of a 30-person group. Nor does Good Afternoon roll off the tongue as nicely. Too many plosives and fricatives. Yesterday, I got yelled at for not saying a cheery enough "Good Morning" to a passing hiker. I did not realize I was at a Downton Abbey garden party.

Then there's the consoling "You're Almost There" hello. For one thing, I am almost never almost there when assured that I am. Volunteers at 10-Ks or marathons are

warned to never, ever, tell someone they are almost there. Almost there is when you can see the parking lot.

An annoying question is "Everything OK"? Why are they asking this? Admittedly I have more gray hair than brown, but do I look so decrepit that they are concerned about my well being? What would they do if I said, "It would really be OK if you took my pack!"

"How you doing?" Do they really want to know that my trick hip is acting up, and my pack irritates that weird spot on my scapula? Probably not.

"Good Luck." Again, why? Is the only thing that will assure my success a whim of fate? I used to answer, "In the words of the immortal solo climber of Mount Everest, Reinhold Messner, 'I do not believe in luck.'" That usually gets me a blank look.

"Where did you start and how long did it take you?" People usually ask me this while hiking in Grand Canyon. But why ask a random stranger how they did? I'm not racing. One woman asked me this at Bryce Canyon National Park because she and her boyfriend were attempting a loop. She

thought they were on the wrong trail, but her boyfriend thought she was wrong. Turned out he was the one who was wrong, and he wasn't happy about finding that out.

"Is it really harder hiking uphill?" Is this a trick question?

"Where are you going?" That seems a deep philosophical question to pose to a complete stranger.

"How was it?" I guess I could answer on a scale of one to 10...

"Was it worth it?" I'm always tempted to reply, "No, turn around now."

"Does this trail go anywhere?" "No," I want to say, "it just kind of sits there."

"If I hike down this trail, is there another way out?" Not really: Walk in, walk out, is usually the case.

Sometimes a joker will ask, "Are we there yet?" "I sometimes answer, 'Buddha would say, 'We are always there.' That gets me a laugh now and then."

Several times I have been asked where the next shuttle bus stop is. If this is asked while on a trail in the Grand Canyon, the answer is "A mile back and a thousand feet up the way you came." Poleaxed stare. "The

bus doesn't come down here?" "No," I want to say, "they tend to stick to the paved road."

One young man told me, "I hope I can do this." I said, "It looks as though you are." "No, I mean when I am as old as you." I guess I can take that as a compliment. Then there is the compliment: "I hope I'm as fit as you when I'm your age." I want to reply: "I might be as fit as your age!"

A friend who let her hair go gray during COVID told me that she gets a lot more positive comments than she used to: "Young hikers used to mutter under their breath when I passed them. Now they tend to do a thumbs up and say, 'Good for you.'"

I was hiking one day with a group of women who have hiked the West on trails for years, when a man stepped to the side to let us pass. He beamed at us as he said, "You ladies look radiant." Now that is the kind of trail talk I like.

Marjorie 'Slim' Woodruff is a contributor to Writers on the Range, writersontherange.org, an independent nonprofit dedicated to spurring lively conversation about the West. She is an educator at the bottom of Grand Canyon.

Sometimes You Watch 'The Bear'

By ROB PATTERSON

The 2004 Emmy Awards take place on the same day as the publication date of this issue of *The Progressive Populist*. The Hulu series *The Bear* set a record this year of the most Emmy nominations as ... a comedy. It's better classified as a dramedy, but that clumsy locution still only encompasses some of the richness to be savored in a series that is in some ways its own beast as far as categories go.

Within what I call the New Golden Age of Television that began in the 1990s as cable TV began a creative surge, there are some shows that occupy the pantheon of series mastery. *The Sopranos* and *The Wire* stand tall together atop the pinnacle, with a number of fine and notable works a smidgeon below them that also merit high stature. This honor roll can be subjective; a few of my stand outs of yore would be *Mad Men*, *Oz*, *Breaking Bad* and *Six Feet Under*.

The Bear slots nicely into such esteemed company as a genuine modern TV masterpiece. It boasts a Jeremy Allen White backstory from his portrayal of Lip Gallagher in *Shameless*, also, like *The Bear*, set in Chicago.

That character has some parallels to his star turn in this show as Carmen "Carmy" Berzatto: smart and gifted yet plagued by self doubt. This character and place lineage provides a familiarity for those of us who followed *Shameless*.

The series begins with Carmy returning to Chicago, where he escaped from to New York City to train, work and win awards as a gourmet chef. His older brother has died and named Carmy as an heir to the family's Italian beef sandwich restaurant in the Windy City's downtown. He begins to make moves to upgrade the joint, encountering pushback from the family friends who work there. In a key move for the restaurant and the show, he hires Sydney Adamu, a budding gourmet chef, played in a career-making role by Ayo Edebiri, a 28-year-old actress, comic and TV writer who has already won Emmy and Screen Actors Guild awards for her sublime portrayal.

The first two seasons are another take on the notion of *Kitchen Confidential*, diving deep into the inner workings of the professional kitchen and restaurant business as Carmy strives to transform the largely take-out sandwich shop called The Beef into a gourmet eatery named The Bear. He struggles with resistance from the staff and must contend with an older building and cookery equipment plagued.

The Chicago lineage is furthered by vet-

eran actor Oliver Platt, also a star of the Dick Wolf-produced series *Chicago Med*. On *The Bear* he's a family friend known as "Uncle" to the Berzatto clan who invests in Carmy's plan. Another Windy City element that's personally touching to me was a snippet of radio that opened the first season with DJ Lin Brehmer, a longtime friend whom I worked with in college radio at Colgate University. He went on in that field to become a star air personality and beloved Chicago voice on the city's top-rated FM rock station WXRT for three decades. Just after the series debuted in 2022, Lin went public with a diagnosis of prostate cancer, from which he died.

With season three, which I feel is in many ways the show's strongest, things do get a bit tricky. After a largely hurly-burly linear storyline in seasons one and two, on the next *The Bear* breaks a bit out of that mold to bring nuance and some backstory to the characters and *mise en scene*. Read a few gripes about it on social media and the show dropped from a 100% Rotten Tomatoes critics rating to 85%. But for me, its third season used the tools of long-form TV storytelling to add depth to the characters and tale.

And what a tale it is. A deep dive behind the scrim into a restaurant and its kitchen aiming towards the stars (from Michelin). A look at the genetic families we are born and the proverbial ones we form

with friends and at the workplace. A superbly scripted story that feels like real life with characters marvelously played. With fantastic musical choices. And the city of Chicago and its urban essence as a major secondary character. It's TV at its best, not to be missed.

Populist Picks

ALBUM: *Daylight Savings Time* by Steve Forbert – The fine neo-folk-rocker delivers yet another fine set rich with his trademark lyrical and melodic charms, as always finding the vibrant emotional richness in even the smallest human moments and the world around us.

TV DOCUMENTARY: "Brat" – Anyone who came of age during the 1980s teen/young adult movies boom will likely enjoy this exploration of "The Brat Pack" thespians on Max directed by Packer Andrew McCarthy. The term had its effect on all those tagged within it – only some of whom he talks with – and the cultural landscape. But McCarthy's observations feel like he doth protest a bit too much.

Rob Patterson is a music and entertainment writer in Austin, Texas. Email robpatterson054@gmail.com.

What Was the Paris Olympics?

The Olympic Games supercharge the problems that already exist in a host city. We saw that in Paris—but what will happen in LA?

By JULES BOYKOFF and DAVE ZIRIN

PARIS – At the closing ceremony of the Paris Olympics, outgoing International Olympic Committee President Thomas Bach said that the 2024 Summer Games "were sensational Olympic Games from start to finish." He then added, "Or dare I say: Seine-sational Games." Bach's cringe-worthy pun was only outmatched by the hyperbole of the Olympic faithful proclaiming Paris to be "the best Olympics ever." In reality, amid the inspiring, often poetic, feats of athleticism, these Games magnified the social problems of Paris—and the world.

Olympians make the Olympics, and Paris 2024 was no exception. The Paris Games featured athletes who brought exquisite skill and joy to the competition, but they also brought their politics. It started with the opening ceremony, when members of the Algerian team released roses into the Seine to honor those who were shot and drowned in the river by French police in 1961, the final year of Algeria's war of independence from colonial France. Upwards of 120 people were killed in an incident that, for decades, French officials attempted to cover up. Faïza Zerouala, a French journalist of Algerian descent who writes for Mediapart, told us, "I was very proud they did that. For me, it was proof that Algerian descendants still know who they are" and that "we don't forget the past," even if many in France are "blind to its colonial background." She added, "It was a very important tribute to the martyrs."

Later in the opening-ceremony procession, one of

Palestine's flag bearers, boxer Waseem Abu Sal, wore a white shirt embroidered with depictions of Israeli fighter jets bombing children in Gaza. He was one of eight Palestinians competing in Paris, including Layla Al-Masri who set a Palestinian national record in the 800-meter run. Fans in Paris celebrated Palestinian athletes wherever they went—even as the press largely ignored them. Few journalists bothered to interview members of the Palestinian Olympic team. The overall absence of attention Palestinian athletes received—the erasure of their struggles—mirrored the war on Gaza and the attendant suffering of deliberately unheard Palestinian civilians.

The competition brought—also underreported—political statements to the playing field. When Manizha Talash, a breakdancer from Afghanistan representing the Refugee Olympic Team, finished her performance, she unveiled a cape reading "Free Afghan Women." While fans in attendance applauded, as did the athlete from the Netherlands against whom Talash was competing, the Olympic power-brokers disqualified her. Yes, they disqualified someone from the refugee team for raising awareness about why she is a refugee. By disqualifying Talash, Olympic honchos essentially did the bidding of the Taliban, whose prohibition on women playing sports is precisely why she could not compete under the flag of her home country.

Zerouala also pointed to the importance of Kaylia Nemour, one of France's top gymnasts, who chose to switch nationalities and compete for Algeria after a protracted dispute with the French gymnastics federation, which was inflexible about where the 17-year-old gymnast trained. Zerouala dubbed Nemour's gold-medal win on the uneven bars "a colonial reparation." The victory made Nemour the first African athlete to win a medal in Olympic gymnastics.

While there was no shortage of coverage of women's boxing gold medalist Imane Khelif, who triumphed despite facing down bigotry and lies about her sex and gender, less was made about her winning gold in France as an Algerian. Khelif's refusal to speak French in her last press conference, opting for Arabic and English instead, revealed a

politics of resistance that Western journalists did not understand.

Politicians often try to exploit the Olympics—and Olympic athletes—for their political careers. But this backfired for French President Emmanuel Macron, whose constant, unrequested hugging of any French Olympian within his five-meter radius was off-putting. After French judoka Romane Dicko won bronze, Macron cupped her head in his hands, an experience that, she said, made her feel "a little embarrassed." French Olympian Hugo Hay, who qualified for the final in the 5000 meters, even called out Macron for his brazen politicking, declaring, "These are not his Games, but those of the athletes."

Macron's tanned visage also evinced a cacophony of jeers when it appeared on the jumbotron at the Olympic fan zone in Place de la Bataille Stalingrad during the gold-medal men's basketball game between the United States and France. And the Games did not boost his popularity: In early August only 27% of the country had confidence in his ability to address France's problems, only two points higher than in early July.

Amid the media hullabaloo over the Paris Olympics, serious social issues in Paris remain unresolved. To police the Olympics, there were heavily armed security forces from more than 30 different countries, but that is not all. France's political leaders also transformed the city into their own panopticon, with the French National Assembly green-lighting the use of algorithmic video surveillance. They built this security architecture ostensibly to prevent terrorism, but as is often the case, it was wielded against activists. (There were also heavily armed police units patrolling working-class, immigrant neighborhoods far from the Olympic zone.)

Off the field, the most under-discussed story were the people in Paris who paid for the Olympics with their shelter and sense of stability. About 12,500 unhoused and precariously housed people were bused out of the city. Making the city "Olympics ready" meant a "social cleansing"—or

Continued on next page

Surviving Canada's Indigenous Boarding Schools

“**S**ugarcane” is a harrowing documentary about the Canadian system of mission residential boarding schools for Native children. The 107-minute film was co-directed by Julian Brave NoiseCat, of the Canim Lake Band Tsq’escen and descendant of the Lil’Wat Nation of Mount Currie, and Emily Kassie.

Tell us about the boarding schools?

JULIAN BRAVE NOISECAT: “Sugarcane” follows an investigation into abuse and missing children at St. Joseph’s Mission, one of 139 federally-funded Indian residential schools across Canada. An amendment to the Indian Act in the 19th century made attendance at these Indian residential schools compulsory for all Indigenous children [starting 1894]. Those schools were designed, in the words of one of the people who oversaw them, to “Get rid of the Indian problem.”

While the assimilation, abuse, and potential unmarked graves at Indian residential schools has made international headlines in Canada, in the U.S. there was actually an older system of Native American boarding schools that were in some ways the model for Canada’s schools. They were setup by Army captain Richard Henry Pratt, who started a boarding school in Pennsylvania, the Carlisle Indian School [in 1879], and he described the mission of these [408] schools as: “Kill the Indian and save the man.”

They were a continent-wide system of schools that separated Indigenous children from their families that were enforced by law enforcement, the legal system, that if you did not send your children, you could face jail. There were actually Hopi elders from Arizona incarcerated at Alcatraz because they did not want their children to be taken away to these schools.

There was rampant physical, sexual and psychological abuse, and in some instances, even death. That is part and parcel to the story of how North America was colonized and what happened to First Peoples here.

EMILY KASSIE: The last school closed in 1997. They ran for over 100 years and took away hundreds of thousands of Indigenous children from their families across North America.

It seems like a sort of “Final Solution to the Indian Question.” The crimes weren’t just carried out by rogue priests; it was more part of institutional racism. Were

these schools part of a coordinated genocidal plot to exterminate Indigenous culture and people – including systemic infanticide?

NOISECAT: Words like “genocide” and “systemic” – it’s really important that we get the terminology correct when we talk about this history. It’s accurate to describe what happened at the Indian residential schools in Canada, as well as Native American boarding schools, as a form of genocide. In fact, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in Canada officially calls the Indian residential school system “cultural genocide.”

At St. Joseph’s Mission, in our documentary we uncover a pattern of infanticide where babies born to students at the school and in some instances to nuns, were forced into adoptions out of their family and community contexts, and were, in some instances, put into the incinerator to be burned with the garbage. Some babies were fathered by priests.

People can have a semantic debate how to characterize that. What we really wanted to prioritize with was an investigative truth and on top of that, an emotional truth. What is it for survivors of this history, which still has consequences in the present, to live in the aftermath of that genocide?

How many children were murdered, fathered by priests, etc.?

KASSIE: What’s so challenging and important about this story is how little we know. How few records have been opened to Indigenous communities and investigators looking for truth. The Catholic church, Canadian government and police have not fully opened their records to be able to find out what happened. “Sugarcane” uncovers testimony and evidence pointing to these horrific crimes. We’re just at the beginning of understanding the full truth... We don’t know how many children passed away at these schools... We now know through the investigation at “Sugarcane”, there were cases of babies born to girls who were thrown away.

Tell us about the investigation at St. Joseph’s Mission?

KASSIE: Charlene Belleau and Whitney Spearing are going through any archives and hundreds of interviews of testimony with survivors to try and piece together what crimes occurred at this school. First Nations across Canada are working with ground penetrating radar to detect potential graves, burials in the grounds of these schools.

Tell us about the film’s Ed NoiseCat?

NOISECAT: Ed is my dad ... “Sugarcane” is as much a journalistic investigation into missing children and abuse at St. Joseph’s Mission, as it is a personal investigation into the circumstances around my father’s birth at that Indian residential school. And then the intergenerational impacts of that school on him and our family.

Because my father was – there’s no real easy way to say this – the only known survivor of the incinerator at St.

Joseph’s Mission. He was abandoned as a baby and narrowly survived the pattern of infanticide at that school. Then he became a great artist, but carrying his own baggage ... he unfortunately did not really raise me or my little sister. So, that cycle of abandonment that began with the Indian residential schools, which systematically kept Native parents from being able to raise their children, had effects on his life, on his parents’ life, and on my life. A big part of “Sugarcane” is about not just the wrongdoing at St. Joseph’s Mission, but also the present injustices that remain long after St. Joseph’s Mission closed.

“Sugarcane” is also a road trip movie and about father-son bonding.

NOISECAT: It is. Yeah, we go on a road trip back to the res we’re from, at Canim Lake, and the mission where he was born.

KASSIE: We wanted to capture a community’s experience of reckoning in a moment where the truth is coming out and the ghosts have come back to help the story be told. We decided to film it as a vérité film and follow events as they were happening and get the perspective and emotional truth of each character.

Is it possible for humans to overcome this trauma?

NOISECAT: It’s absolutely possible for people to overcome and also learn how to live with these truths. We can never rewrite what happened. We can let people know what happened and grapple with it. But what happened happened. People suffered and have died as a consequence and continue to, to this day.

“Sugarcane” is not just about these atrocities, it’s also about what has held people together and kept them attached to their place, community and culture, despite this massive, continent-scale, systematic effort to alienate people from each other and their selves, with violence. This film also points the camera at things that continue to bring us together, make us love each other, and help us endure ...

At the same time, it’s about people who have been dehumanized, it’s also about people who are in deeper touch with things fundamental to who we are as human beings.

What would justice look like?

NOISECAT: Justice needs to be defined by the people who survived the injustice. The form that justice might take might not be through a court system, a settlement, policy, but might be through ceremony; Indigenous jurisprudence; and laws we define as sovereign people.

Sugarcane opened in New York and Toronto Aug. 9 and has expanded to additional theaters.

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 expanded version of this was originally published Aug. 16 by Truthdig. See the original version online.

Zirin...

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what activists from Le Revers de la Médaille (The Other Side of the Medal) called *nettoyage social*. Some were given shelter; others, their whereabouts are unknown. This was an Olympic-size human rights travesty that deserved more coverage.

Now, attention shifts to Los Angeles, host of the 2028 Summer Games. The finale of the Paris 2024 closing ceremony involved a gaudy, star-studded handoff of the

torch to LA Mayor Karen Bass. But not even the shine from Snoop Dogg’s golden shoes could blind Kenneth Mejia, LA’s city controller, from the grim realities that differentiate LA from Paris. Mejia posted a graphic comparing the two cities on metrics like transit use and the population of un-housed people. When we consider the massive number of unhoused and precariously housed people in LA—10 times as many as Paris, according to Mejia—one shudders what the “solutions” will entail, especially with California Governor Gavin Newsom

waging his war against homeless encampments.

The Olympics are an inequality machine, supercharging all the problems that already exist in the host city. Los Angeles brings Hollywood glitz and glamor but also homelessness, displacement, racialized policing, and a changing environment. If there is one lesson to learn from Paris it is this: Be sober-minded about hosting the Games, don’t drink the Kool-Aid, and definitely do not wait until 2027 to start organizing. There are already activists from

NOlympicsLA doing grassroots activism. People should join their efforts to make sure that the most marginalized populations don’t pay the highest price for the next Games.

Dave Zirin is the sports editor at The Nation. Jules Boykoff is a professor of political science at Pacific University in Oregon and author of six books on the Olympic Games, most recently “What Are the Olympics For?” Email edgeofsports@gmail.com.

Hartmann...

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litical contributions went from an average of a few hundred thousand dollars a year during the decade preceding 2010 to multiple millions every year after Thomas’ vote. Americans for Tax Fairness calculated it at an 862% increase just for the Crow family.

In this post-Citizens United era, truth has become a casualty of big money. For example, according to opensecrets.org, the Empower Parents PAC has contributed \$82.5 million, Susquehanna International Group \$69.7 million, Citadel LLC \$59.9 million, and Uline Inc \$59.6 million to Republican causes so far. And they’re just getting started.

Ever since Citizens United legalized literally unlimited contributions to the new category of political action committees it created (SuperPACs), just in the 15 months from January 2023 to April of 2024 over \$8.6 billion has been raised for this year’s federal campaigns with over 65% of that money – \$5.6 billion – running through PACs. And, as noted, they’re just getting started.

Governor Inslee was confident his carbon tax was going to pass, just like Jayapal,

Bowman, and Bush expected a comfortable ride to re-election.

Then big money came in and lowered the boom.

So, get ready. It’s going to get ugly. There’s not a competitive House or Senate race anywhere in America that’s immune from massive dark money that’s been thrown together at the last minute to remain untraceable.

And the presidential race will be unlike anything ever seen before: already a South African immigrant billionaire has promulgated a deepfake video of Harris calling herself a DEI hire, while J.D. Vance is trying to Swift Boat Tim Walz.

To compound the problem, Republicans on the Federal Election Commission just announced that they will prevent that agency from regulating deepfakes in this presidential election. And in Wisconsin, dark rightwing money is attempting to reshape that state’s form of governance to give more power to Republicans in its legislature.

Did I mention they’re just getting started? We won’t even know the dimensions of the coming onslaught until it’s upon us in September and October.

As Senator Elizabeth Warren noted, echoing a position held by fully 72% of

American voters, “Our democracy shouldn’t be bought and paid for by the wealthy and powerful.”

If Democrats survive the onslaught that’s coming and emerge victorious at the federal level, the first order of business next year must be to strip the cancer of dark money out of our body politic.

We can’t take anything for granted. We must phone bank, canvas, write postcards, talk to friends and neighbors, help people register to vote, and share the good word.

If we fail, the poison Thomas and his Republican colleagues on the Court have injected into our democracy may well prove fatal to our system of government, signaling an end to the American Experiment and the beginning of a full-blown oligarchy.

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.

Carlson...

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In the battleground state of North Carolina the week before the convention, Harris promoted her plan to ban price gouging by food producers and implement a \$25,000 down payment assistance program for some first-time homebuyers. While campaign promises often look different than the reality of a presidency, these are policies that could help her stand out, if she continues to promote and flesh them out during her campaign.

At this writing, there are two days left of the DNC with speeches from Barack and Michelle Obama and Harris herself to look forward to. But I, for one, am eager for what happens after the Chicago fanfare comes to a close.

Claire Carlson is staff correspondent of The Daily Yonder, where this article was originally published in its email newsletter, “Keep It Rural.” See DailyYonder.com.

Support The Progressive Populist Fund (see pg. 2).

AMY GOODMAN



Many in the Democrats' Big Tent support a ceasefire in Gaza and return of hostages. But party officials wouldn't let one speak from the podium.

A Sit-in for Peace in Gaza at the Democratic National Convention

The Democratic National Convention in Chicago Aug. 19-22 was a four-day event designed to build momentum to propel Vice President Kamala Harris to the presidency. Many of the delegates at the convention from throughout the Democratic Party's "Big Tent," from Arab Americans to African Americans to Jewish Americans to union members to

youth support a ceasefire in Gaza.

Many delegates wore a keffiyeh sash that reads "Democrats for Palestinian Rights," and a number wear buttons calling for an arms embargo against Israel, reading, "Not Another Bomb." A clear majority of Democrats support a ceasefire in Gaza and a return of all the hostages held there.

In February, as the death toll in Gaza mounted, activists began building the Uncommitted Movement, casting their votes for "uncommitted" instead of for Joe Biden. As a result, there were more than 30 "Uncommitted" delegates in attendance at the DNC.

A key demand of the movement was for a Palestinian American to speak from the convention podium. After party leaders rejected their demand on Aug. 21, Uncommitted delegates began a peaceful sit-in outside the United Center, the convention site.

Delegates inside the convention heard Stevie Wonder singing one of his signature songs, "Higher Ground," with the lyrics, "Powers keep on lying, While your people keep on dying," followed by speeches from Oprah Winfrey, former President Bill Clinton and from Minnesota Gov. Tim Walz, Harris's Vice Presidential nominee. Outside, Uncommitted activists from around the country spoke out:

"My name is Ruwa Romman. I am a Georgia state representative. I am an elected Democrat ... We are not here to create any divisions. As my colleagues have said over and over and over again, the only reason we are here — the only reason we are here

— is to ensure that Donald Trump will never make it to the White House, and save the lives of the people that we love. It's about the fact that today I watched my party say, 'Our tent can fit anti-choice Republicans,' but it can't fit an elected official like me?"

Addressing the issue of a Palestinian American speaker, Romman continued,

"This would have truly and sincerely been a beautiful gesture to show this party cares about the cries of an Israeli child the same way they care about the cries of a Palestinian child. We are not asking for too much."

Sabrene Odeh spoke next, a Palestinian American delegate from Washington State,

"How many more Palestinians need to die until the American government stops sending arms to kill them? What more do we have to do?"

As delegates exited the United Center following Walz's acceptance speech, more visited the sit-in. Among them was Muslim Minnesota Congressman Ilhan Omar, herself a former war refugee from Somalia.

"I love you all," Omar said. "This is not about just winning votes. It's about living up to the words that we say about caring for our neighbors, for having a heart, for being compassionate. If that is who we are as Democrats, there is no compassion in continuing to fund this genocidal war. There is no compassion in turning our heads away from the piles of dead bodies that have been going on for the last 10 years. There is no compassion and care in simply keeping this

the status quo. There is compassion and care in saying we know that a ceasefire is only possible if we use every leverage that we have. And the biggest leverage that we have is to stop sending bombs."

A number of Jewish Democrats visited, or participated in the sit-in as well, including Lily Greenberg Call. She was the first Jewish Biden appointee to resign over Gaza:

"I resigned in protest of the president's unconditional support for Israel's assault on Gaza ... We, as Jewish people, know what it is like to be persecuted, know what it is like to be victims of state-sponsored violence, know what it is like to have an entire country dedicate itself to your extermination. That is what I learned about being Jewish, that because of that obligation, you stand up for other people."

As this column goes to press, the Democratic National Committee still refused to allow a Palestinian American to speak from the podium, and the sit-in continued. As the Uncommitted delegates continued the painful task of counting the bodies of friends and relatives in Gaza, Democratic party leaders at the DNC were counting votes.

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."

Having a Baby at 40 and Giving Women the Space to Make Decisions for Themselves

By BONNIE JEAN FELDKAMP

When I told my neighbor that my son had sisters 15 and 19 years older than him, her eyes flew open. She wasn't shocked; she was so relieved to hear this and had questions. Her son is about to turn 2, and she's been feeling the pressure to have another baby now instead of waiting. Women hear so much advice when it comes to children, and one of those bits of advice is about the optimal age gap for siblings.

Who comes up with these standards?

Life happens, and every situation is different. Every

decision is valid. Women need grace and space to do what's best for them and their family, not pressure and judgment.

For me, the life that happened included a divorce followed by diagnosis of autoimmune arthritis. With illness came toxic medication that did not make room for dreaming of another baby. I had put thoughts of another child out of my mind.

Then a new medication came on the scene and once again I had options. I was also in my late 30s.

Then, my youngest daughter started her period for the first time. She had ceremoniously entered womanhood and all I could see was that I didn't have any babies left.

"I'm not ready for this part of my life to be over," I cried to my husband.

We had discussed one more child, but never followed through. Our youngest hitting puberty seemed to shake the sand in the glass. Time was running out.

We decided to let our oldest finish high school and our youngest get through middle school without the added stress of a pregnant mom in the house. Then we started trying.

"Don't get discouraged if it takes a while," my OB-GYN told us. I was 39 years old after all.

If we got lucky, I'd officially be an "older mom." But as an older couple, we were also more financially secure — and after creating a family from two single-parent homes, we knew this challenge was one we could handle with love and grace.

"Oh my gosh!" I exclaimed from inside the bathroom. It had not taken a while — we were pregnant after the first month of trying. It was really real. We were going to have a baby.

In the fall I turned 40, with my husband by my side and his older sisters in the waiting room, our son was born. And it all felt perfect.

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Find her on social media @WriterBonnie, or email her at Bonnie@WriterBonnie.com. Check out her weekly YouTube videos at <https://www.youtube.com/bonniejeanfeldkamp>.

Dispatches ...

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ber of migrants entering the country illegally following an executive order from President Joe Biden in early June that widely stopped granting asylum to migrants.

Federal authorities apprehended roughly 32% fewer migrants in Texas in June, the first month that Biden's order was in place. The sharp drop of apprehensions in Texas was also seen across the rest of the southwest border and continued in July, when they hit a new low during the Biden administration.

The administration has credited his executive order for the decrease, while Abbott has credited the state's \$11 billion Operation Lone Star border mission that launched in March 2021. Through the border initiative, the state has dispatched thousands of Texas National Guard troops to patrol the border and thousands of Department of Public Safety troopers who arrest migrants on state charges.

Two immigrants' rights groups in Texas sued to stop the executive order. Texas, which has sued the administration over its previous immigration policies, has asked a federal court to help defend the policy, court records say.

J.D. VANCE STANDS BY 'CAT LADIES' SLUR. Donald Trump's running mate, Ohio Sen. J.D. Vance sat down for an interview with "Meet the Press" and once again refused to apologize for characterizing Democrats as "a bunch of childless cat ladies," Walter Eikenkel noted at Daily Kos (8/26)

"Look, I regret, certainly, that a lot of people took it the wrong way," Vance told NBC's Kristen Welker in a textbook non-apology.

"And I certainly regret the DNC and Kamala Harris lied about it." In no way did anyone at the DNC or Harris "lie" about Vance's statement, which was recorded for posterity and amplified in late July by none other than Hillary Clinton.

"I'm a real person. I'm going to make jokes. I'm going to say things sarcastically." Vance responded when pressed by Welker. Real person Vance then argued that the important information to take away from his belittling of millions of Americans without children was that, "this country has become too anti-family."

It's an interesting redirect from someone who skipped out on a vote that would have expanded the child tax credit, and who represents a political party that worked intensely to sunset the expanded child tax credit that helped tens of millions of children get out of poverty in the first place.

GAVIN NEWSOM PULLS 1-MINUTE FACT CHECK ON FOX NEWS. California Gov. Gavin Newsom (D) has made a recent pastime of humiliating right-wing luminaries like Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis (R). So it's no surprise that when he appeared on Fox News (8/22), Newsom made quick work of host Brett Baier's attempts to push the sexist right-wing talking point that Vice President Kamala Harris is a soft-on-crime commie, Walter Eikenkel noted at Daily Kos (8/23).

Baier brought up California's Proposition 47, approved by voters to decrease the number of prisoners by reducing penalties for some nonviolent drug crimes and petty theft offenses. The resulting law raised the threshold for felony theft to \$950. It didn't make stealing legal or unpunishable, despite con-

servative claims to the contrary.

"Which is, by the way, the 10th toughest threshold in the United States of America, meaning you can steal up to \$950 of goods and it will be charged as a misdemeanor," Newsom informed Baier. "You can steal \$2,500 in the state of Texas," Newsom pointed out. "Why you're not focusing on those other 40 states is beyond me. Tenth toughest felony threshold in the United States of America. That is a fact."

The \$950 threshold has become a major talking point for convicted felon Donald Trump (who has done zero time for his criminal offense) over the past couple of weeks. During a press conference at his Bedminster, N.J., golf course (8/15), the GOP presidential nominee blathered and lied about the law.

"You can rob a store and you have kids, thieves going into stores with calculators, calculating how much it is," Trump claimed. "Because if it's less than \$950, they can rob, but not get charged."

Stuck with this dead-end talking point, Baier asked, "Do you think that the pitch that [Harris] was a tough prosecutor in California is going to stick?"

Newsom's response was lightning-fast.

"Do you remember her primary for president?" a laughing Newsom asked. "She was attacked from the left for being too tough, for being a prosecutor, for having a prosecutorial mindset."

The California governor is in a different weight class than these guys.

'THAT'S MY DAD!' STOLE OUR HEARTS. MEET GUS WALZ. The unbilled star of the Wednesday (8/21) Democratic National Convention was Gus Walz—the 17-year-old son of Gwen

and Tim Walz—who couldn't hold in his tears, his joy, or his pride at seeing his father on the national stage. Joan McCarter noted at Daily Kos (8/22).

"Hope, Gus, and Gwen, you are my entire world and I love you," Walz said in his speech, after talking about the years of fertility treatments he and Gwen underwent to have children. That's when Gus stood up to proclaim to the whole convention center and everyone watching "That's my dad!"

The Walzes have opened up about their family in a *People* magazine interview, and especially about Gus, a young man whose parents say his condition is a "secret power." He has a non-verbal learning disorder, ADHD, and an anxiety disorder.

"Like so many American families, it took us time to figure out how to make sure we did everything we could to make sure Gus would be set up for success as he was growing up," the couple told *People*.

"It took time, but what became so immediately clear to us was that Gus' condition is not a setback," they added. They explained that Gus "is brilliant, hyper-aware of details that many of us pass by, and above all else, he's an excellent son and brother to his sibling."

The Walz's family values shine through in that interview, just like they did that night in Tim Walz's speech. He's taken the simple, beautiful message that "everybody belongs" to the national debate, and for him it clearly starts at home.

That was true before he became the nominee. It's in all those viral videos he's done with his daughter, Hope, who makes fun of him unmercifully as a daughter should. It's all over Walz's social media pages.

Continued on next page

Did Joe Biden Get the Send-Off He Deserved?

By DANA MILBANK

From my seat in Section 307 of the United Center in Chicago, the first night of the Democratic National Convention was a good show. Democrats roared for Hillary Clinton and adored Vice President Kamala Harris's cameo. But it was supposed to be Joe Biden's night.

Speaker after speaker thanked him. The crowd chanted "Thank you, Joe!" Yet the party thanked Joe by bumping him out of prime time. Biden, who was supposed to come out at 9:45 p.m. local time, had to wait until 10:25. So I asked my colleagues Ruth Marcus and E.J. Dionne Jr.: Was this the send-off Biden deserved?

Dana Milbank: Biden's speech was powerful and moving, but millions of Americans probably missed it because of the hour. Some will inevitably wonder whether the DNC did this intentionally. As his speech went on past 11 — midnight on the East Coast — I was sorry to see hundreds of people heading for the exits before he finished. I think he deserved a little better. E.J. and Ruth, tell me why I'm wrong.

Ruth Marcus: This was the speech Biden planned to give as nominee, with a Harris-Walz overlay tacked onto it. That's entirely understandable. Biden wanted to be in Chicago in a very different capacity. This is, in all likelihood, the last great speech of his career, with more public attention on him now than he will ever have again. He is Joe Biden, after all, and — I write this with warmth — he has a lot to say. About his presidency and what he accomplished. About the clear and present danger posed by Donald Trump. About the imperative of electing Harris and Tim Walz. So, he got his time, although not in prime time.

E.J. Dionne: This was a comprehensive

case for his presidency. It included a lot that he might have said if he had been the nominee, but I think it was even more achievement-heavy than an acceptance speech because he was speaking to those who will judge his contributions and to history.

Ruth: I have to say, listening to Biden, I felt gratitude for his service, but even more, gratitude for the fact that he is not the nominee and is edging out of the spotlight.

Dana: Agree. It sounded a lot like a State of the Union address. The accomplishments are huge, and he deserves the right to crow. But I did have a sense midway through it that I am very happy this is not his acceptance speech.

Ruth: It's a really interesting question to know how it would have been different if it were an acceptance speech. I kind of tend to think it would have been much the same, a justification and defense of his first four years as part of a case for another four. In this setting, it takes on a new air of trying to write the history books. And I agree, he gets the right — and as much time as he may choose to consume — to crow. He did the right thing, eventually, by deciding to withdraw as the nominee, and "Thank you, Joe" is the only possible response to that.

E.J.: I was struck by his revisiting some of the best lines he has used over the past couple of years, including: "You cannot say you love your country only when you win" and his reference to the contemporary far right as "old ghosts in new garments." Both keeper lines.

Ruth: It really was quite the mashup — almost a ChatGPT feel. But as I was hearing familiar lines, I did wonder whether it would sound differently to others who are not as immersed in the Biden oeuvre.

E.J.: Completely agree that many people might have not heard those lines. I was happy to hear them again. I spoke with Vinay Reddy, Biden's chief speechwriter, on Monday morning before he left for Chicago. I asked him to distill the message of this speech. Here's what he said: "How do you choose to use the presidency? Trump used it to divide the country and appeal to our

worst fears. Joe Biden appeals to the goodness of us, the hopefulness of us, the decency of us. Kamala Harris does as well. Democracy and freedom depend on those virtues." I think you heard some of that in this speech, and especially in the lead-up speeches.

Dana: A couple of the best lines came toward the end: "I love the job, but I love my country more." And "I promise I'll be the best volunteer Harris and Walz's camp have ever seen." Also, the crowd was adoring. It was quite emotional in the hall.

Ruth: I don't mean to sound churlish or mean-spirited, but I feel honestly relieved to be leaving the Biden-era behind. We need a fresh voice. I did absolutely love the best volunteer line. It evokes the selflessness of the moment. And the spirit of grace in which Biden should be addressing it.

Dana: Yes, we can at once celebrate his sacrifice for country and feel relieved. So, was he intentionally bumped into the midnight hour? Or was that just poor time management?

Ruth: Hello, these are Democrats! They're not good at running things on time. Remember George McGovern speaking in the wee hours? I always believe in incompetence over conspiracies, and this just seemed to me to be the predictable result of loading in so many speakers, not a plot against Biden.

E.J.: Yes, they probably should have made adjustments so Biden would not have been pushed so late. But there were a lot of powerful speeches during the evening that might have done more political work for the ticket. Clinton was on fire, and so was Sen. Raphael G. Warnock (D-Ga.). A clean flow from Clinton to Warnock to Biden would have been good, but I think the energy and gratitude of the crowd largely made up for the lateness.

Ruth: Can I take a moment to give a shout out to Jill Biden? It's always harder for the spouse to turn the other cheek and give up the fight. And I thought she was really gracious and supportive toward Harris.

Dana: The Ashley Biden intro, and Joe Biden dabbing his eyes, was also very mov-

ing.

Ruth: Biden dabbing his eyes got me, too. I am a sucker for proud and loving dads.

E.J.: Agree totally on Jill and Ashley. That had to be really hard for Jill and she pulled it off with, as you said Ruth, a lot of graciousness.

Ruth: This was a combination of Biden's do-over from the flubbed debate and his valedictory. Most people will experience it from headlines and TV (or social media) clips, and I suspect his "but I love my country more" and "best volunteer" lines, along with his sharp attacks on Trump, will be the most prominent. Biden achieved what he wanted to achieve, which was a defense of himself and his presidency. Democrats achieved what they wanted to achieve, which was a decent send-off. Now they can move on to the real business of the convention and the election.

Dana: Any other moments from the night you particularly enjoyed?

E.J.: I was really impressed by Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez (D-N.Y.), United Automobile Workers President Shawn Fain and NBA coach Steve Kerr. I cannot remember hearing as explicit a set of appeals on behalf of the working class at a Democratic Convention as we heard from AOC and Fain. And Kerr was great for bringing out patriotism — I love hearing Democrats chant "USA! USA!" A basketball coach defining leadership and shouting out "Coach Walz" was a good touch. (Yes, fellow Celtics fans, I agree he should have played Jayson Tatum more!)

Dana: Sadly, James Taylor got cut from the lineup to save time tonight, which confirms that the timing problem was not intentional. Dare we hope he'll be relocated to later in the week?

Ruth: This was the tragedy of the evening for me. Bring back James.

Dana Milbank is a political columnist for the Washington Post, where this appeared. Follow him on Twitter @Milbank.

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The Right To Decide

By GENE NICHOL

We learned in August that voters in Arizona and Missouri will decide whether to enshrine a presumptive right to abortion in their state constitutions. 65% of likely Arizona voters told pollsters they support the measure. More signatures were gathered to place the issue on the ballot than has ever occurred in Arizona history.

Similar proposals are already on the ballot in Nevada, South Dakota, Colorado, Florida, New York and Maryland. In the two years since the Dobbs decision, abortion rights supporters have prevailed in all seven states where the issue has been put before the voters. Something of a pattern appears.

North Carolina, sadly, doesn't recognize the right to initiative. But an abortion amendment could be placed on the ballot if referred by the General Assembly. State Sen. Rachel Hunt (D-Mecklenburg) has attempted to do

exactly that — filing the "Protect Women's Healthcare" proposal (Senate Bill 909).

Republican leaders made sure it went nowhere. Even though they are perennial advocates of a wild and often silly array of state constitutional amendment offerings, they apparently don't want to hear from Tar Heels on one of the most vital personal liberty questions to arise in North Carolina history. I'm guessing they're a little frightened by the gale that's blowing. So much for the will of the people.

And it's not that North Carolina Republicans don't want to change the state constitution in November. Following the advice of election-denying Donald Trump lawyer, Cleta Mitchell, Republicans have already placed on the ballot a measure to alter the language of Art. VI, sec. 1 of the NC Constitution. It would say, if passed, "only a citizen of the United States who is 18 years of age" can vote in the state.

It wouldn't change North Carolina's constitutional and statutory requirements in any meaningful way. But it does follow the Republican political playbook — turning out the

base by implying, falsely, that undocumented immigrants are voting in North Carolina elections. They aren't. And won't be. But better to throw up the fictitious specter than focus on women's crucial, life-altering, reproductive freedoms. Why pay attention to what's real when you can dwell on the animosity-laced terrain of the fake? How Trumpian.

Republicans got surprising (and disappointing) levels of support from Democrats on the "citizens only" referral. I'm guessing many were reluctant to be beaten over their head in November for a provision that doesn't actually do anything.

Jim Womack, president of the hilariously-named North Carolina Election Integrity Team, said Republican lawmakers would support the proposed constitutional change "simply because it will bring conservatives to the polls." House Speaker Tim Moore put a little brighter gleam on it, calling it "very important ... that we get that to the people to be able to vote on it."

Sen. Brad Overcash (R-Gaston), grandly, told his colleagues: "The opportunity today is to empower the people of

North Carolina to amend their own state constitution." Buck Newton, Senate Republican from Wayne County, echoed Overstreet, declaring it "only fair that the citizens of this state ... (be) given the opportunity to decide (this issue) for themselves." You bet.

I'm certain that hundreds of thousands, or perhaps millions, more North Carolinians would prefer to decide the crushingly concrete abortion issue for themselves than the imagined peril of non-citizen voting. Why not "empower" them? Isn't it "only fair they decide." Or do our Republican leaders merely use the referendum system to distort the democratic process, not to assure it? I fear we know what the answer to that question is.

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

Dispatches ...

Continued from previous page

That's a pretty sharp contrast to those other guys. You don't see a whole lot of love oozing from Donald Jr. or Eric for their dad Donald at the Republican National Convention. Neither Trump's wife nor daughter Ivanka chose to speak this time around, and have been noticeably—and deliberately in the case of Ivanka—absent from the campaign trail. And let's not forget Trump's youngest.

"I also wanna thank my entire family for being here. Don, Kimberly, Ivanka and Jared. Eric and Lara. Tiffany and Michael. Barron," Trump said at the Fiserv Forum in Milwaukee, Wis., at RNC. "We love our Barron."

Barron, however, was not at the RNC, and *Newsweek* reported, "led to laughter from the crowd."

Here's what Sen. J.D. Vance, Trump's vice president pick, said about his family in his acceptance speech: "I'm joined by my beautiful wife, Usha, an incredible lawyer and a better mom. And our three beautiful kids, Ewan who's 7, Vivek who's 4, Mirabel who's 2. Now they're back at the hotel, and kids, if you're watching, Daddy loves you very much but get your butts in bed. It's 10 o'clock."

Feel the love.

A few weeks later, Vance went on a podcast with YouTube comedians the NELK Boys where he laughed about telling Ewan "Son, shut the hell up for 30 seconds about Pikachu" while he was on the phone with Trump.

If it's about family values, Democrats win every time.

DOJ FILES RENT-FIXING LAWSUIT AGAINST CORPORATE LANDLORDS' GO-TO SOFTWARE FIRM. Executives at the property manage-

ment software company RealPage claimed they had the "greater good" in mind when they offered corporate landlords a price-fixing algorithm service, said the U.S. Department of Justice as it filed a lawsuit against the firm—but the scheme allegedly drove rental costs up in communities across the country, contributing to the housing crisis, Julia Conley noted at CommonDreams (8/23).

The antitrust lawsuit, filed with attorneys general from states including California and Colorado, accused RealPage of using confidential data about its clients to algorithmically determine the highest price renters would pay, using its AI software.

U.S. Attorney General Merrick Garland and other officials said the company has violated antitrust laws by providing the service, which gives corporate landlords recommended rental prices and allows them to align

prices with one another instead of having to compete.

Assistant Attorney General Jonathan Kanter said the lawsuit is "best understood in the words of RealPage's own executives," who have said the company's software allows landlords to "drive every possible opportunity to increase price, even in the most downward trending or unexpected conditions."

"RealPage tells landlords that it would prefer everybody succeeding versus essentially trying to compete against one another," said Kanter. "But that's not how free markets work. Competition among landlords, not RealPage, should determine prices for renters."

Garland added that "Americans should not have to pay more in rent because a company has found a new way to scheme with landlords to break the law."

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