

The Progressive POPULIST

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Goodbye to All That: From Carter to the Crater

Cynics made fun of Jimmy Carter because he seemed so decent and upright, and now we've re-elected a gross felon who has never been suspected of decency, honesty, generosity or even presidential dignity.

By HAL CROWTHER

The same day the media reported the death of Jimmy Carter, a federal appeals court upheld a jury's decision that Donald Trump had sexually abused E. Jean Carroll in a New York City department store. Carter's death at 100, at the close of a merciless calendar year and mercifully before the next inauguration, underscored what a discouraged old-timer like me might characterize as a cataclysmic 50-year decline in America's public integrity.

Dramatic contrasts between the late President Carter and the once-and-future President Trump range far beyond the visual shock, the smiling farmer versus the sneering, snarling predator. The man who promised his constituents "I will never lie to you" versus a man who must have taken a secret oath that he would never tell the truth, and never did. The politician dedicated to "doing the right thing" versus one dedicated only to doing his own thing, at whatever cost. The devout Christian whose 77-year marriage was described by the Carters and all their friends as a great Southern love story versus ... my God, it's too sordid to contemplate ... a serial adulterer and multiply accused sex criminal? On the one hand, a humanitarian who hammered nails for poor families' houses, on the other a fake mogul from reality TV who courted and cheated porn stars.

After Carter's death, one of his old Atlanta friends eulogized him as "an example of how you want to live your life." When Trump dies, most of us who survive him will remember him as a perfect example of how not to. Why has the electorate's taste in leadership changed so violently, in such an embarrassing direction? I have theories, but not one I can present with full confidence. Half a century's changes have been cosmic, of course. Cynics made fun of Carter because he was such a Boy Scout, a Sunday school teacher who seemed so decent and upright, almost too good to be true. Now we've elected — re-elected — a gross felon who has never been suspected of decency, honesty, generosity or even presidential dignity. He peddles gold-painted sneakers, guitars, bibles and fragrances ("Here are my new perfumes and

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Illustration by DOLORES CULLEN

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THE BIG LIE PARTY
TAKES OVER

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*By working together at all levels—
from the shop floor to Congress—
we can find how to build power*

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US NEEDS NATIONAL HEALTHCARE
*The for-profit health insurance industry
attached itself to us like a bloodsucking tick
and 'Scientific Racism' is a reason. why*

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AN EDITORIAL

Big Lie Party Takes Power

When Donald Trump is sworn in as the nation's 47th president, the Republican takeover of federal government will be complete. The Republican majorities in the House and Senate are small, but they are enough to back up whatever high crimes and misdemeanors the once and future Liar in Chief might commit.

Trump is perhaps the most prolific liar in American history. The Washington Post Fact Checker tallied 30,573 lies told by Trump in his first term as president, and his biggest lie was the unfounded claim that Democrats stole the 2020 election, which inspired riots at the Capitol on Jan. 6, 2021, in a last-ditch attempt to stop the certification of the vote, but Joe Biden replaced Trump in the White House.

During the interregnum, Trump maintained control of the Republican Party and insisted that Republicans adopt the Big Lie that Trump was still the rightful president.

During the past election year, Glen Kessler, the Post's chief Fact Checker, noted, "Trump once again resorted to false claims and sometimes outrageous lies, especially on immigration and the economy. He rode a wave of discontent about inflation — a problem in every industrialized country after the pandemic — to falsely claim that the economy was a disaster, despite relatively low unemployment, falling inflation and strong growth."

In 2024, Kessler noted, the Post's most-read fact check was Trump's false claim in October 2024 about Hurricane Helene relief efforts, claiming there was no money for North Carolina because Joe Biden spent FEMA funds on migrants. "What's even richer is that when Trump was president, he did exactly what he claimed Biden did — funding migrant programs with FEMA disaster aid," Kessler noted.

Two weeks before Trump was to be inaugurated again (and perhaps to distract attention from his scheduled sentencing two days later for 34 felonies in New York), Trump recklessly blamed California Gov. Gavin Newsom for wildfires that were rapidly spreading across the hills surrounding Los Angeles.

In a Jan. 8 post on "Truth Social," Trump said, "Governor Gavin Newsom [sic] refused to sign the water restoration declaration put before him that would have allowed millions of gallons of water, from excess rain and snow melt from the North, to flow daily into many parts of California, including the areas that are currently burning in a virtually apocalyptic way. He wanted to protect an essentially worthless fish called a smelt, by giving it less water (it didn't work!), but didn't care about the people of California. Now the ultimate price is being paid. I will demand that this incompetent governor allow beautiful, clean, fresh water to FLOW INTO CALIFORNIA! He is the blame for this. On top of it all, no water for fire hydrants, not fire-fighting planes. A true disaster!"

By that time, three raging fires had consumed more than 5,000 acres, with no containment, and the flames were spreading at unprecedented levels, driven by winds of up to 100 mph, which kept the state from using firefighting airplanes to stop the advance.

Newsom noted there was no "water restoration declaration" at issue and state reservoirs were filled, but the demand on fire hydrants by hundreds of firefighters reduced water pressure to the point that they were ineffective against wildfires as hurricane-force winds blew the flames and cinders into new neighborhoods.

Reckless statements such as Trump's attempt to politicize a

wildfire catastrophe in California because it is governed by Democrats, as well as his musing that the US should take control of Greenland from Denmark (a NATO ally) and the Panama Canal from the Republic of Panama by force, if necessary, as well as his proposal to annex Canada as the 51st of the United States, should undermine any belief that Trump is fit for the presidency. But his political appointees embrace his craziness, starting with the Big Lie that he won the 2020 election, and they must pledge their loyalty to him over the Constitution. Republican senators are expected to vote to confirm his dubious nominees for Cabinet positions, and they are threatened with being primaried if they resist.

Among other "big lies" Republicans must embrace to advance in the party (many of which were noted in a Jan. 8 column by Thom Hartmann at HartmannReport.com) are:

- Climate change is not responsible for the increased ferocity of wildfires, hurricanes, windstorms or other extreme weather events;
- Giving tax cuts to billionaires and corporations helps average working people;
- Joe Biden opened the southern border for four years and Democrats encouraged illegal immigrants to vote;
- Social Security is going broke and can only be fixed by cutting benefits or privatization.

• A national healthcare system, such as Medicare For All, won't work in America, even though it works in every other advanced democracy in the world.

• Free or inexpensive college doesn't benefit the nation, but student debt builds "individual responsibility."

- Gun control laws lead to higher crime rates.
- Public schools are indoctrinating children with Marxist and homosexual ideologies and Critical Race Theory is being taught in elementary schools to make White children feel guilty.

Trump added "convicted felon" to his resumé on Jan. 10, as New York Judge Juan Merchan sentenced him to "unconditional discharge" for 34 felony counts of falsifying business records to cover up a hush money payment Trump's attorney, Michael Cohen, made to porn star Stormy Daniels to keep her quiet during the 2016 campaign. Trump was found guilty by a New York state court jury in May 2024 after Daniels testified about the one-night sexual encounter in 2006, while Melania Trump was nursing their infant son, Barron.

Trump, whose business reimbursed Cohen for the payment, insisted he did nothing wrong and refused to take responsibility for his actions, a position endorsed by many Republican misleaders, including House Speaker Mike Johnson (R-La.), who issued a statement after Trump's sentencing, calling the trial a "weaponization of government" and expressing support for the president-elect's decision to appeal the hush money conviction.

The case, Johnson asserted, "was never about the facts, and it should have never been brought in the first place." Covering up serial adultery to win the election apparently wasn't a problem for Johnson or other professed evangelical Christians.

"The judge grossly perverted the American legal system by manipulating existing law in a purely partisan effort to convert a bogus misdemeanor charge into a felony," Johnson said.

Don't enable the Big Liars. Don't surrender your constitutional rights. Don't believe anything you read on social media without checking it out. Support the Democratic resistance in Congress. And hold on until 2026.

— JMC

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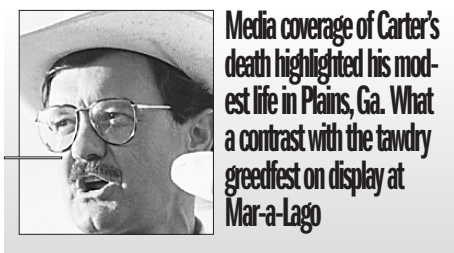
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JIM HIGHTOWER



Jimmy Carter's Light Exposes Donald Trump's Darkness

You're not fooling me, Jimmy Carter. You did that on purpose! Dying when you did, I mean.

You chose December to grab the global political spotlight once more to make a statement with the only Earthly move you had left: checking out. What better way to make people ponder the state of political integrity in America than to reflect on how the Trump Kakistocracy is moving its arrogant billionaires, corporate grifters and ideological tyrants into our White House.

Sure enough, media coverage of Carter's death highlighted his modest life in Plains, Georgia, plus the personal values of fairness and honesty that led him to a lifetime of roll-up-your-sleeves humanitarian efforts. What a damning contrast to the tawdry greedfest on display at Mar-a-Lago, with supposedly respectable corporate executives flocking to "get theirs" in Donald Trump's sell-off of government favors and public offices.

And how amazed Carter must have been to see the gilded Trumpers flagrantly rejecting any pretense that theirs is to be a government of and for The People. He even saw Elon Musk — the prancing prince of plutocratic pomposity — practically move into Trump's Florida mansion to shape the new government. To put a gloss of legitimacy on Musk's self-serving role, Trump grandly named him head of an imaginary federal office he calls the "Department of Government Efficiency." This DOGE should be pronounced "dodgy," for it doesn't actually exist and has no authority. But Musk is nonetheless flitting about officiously announcing that he will eliminate major programs that benefit people, while increasing government funding for — surprise! — corporations like his.

Even in death, the light of Jimmy Carter's public integrity exposes the public corruption coming from Trump's darkness.

Daddy's Philosophy

This holiday season got me to thinking about America's spirit of giving, and I don't mean this overdone business of Christmas, Hanukkah and other holiday gifts. I mean our true spirit of giving — giving of ourselves.

Yes, we are a country of rugged individualists, yet there's also a deep, community-minded streak in each of us. We're a people who believe in the notion that we're all in this together, that we can make our individual lives better by contributing to the common good.

The establishment media pay little attention to grassroots generosity, focusing instead on the occasional showy donation by what it calls "philanthropists" — big tycoons who give a little piece of their billions to some university or museum in exchange for getting a building named after them. But in my mind, the real philanthropists are the millions of you ordinary folks who have precious little money to give, but consistently give of themselves, and do it without demanding that their name be engraved on a granite wall.

My own Daddy, rest his soul, was a fine example of this. With half a dozen other guys in Denison, Texas, he started the Little League baseball program, volunteering to build the park, sponsor and coach the teams,

run the squawking PA system, etc. Even after I graduated from Little League, Daddy stayed working at it, because his involvement was not merely for his kids ... but for all. He felt the same way about being taxed to build a public library in town. I don't recall him ever going in that building, much less checking out a book, but he wanted it to be there for the community and he was happy to pay his part. Not that he was a do-good liberal, for God's sake — indeed, he called himself a conservative.

My Daddy didn't even know he had a political philosophy, but he did, and it's the best I've ever heard. He would often say to me, "Everybody does better when everybody does better." If only our leaders in Washington and on Wall Street would begin practicing this true American philosophy.

The Unholy Messiah of Corporate Rule

And lo, the Magi came from afar, guided by a heavenly star to worship the Messiah of Mar-a-Lago. Bearing precious gifts of flattery, cash and bitcoin, the corporate Magi fell to their knees in awe when they beheld the Orange Aura in his gilded manger.

These starry-eyed worshippers are not religious seekers but uberrich CEOs of Wall Street banks and corporate giants. Abandoning any shred of principle and self-respect, they rushed to Florida this month on their private jets to suck up to The Donald, crassly trying to cash in on the plutocratic rule of his incoming Trump Taliban.

Especially embarrassing is the sight of avaricious high-tech titans seeking favors. These self-proclaimed paragons of "laissez-faire" economics are largely funded by us taxpayers, and they're now trying to get more government giveaways the old-fashioned way: bribery. Such billionaire tech elites as Jeff Bezos of Amazon and Mark Zuckerberg of Facebook have greased their appeals by paying a million dollars each to Trump's coronation committee — just to get a meeting with him!

Interestingly, both Bezos and Zuckerberg had previously condemned Trump's flagrant xenophobia, racism and misogyny. But now, their repulsion has turned to adulation. After all, billionaires don't let ethical principle get in the way of their (SET ITAL) financial principal. (END ITAL)

Do you have a million dollars to buy a meeting with His Lordship? What are today's young people to make of greed-headed creeps like Bezos and Zuckerberg, who insist that not only can they openly buy government favors but mock our people's democratic ideals? Young people are right: The system is corrupt. Trump aside, our No. 1 political goal must be to ban corporate money from politics.

Making Work Work for Workers

As a writer, I get stuck every so often straining for the right words to tell my story. Over the years, though, I've learned when to quit tying myself into mental knots over sentence construction, instead stepping back and rethinking where my story is going.

This process is essentially what millions of American working families are going through this year as record numbers of them are shocking bosses, politicians and economists by stepping back and declaring, "We quit!" Most of the quits are tied to very real abuses that have become ingrained in our workplaces over the past couple of decades — poverty paychecks, no health care, unpredictable schedules, no child care, understaffing, forced overtime, unsafe jobs, sexist and racist managers, tolerance of aggressively-rude customers and so awful much more.

Specific grievances abound, but at the core of each is a deep, inherently destructive executive-suite malignancy: disrespect. The corporate system has cheapened employees from valuable human assets worthy of being nurtured and advanced to a book-keeping expense that must be steadily eliminated. It's not just about paychecks. It's about feeling valued, feeling that the hierar-

chy gives a damn about the people doing the work.

Yet, corporate America is going out of its way to show that it doesn't care — and, of course, workers notice. So, unionization is booming, millions who were laid off by the pandemic are refusing to rush back to the same old grind, and now millions who have jobs are quitting. This is much more than an unusual unemployment stat — it's a sea change in people's attitude about work itself ... and life.

People are rethinking where their story is going and how they can take it in a better direction. Yes, nearly everyone will eventually return to work, but workers themselves have begun redefining the job and rebalancing it with life.

Greed Is Immoral. Health Care Greed Is Abominable.

America has endured a long panorama of corporate greed — from the East India Trading Company to the Robber Barons, Gordon Gecko Wall Streeters to Elon Musk. But down at the bottom of raw greediness today, you'll find the insatiable profiteers of the private nursing home industry.

Of course, many providers deliver honest, truly caring service (especially nonprofit and publicly owned community centers). But as a whole, this essential service has fallen into the clutches of money-hustling corporate chains and Wall Street speculators. Their goal is not to maximize grandma's care but to minimize her cost to faraway rich shareholders.

Their most common profiteering ploy is to understaff their facilities, leaving vulnerable residents unattended ... and often, dead. Federal law, though, lets corporate owners define "sufficient" staff levels, which is why so many are grossly insufficient. One profit-padding tactic is called "tunneling" — the chain sets up a dummy staffing agency to provide employees for the chain's nursing homes. That agency then charges greatly inflated to provide employees. But the chain doesn't complain, since it owns the agency ... and since unknowing customers end up paying the jacked-up tab.

President Joe Biden has proposed new rules to stop the gouging and improve care, including a requirement that each "nursing" home actually keep at least one nurse on staff. One! But, oh, the squeals by billionaire owners! "Cost prohibitive," they howl! So, instead of hiring nurses, they're hiring high-dollar lobbyists and lawyers to kill this little bit of health care fairness for people who are near the end of life.

These multimillionaire executives and billionaire investors are not only gouging families but profiteering on the health of peo-

ple's loved ones. In case they care, that is why the public despises them.

Why Should We Allow Food Monopolies? Let's Bust the System!

How are monopolistic corporations able to gain their economic dominance? By getting politicians to give it to them.

Consider the old robber barons. They weren't brilliant investors or managers but ruthless exploiters of government giveaways and bribers of officials who permitted their monopolistic thievery.

Likewise, today's monopoly players have captured local, state and national markets — not through honest competition but by getting public officials to subsidize their expansion and to rig the rules against small competitors. Monopolizers buy this favoritism with the legalized bribes of campaign donations they lavish on compliant lawmakers.

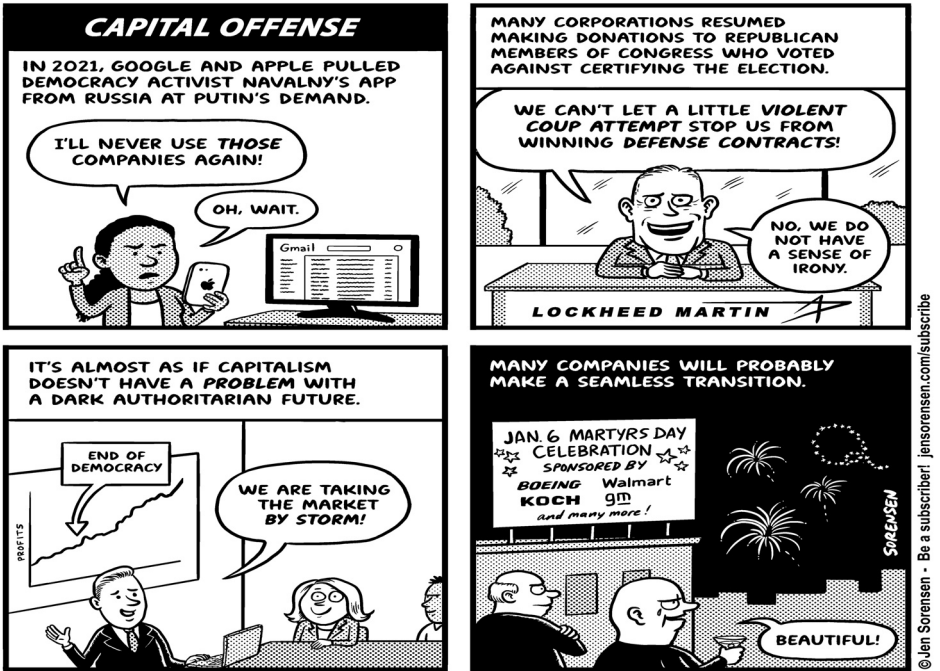
Investigative digger Stacy Mitchell recently documented how this corrupt political favoritism has allowed massive retail chains like Walmart, Kroger and Dollar Tree to crush thousands of local grocers. This has left millions of Americans living in "food deserts" — poor and rural communities with no food store.

What happened? As grocery chains spread from local to regional to national, they demanded that food manufacturers give them big discounts, giving them a dramatic monopoly pricing advantage over independent rivals. So, hometown grocers began hemorrhaging customers ... and going broke.

This raw, anti-competitive price discrimination was a flagrant violation of America's anti-monopoly law — but here came Big Money to protect the monopolists. In 1980, as President Ronald Reagan was railing against "silly" consumer protection laws, supermarket lobbyists poured campaign cash into top officials of both parties. What they bought was bipartisan agreement to simply stop enforcing the "fusty" old antitrust law that had protected a competitive grocery economy for nearly 50 years.

But good news! That useful, highly effective law is still on the books, so let's build a long-term grassroots campaign to rejuvenate it and re-outlaw monopolization, redlining and price gouging by food giants. For more information, go to Institute for Local Self Reliance: ilsr.org.

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

The Tariff Puzzle

If there is one subject most Americans have difficulty grasping, it is economics. Labeled “the dull science” for good reason, savvy politicians throw a litany of facts and figures to win favor with voters, but minus the moving parts that tell the whole story. No economic topic is more abused and confusing than tariffs.

Simply stated, a tariff is a tax on imports entering the US. Other countries levy them on our exports. Our tariff rate on thousands of imports averages around 2%. The consumer, not the exporting country, pays it. That’s you. It is not itemized on your receipt since the store or website you patronized has already paid it to our government and added the cost to your bill as a hidden tax.

Tariffs protect American manufacturers and farmers from foreign competition. Normally they are placed on items, not countries, as convicted felon Donald Trump proposes with his “America First.” plan. “Tariff Man” threats of 25% tariffs on imports from Canada and Mexico, coupled with up to 60% from China, would be met with retaliatory tariffs on our exports, resulting in inflation and possible shortages for both countries.

According to the USDA, the US imports 60% of its fresh fruit and 38% of its fresh vegetables. A tariff war would mean higher prices at the supermarket. Expect similar results on manufactured goods. Quid pro quo.

Eliminate tariffs? Also a bad idea. Corporate elites prospered with Bill Clinton’s NAFTA no-and-low-tariff policy to enrich their coffers from trade with Canada and Mexico by outsourcing production, closing American factories, and worsening the Rust Belt.

Prior to Clinton, Ronald Reagan legitimized stock buybacks, illegal before his administration. Corporate portfolios ballooned with money that could have hired more workers and provided them better pay, hours, and pensions instead of their inferior 401k replacements. Together, both stock buybacks and NAFTA hurt the American working class.

Used wisely, tariffs are a sound economic policy. But when politics “trumps” reality, tariffs can have a chilling effect. The Smoot–Hawley Tariff Act (1930), one of the highest in American history, was designed to lift the US out of The Great Depression. Instead it had the opposite effect. Chastised as “economic stupidity” by Henry Ford, it increased unemployment and misery.

America First? More like America Alone.

ED ENGLER, *Sebring, Fla.*

Respect the Police? Well, Pardon Me.

On Jan. 6, 2021, the heavily armed, Trump-incited mob attack on the U.S. Capitol building physically injured 174 police officers who responded to the attack, one Capitol Police officer who died from two strokes after being pepper-sprayed during the attack and four officers who died by suicide within seven months. The attack was not just on the U.S. Capitol building, but also on democracy and the rule of law. It was “likely the largest single-day, mass assault of law enforcement officers in our nation’s history.” Subsequently it was determined that the number of officers who were physically injured was even higher, let alone those who have suffered trauma as a result of the day’s events.

Trump has said that he’ll “most likely” begin immediately pardoning Jan. 6 defendants. Trump told Time magazine. “We’re going to look at each individual case, and we’re going to do it very quickly, and it’s going to start in the first hour that I get into office. And a vast majority of them should not be in jail.”

More than 1,500 defendants have been charged and 1,100 convicted in the sprawling Capitol breach probe, with more than 600 being sentenced to prison. Defendants were arrested, convicted and sentenced all throughout 2024, but the cases received diminishing coverage.

Members of society are told to support your local police, but what about the fellow police officers themselves? So many police officers supported and endorsed Trump in the 2024 presidential election and so did many police unions and national police organizations including the Police Benevolent Association, New York City’s largest police union and the Fraternal Order of Police, the nation’s largest police labor organization.

It’s one thing to support a presidential candidate, one who even incited the mob attack, but to see the police officers, their unions and organizations just sit back and allow the mob who injured their fellow officers to be pardoned is the ultimate show of disrespect for their fellow police officers. Shouldn’t they all be at the front of the line assuring that these attackers of the police remain in prison and not be pardoned.

Frankly, if these police officers cannot respect their fellow officers, why and how should we, the general public, support the police. Jan. 6th was a day of infamy. Why should the perpetrators of the insurrection be allowed to go free?

But, in America, there are usually two sides or more to a story. President-elect Trump insisted that the January 6th attack, when his supporters stormed the Capitol and assaulted scores of law enforcement officers, was not a day of violence, but a “day of love” when “nothing” was “done wrong.”

Am I being too hard on the police? Well, pardon me.

ALVIN GOLDBERG, *Great Neck, N.Y.*

No Thanks to Non-Voters

Congratulations to [Art Cullen’s] friend [in “Waiting and Wondering, 12/1/24 *TPP*”] for his complicity, along with the other (almost) 90 million eligible voters who also chose to not exercise one of our most precious rights as American citizens! He says he cares about climate change? Not enough, I guess. He believes that “money orders things”? So do I, that is why I voted against big money. Or, at least, the lesser of the two.

He likes conservation programs, what will he think when Trump/Grassley/Reynolds run a pipeline through his favorite place? Will that motivate him to get off his hands and participate? I’m not sure if the immigrants will be deported en masse, it doesn’t seem likely. But then again, it didn’t seem likely that America would elect a convicted felon/adjudicated rapist either. What I can be sure of is if the immigrants get deported, Blackrock et al will buy up all the newly vacant properties and promptly raise the rent!

I sincerely hope that he can continue to ‘follow most of the news’, at least until all we have is state run media!

Yeah, it’d be nice to just hide and watch, but I’ve always been kind of fond of democracy, and I’ve got children and grandkids to think about, and to give my best effort for them!

KURT THOMPSON, *Molina, Colo.*

Despair and Capitalism

The humiliating calamity that swept across the misnamed America’s voting stations on Nov. 5 can be fully understood by any curious student who consults Ann Case’s and Angus Deaton’s indispensable volume, “Deaths of Despair and the Future of Capitalism” (Princeton, 2020). Additional background enlightenment can be secured from Charles Derber’s vital “Sociopathic Society (Paradigm, 2013). It’s been one more giant leap to “1984,” following the actually rigged results in 2000, 2004 and 2016, there’s just time for both the U.S. Zionists and self-styled “Christians” to prepare for their incredibly unending

when those tactics weren’t enough, the U.S. army was called upon to finish the job.

Over the next 15 years an estimated 60,000 Indigenous persons from 18 tribes were sent west: One-sixth would die during, or related to the ordered march known as the Trail of Tears.

For Americans with functional feelings, the Jacksonian era is forever stained by these events. Less so, the 45th and 47th president fixated with “Old Hickory” to the point of hanging his likeness in the Oval Office (Joe Biden famously had it removed as part of his remodeling process) and repeatedly praising Jackson for his “true leadership” and “putting America first.”

Donald Trump’s gift for remaking historical figures in his own image is legendary, but not every parallel between the two presidents is a figment of Trump’s kookiness. And that’s not good news for this and at least three other sovereign nations.

Reduced to his essence, Trump is a real estate guy. Gold, Bitcoin and autographed Bibles make for cheap press and upwardly markets, but the true art of the deal almost always involves property and how to make money off it. It’s about land.

Trump’s land-related governing policies to date have been mere extensions of his own appetites for speculating,

residence in Gehenna. Best not to dwell upon the fates of all the other helpless species presently still extant on Earth.

VIRGE MacLEOD, *Bonniers Ferry, Idaho*

In Defense of Ted Rall

I’d like to respond to [Stephen] Appell’s takedown [“Rall’s Attempt at Satire” letter in 1/1-15-25 *TPP*] of [Ted] Rall’s article “Stein Wins” [12/1/24 *TPP*]. My first impression of his letter was the angry, bitter tone. If we’re all readers of *TPP*, couldn’t we discuss differences in a more comradely tone? Instead of immediately condemning the article as “tasteless and inane”!

As far as the ‘indistinguishability’ of the two major parties, I would submit that the majority of serious people on the US “Left” have come to the conclusion that the national Democratic Party abandoned the working class some time ago, maybe in the ’90s. And those that hadn’t arrived at that conclusion before Oct. 7, 2023, certainly have been disgusted and outraged by the Democrats’ full-throated support of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu’s response. Israel’s far-right regime has been condemned by both Amnesty International and the UN (as well as tens of thousands of Israelis) for it’s genocidal attacks on Palestinian civilians, the majority being women, children and elders.

Regarding a vote for Jill Stein being a vote for Trump: I disagree. I submit that a vote for Stein was, in fact, a vote FOR Dr. Jill. And maybe a vote against the Harris ticket. Kamala had pledged to continue to provide all the military/monetary support that the far right in Israel demanded! Maybe Netanyahu was “the tail wagging the dog”! Looks like he played the hapless Dems like a fine-tuned fiddle!

Finally, your publication’s habit of providing space for a wide range of ideas is a strength, not a weakness! Let us continue to strive towards a more perfect union; one that gives more power to the working class, and less power to the oligarchs, or the “Barons,” as Austin Frerick’s new book details. In solidarity,

MATT HOFFMAN, *St. Paul, Minn.*

Take the Profits Out of Health Care

Regarding Sam Uretsky’s article about RFK Jr. [“Robert F. Kennedy Jr. Makes Diseases Deadly Again,” 12/15/24 *TPP*] and the condition called spasmodic dysphonia, I have enclosed a copy of two pages from a biography, “The Real RFK Jr.: Trials of a Truth Warrior,” by Dick Russell (Skyhorse Publishing, 2023). Uretsky may believe that the source of the disorder is unknown, but clearly the (for-profit) pharmaceutical industry *does* know the source.

The murder of the United Health CEO on Wall Street and the explosive reaction by the general public exposes for all to see the corruption, greed and tyranny of the for-profit insurance conglomerate. Will those corporations heed the wake-up call or will a revolution be necessary to disable the robber barons in order to restore the equality and democracy that we have claimed is the best in the world?

CAROLINE GARDNER, *Freeland, Wash.*

In the Court of the Orange King

Looks like President-elect Donald Trump is creating a corrupt and garish version of JFK’s Camelot. So welcome to Scamelot!

CARL HANSON, *Albuquerque, N.M.*

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From Jackson to Trump: It’s All About Land

By **DON ROLLINS**

It was Dec. 6, 1830. Eager to ensure congressional abettance, President Andrew Jackson delivered a typically detailed, second annual address whose centerpiece was the Indian Removal Act - a working blueprint for the White annexation of nearly all Indigenous lands east of the Mississippi River.

Jackson was (for his dour self) relatively upbeat: “It gives me pleasure to announce to Congress that the benevolent policy of the Government, steadily pursued for nearly 30 years, in relation to the removal of the Indians beyond the white settlements is approaching to a happy consummation.”

But not every member in attendance left the Capitol Building convinced. Six months later, the blueprint did indeed become law, but by narrow margins in both chambers: 102-97 in the House, 28-19 in the Senate.

Once passed, Jackson wasted no time mobilizing his plan. Three separate governmental departments were tasked with pressuring and threatening tribal leaders to vacate; and

buying, exploiting and flipping. It would be the height of naivete to expect anything other than more of the same.

What’s new are Trump’s recent, mind-bending remarks about retaking the Panama Canal, buying Greenland and along the way, bestowing Canada with 51st state status - a sentence never before uttered in human history.

The braggadocio is embarrassing, even dangerous, but it’s here that Trump’s passion for Jacksonian-style land annexation is most on display, albeit even more panoramic in scope.

The formulas behind the land-grabs are strikingly similar: 1) Assume near-total influence over a political party; 2) Use political majorities to influence policy; 3) Impose a strictly business model for governing; 4) Commodify and accumulate land, and 5) Leverage land to achieve political ends.

It’s a sinister, yet effective, political calculus.

Jackson was by no means the only sitting president to illegitimately annex broad swaths of property - see James K. Polk circa the 1840s — but whether by whim or consideration, Trump has chosen a land-greedy colonizer as his model for office.

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



By most measures, 2024 was a tough year that did not end well, and it looks like 2025 will be a challenge that might look better in poetry than in prose.

Slammin’ 2025 — An Epic Look Forward

It’s time for “good riddance” to year ‘24
We can’t wait to see it depart through the door.
COVID’s been tamed but bird flu appears
And climate calamity rapidly nears.
I don’t blame the voters, we all have our views
And climate has never been first on the news.
After decades of warning from folks who do studies
We now see the Arctic thaw deep and get muddy.
Turn the thermostat down, put on a sweater,
Save power, save money, buy local, feel better.
As the Biden days wane to the smallest statistic,
It may be Bob’s right and we all are autistic.
But enough of that stuff and hey here’s the point
The Orange One retreats when he feels out of joint.
In his circle, remember, no women or gays
Ivy Leaguers and White men for day after day.
“Boot lickers” we taunted, Fox News said, “Don’t panic.
He’ll find you some Blacks and perhaps a Hispanic”

DISPATCHES

‘REPUBLICANS ARE GEARING UP FOR CLASS WAR,’ DEMOCRAT WARNS, AS R’S PUSH FOR HUGE MEDICAID CUTS. Policy analysts and Democratic lawmakers raised alarm over the weekend at a leaked document indicating that House Republicans intend to pursue massive cuts to Medicaid, a program that provides sometimes lifesaving coverage to roughly 80 million people across the United States, Jake Johnson reported at CommonDreams.org (11/13).
Near the top of a list of “spending reform options” that House Republicans are considering to help finance additional tax cuts for the rich and large corporations are proposals that would strip Medicaid coverage from millions of Americans, including children, seniors and people with disabilities.
One of the changes listed in the leaked document, obtained by *Politico* last week, would convert Medicaid’s funding structure to a “per-capita cap,” under which the federal government would only provide states with a fixed amount of funding for each beneficiary rather than paying a percentage of states’ overall Medicaid costs.
The document, which reportedly comes from the House Budget Committee, suggests the reform would result in up to \$918 billion in cuts over a 10-year period.
Edwin Park, a research professor at the Georgetown University McCourt School of Public Policy’s Center for Children and Families, noted in a blog post that such a change would “radically restructure Medicaid financing.”
“These funding caps are typically designed to fail to keep pace with expected growth in healthcare costs in order to severely cut federal Medicaid spending, with those cuts growing larger and larger over time,” Park wrote. “Moreover, the caps would also fail to account for any unexpected cost growth such as from another public health emergency or a new, costly drug therapy, which would make the federal funding cuts even larger than originally anticipated.”
The Center on Budget and Policy Priorities warned in an analysis that cuts to federal funding under a per-capita cap “would impose significant strain on states and put millions of people at risk of losing benefits and coverage.”
The document also includes a call to “Equalize Medicaid Payments for Able Bodied Adults”—a proposal seen as an indication that the GOP plans to go after the Affordable Care Act’s Medicaid expansion—and confirms that Republicans intend to push for Medicaid work requirements, which have proved disastrous in the states that have tried such mandates.
Park argued that work requirements—and the “onerous red tape” they entail—would amplify the harms of cuts to federal Medicaid funding.
“As a result, these proposals would take away coverage and access from tens of millions of low-income children, families, seniors, people with disabilities, and other adults who rely on Medicaid,” Park wrote. “Moreover, because Medicaid is the largest source of federal funding for states—accounting for 56.1% of all federal funding for state budgets in 2024—these large cost-shifts to states would also threaten deep, damaging budget cuts to other state spending, including for K-12 education.”
Overall, the leaked Republican document proposes up to \$5.7 trillion in spending cuts over 10 years—with Medicaid cuts making up \$2.3 trillion of that total—as President-elect Donald Trump pushes for a sprawling reconciliation bill that

And eventually, yes, they finally appeared
Though we haven’t seen any to whom we’re endeared,
Female Rollins in Ag, Latin Rubio for State,
After Matt was discredited, Adios, Gaetz.
As for Labor we see it’s a two-for-one story
Chavez-DeRemer, whose first name is Lori.
You see, Orange One responds to our side’s constant wheelies
His vanity says he’ll relocate the needles
The polls that meter the public opinion
Increasing, he thinks, his banner’s dominion.
And if you’ve had luck, you’ve had the good fortune
To never be raped and need an abortion
Then things are just fine and the budget’s extended,
As the fat one prepares that’s what he intended.
Along with the budget, the farm bill keeps going.
Good thing for John Deere with so many guys owing.
An extra 10 billion for big farm accounts,
Poor folks in small towns will see no amount.
Both sides need the budget, that much is clear
But Biden is jitt’ry, his last day draws near.
Hands out medals and pardons, we’ll see to what ends,
Please pardon the immigrants, some of them friends.
We’re anxious for Gaza and Israel’s lobby
Sad for Ukraine and nervous ‘bout Bobby.
I have neighbors that think that we can’t last much more
Their Savior is coming, the dead will all soar
On heavenly wings singing psalms of high praise.
I sure hope they’re wrong, we’ve got kiddos to raise.
What can we tell them, the next generations?
“Remember your manners. Don’t fall for temptations
Like A.I. and Crypto, fake news and clones

includes another round of tax cuts that would disproportionately benefit the wealthiest Americans.
In addition to Medicaid cuts, the House GOP policy menu calls for slashing Temporary Assistance for Needy Families and federal nutrition assistance, repealing “major Biden health rules,” and eliminating renewable energy funding under the Inflation Reduction Act.
“This won’t lower costs for Americans,” Rep. Mike Levin (D-Calif.) wrote in response to the GOP document. “These cuts would only help bankroll Trump’s tax cuts for his billionaire friends and corporate interests.”
Sen. Ron Wyden (D-Ore.), the top Democrat on the Senate Finance Committee, said the leaked policy list shows that “Republicans are gearing up for a class war against everyday families in America.”
“This list outlines a plan to increase child hunger, boot tens of millions off their health insurance, and lay off hundreds of thousands of clean energy workers to fund tax hand-outs for the wealthy,” said Wyden. “It won’t be any consolation to struggling Americans that their hardship allows some rich buddy of Donald Trump’s to buy a bigger yacht.”
L.A. RENTER ADVOCATES DEMAND EVICTION MORATORIUM, RENT FREEZE AS LANDLORDS ‘CASH IN ON CRISIS.’ With some Los Angeles-area landlords jacking up rental listing prices by 50% or more as historic wildfires rage, housing advocates in the nation’s second-largest city are calling for an immediate eviction moratorium and rent freeze, Brett Wilkins noted at CommonDreams.org (11/13).
As California authorities have noted in recent days, state Penal Code Section 396 prohibits taking “unfair advantage” of consumers during times of emergency or disaster. Landlords cannot raise rent by more than 10% of the price immediately prior to the emergency. Democratic California Gov. Gavin Newsom declared a state of emergency Jan. 7.
“It’s called price gouging,” California Attorney General

And ominous squadrons of alien drones.”
Now, while the oceans grow too hot for fishes,
It’s time for a list of the nation’s next wishes
For D’s set some goals and remember you owe
The workers that built you a long time ago.
Stand up for the needy and stop fueling war
Help the planet and schools, you can do so much more...
Enlist churches and chambers (of commerce, I mean)
For diversity, speak up, be sure that it’s seen
Whose side you will stand with, the humans we hope
Erase words divisive, that’s Fox News’ worthless trope.
United, let’s all step away from the brink
We can sway Father Time whatever you think
For the wealthy, all those with comfortable wallets
Don’t blow on doo-dads or what-cha-ma-callits.
Spend to help out and invest in your places,
Build farmers markets, community spaces,
Most of all, help the kiddos, vote yes for your schools
And fund the libraries where kids can find tools
To grow up more wise than we needed to be
Looks like they’ll require it from what we can see.

Two-0-twenty five we’ll see how you go
You’re full of surprises, that much we know
Here’s a toast to potential, whatever we find
Let’s turn it to good, let’s make it be kind.
We’ll show off our courage instead of our fear
Together we’re strong this happy new year,
Resilience the word, where we’re planted we’ll thrive.
Do your worst! We are ready two-oh-twenty-five.

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

Rob Bonta, also a Democrat, said during a Saturday news conference. “It is illegal. You cannot do it. It is a crime punishable by up to a year in jail and fines.”
That isn’t stopping some landlords from trying to profit from the deadly wildfires. Tenant rights advocate Chelsea Kirk—the director of policy and advocacy at the L.A.-based Strategic Actions for a Just Economy—has created an open database of more than 100 Zillow listings in which landlords have raised asking prices for rents by more than the legal limit, and in some cases by over 50 or even 75% or more.
Activists said there are two related things officials can do right now to mitigate the disaster’s impact on renters.
“We need a rent freeze and eviction moratorium,” the anti-capitalist collective People’s City Council—Los Angeles said on social media.
NOlympics LA said, “L.A. City Council needs to implement a rent freeze NOW.”
“Price gouging in the wake of disaster is unacceptable, this is simple and could be done immediately but will L.A. leaders even propose it?” the group added. “We need an eviction moratorium to stop landlords [from] evicting people to cash in on crisis.”
Temporary eviction moratoriums and rent freezes were implemented at the national, state, and local level during the COVID-19 pandemic. While California’s moratorium did not protect everyone from eviction, with thousands of renters removed from their homes under various exceptions, evictions plummeted thanks to the policy. However, by 2023 eviction rates had returned to—or surpassed—pre-pandemic levels.
The L.A. Tenants Union noted that “in the midst of all this destruction, eviction courts are still churning.”
TRUMP ALLIES LAUNCH \$20M EFFORT TO CONVINCE WORKING CLASS TO BACK TAX SCAM 2.0. A right-wing advocacy group founded by the billionaire Koch brothers announced Jan. 13 the launch of a \$20 million campaign to promote an extension of the 2017 Trump-GOP tax cuts, which disproportionately

Continued on page 22

WHY TRUMP WANTS GREENLAND

Huge rebranding opportunity

Couldn't think of what else to get for Melania's b-day

Thinks it's green

KUPER

FROMA HARROP



More girls are moving out of the house and obtaining education needed for good jobs. Sociologists blame a sense among young men that they're not needed.

Young Men Who Don't Leave Home? Is Mama a Reason?

Young men are not launching — that is, growing up as traditionally holds — at the same rate as young women. Among Americans ages 25 to 34, about 20% of the men are still living with their parents compared with 12% of the women. Fewer young males than females are at-

tending college or job training.

There are theories on why more girls are moving out of the house and obtaining education needed for good jobs. Sociologists blame a growing sense among young men that they are not needed.

That would only partly explain the boys' behavior as they avail themselves of cheap or rent-free living in the family home while they "figure things out."

Could one of those things be Mama? And could their mamas, rather than feeling upset by the arrangement, be in on it? Perhaps their mothers like having their boys around.

The girls' presence may not be coveted for age-old reasons. Recall Snow White's stepmother before the mirror, raging against her younger charge.

There's the Oedipus complex, whereby young boys are said to view their fathers as rivals for their mother's affections. But that was something they quickly grew out of, according to Freud, author of the theory.

Daughters asserting their independence may distress mothers who are traditional caregivers. That may be more a factor now that women have greater access to education and careers.

I know one young fellow — actually,

he's 40 — who lives with his parents in their upscale suburban house. For a while, he was in and out of jobs, doing physical labor in another state and living in an unglamorous rental. He's now back with Mom and Dad.

His mom makes minimal demands of him. She's doing his laundry. Her friends ask why. Mom explains, well, she's doing laundry anyway. Meanwhile, having neatly folded piles of clean T-shirts, shorts and socks placed on one's bed is hardly an incentive to change living arrangements.

A sister moved out long ago into her own pad. She has a job and cuts hair at people's homes for extra cash. She hasn't had an easy time of it, having suffered a tumultuous long-term relationship. But she soldiers on as an independent adult.

The *Wall Street Journal* recently featured the Moreno family of Miami as an example. The Morenos have four children, three boys and a girl. The boys live in the parents' home. The girl is out in the world, having graduated from business school and gotten engaged.

The boys talk about wanting to work but complain they can't find a high-paying job. (Starting in a lower-paying job seems not worth their while.) Two dropped out of

college. One never went.

It's true that young men haven't profited from the recent rise in real estate and stock values that older generations have enjoyed. But neither have the girls who are out making do. Other economic reasons include inflation and student debt. Again, the girls face the same economy.

Could arrogance play a part? The parents don't seem keen on lowering their expectations. And there's no disgrace in sharing rents with friends. If boys feel priced out of super expensive markets like New York, Los Angeles or Miami, they could go to great cities that cost less.

We can't dismiss the social media bluster dispensing tales of crypto bros easily amassing piles of dough as they sit in robes around a pool. It's a lot of baloney but may account for the refusal of many to accept temporary work or what we call starter jobs.

There may be several explanations why the boys are living with their parents. But could Mama be a reason?

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

Time to Make Some Noise About Cancer in Iowa

By ART CULLEN

People are talking about Iowa's alarming cancer rates, but they need to turn up the volume.

"We have to start getting loud with our elected officials about doing something about it," Iowa Cancer Registry Director Mary Charlton told Iowa Capital Dispatch in early January.

Iowa had the second-highest and fastest-growing cancer rate in the nation in 2024. Iowa is notable for breast, prostate and lung cancer, and concentrations are acutely high in Northwest Iowa.

The Registry is launching a series of county meetings to motivate locals to action. The first was held in Palo Alto County, with one of the highest cancer incidence rates, and the next is Jan. 23 in Dickinson County, with one of the lowest rates. Charlton hopes it will begin to drive legislative action.

Don't hold your breath, although it might be advisable in the Land of Foul Odors.

Cancer is complex with many causes: Iowa has the highest binge-drinking rate in the Midwest, which is impressive next to

Wisconsin. Our soil is a blessing and a bane, laden with radon seeping up from your basement and blasting about my house today when the furnace is cranking. As a people, we are chubby. The Brothers Cullen are genetically prone to prostate cancer, probably a legacy from Dear Old Dad's side of our tree.

And then there is the gigantic elephant in the room:

Iowa is a sacrifice state for cheap food and fuel.

We have the most polluted rivers and lakes in America. We have the densest concentration of livestock on the continent, mainly in pigs and poultry, while cattle may be staging a comeback as water runs out in Kansas (beef) and California (dairy).

The Iowa Supreme Court has made it clear that it has no interest in regulating agriculture. Of course, neither does the Farm Bureau or the corporate chemical cabal that runs this state. It's nearly impossible to increase tobacco taxes, which haven't been touched in 18 years. No way the legislature taxes manure output or limits where confinements may locate. We will continue to grow corn out our ears to feed those hogs and hens no matter how much nitrate drains into the Raccoon River, one of the most endangered in America.

It's about the money.

This goes across partisan divides. Liberals and conservatives all want clean water and air. Children who grow up in a cloud of

manure dust suffer lifelong consequences, the research from the University of Iowa College of Public Health shows. Studies link nitrate pollution to cancer. Juries awarded verdicts in the hundreds of millions of dollars for cancer claims arising from glyphosate (Roundup) use, a herbicide that is so ubiquitous that it is losing its punch against weeds.

"What needs to be looked at are things that are probable or possible carcinogens that have increased beginning about 1990, because of the well-recognized latency of environmental cancers," said former UI Public Health Dean James Merchant last February. "Those carcinogens associated with industrial agriculture are the ones that really need to be looked at very closely."

Almost nothing has happened since, predictably.

Surprisingly, a lawsuit has threatened an 11,000-head cattle operation along a trout stream in northeast Iowa. The suing lawyer, Jim Carew, told the *Cedar Rapids Gazette* that there will be more litigation. "I view us on the cusp of a new civil rights movement in Iowa," he said. "It will take some time, but I think in due course the right to access clean water and clean air will be recognized as a fundamental right for Iowans."

There may be some lawyerly hyperbole or bullshiness involved, given how the courts have resisted wading in. He will be a huge pain for the polluters.

Iowa's cancer scientists are sounding an apolitical alarm — something extraordinary has been going on here for about 30 years. The concerns unite liberals and conservatives. The Iowa Cancer Registry has been careful to call for a comprehensive understanding of why Iowa is going the wrong direction without assigning blame. We know so little.

There is plenty of science to tell us that when you are killing the rivers and the children can't breathe, cancer lurks.

I remain convinced that, despite decades of Republican political control, Iowans want clean air and water. A clean and healthy lake has buy-in from nearly everyone here. We passed a bond issue for a clean lake. Clean water can be a political winner — more than 60% of Iowans voted to increase taxes for clean air and water in 2010. The legislature refused to acknowledge the will of the people and did nothing.

That's why people need to get loud. It is difficult for legislators to hear when they are buried under a pile of corporate money. Only voters can overcome that influence.

Art Cullen is publisher and editor of the Storm Lake Times Pilot in northwest Iowa (stormlake.com). He won the Pulitzer Prize for editorial writing in 2017 and is author of the book "Storm Lake: A Chronicle of Change, Resilience, and Hope from America's Heartland." Email times@stormlake.com.

Sustainable aviation fuel study: SAF means 'Sacrificing Affordable Food'

By ALAN GUEBERT

The four-page executive summary of the November-issued report on sustainable aviation fuel (SAF) doesn't predict when or how the hopefully-named "green" aircraft fuel will be produced.

Instead, the 72-page, fact-filled report makes a CO2-tight case that this largely crop-based, "renewable" alternative to today's carbon-heavy jet fuel should never be produced.

The reason, it explains, is as obvious as the food on your plate: "Citizens want affordable food and sustainable food systems. Farmers want to maximize soil carbon sequestration and begin to reduce fertilizer use. We all want to be able to develop renewable energy supplies..."

But SAF's eggs-in-one-basket project "risks moving us away from all these goals" because it will 1.) likely raise food prices; 2.) "reduce the sustainability of food systems;" 3.) "slow or reverse agricultural soil carbon

sequestration;" and 4.) "drive up fertilizer use and attendant agricultural GHG," or greenhouse gas emissions.

Moreover, the massive push toward SAF is a massive rob-Peter-to-pay-Paul scheme that will "put impossible-to-meet demands onto limited supplies of clean, renewable energy thereby slowing emissions reductions in other sectors."

Or, as the report notes bluntly: "If governments continue to encourage and subsidize the SAF megaproject," they are actively working "to solve one problem but create many larger problems."

The report, issued by Canada's National Farmers Union and written by Darrin Qualman, contains 20 bullet points to drive home those key findings. Equally important, these obvious yet rarely discussed consequences of SAF are substantiated by page after page of fact-based analysis.

A detailed examination of what the airline industry projects for air travel in 2050 proves SAF is not just a false hope, but an environmental, societal, and financial disaster.

For example, by 2050, airline travel is projected to hit 13.6 trillion passenger miles per year, or two times today's mileage. As such, Boeing and Airbus estimate they will need to make 40,000 new aircraft by 2043 (today's commercial fleet has an estimated 28,400) to accommodate the flood.

By itself, that near doubling of new aircraft means massive increases in raw materials, fossil fuels, and CO2 production. There's nothing "green" about any of that. Additionally, experts estimate commercial airlines will use 174 billion gallons of aviation fuel in 2050, or 75% more than today's 100 billion gallons.

If accurate, the farm-sourced SAF needed to replace petroleum jet fuel by 2050 would require 2 billion acres of mostly soybeans, canola, and corn. Two billion acres, writes Qualman, is "20 times the total cropland area of Canada (and) five times the cropland area of the United States."

And that excludes military and private aircraft use while also consuming all the feedstock for today's alternative fuels such as ethanol (5.5 billion bu. of U.S. corn in 2024), and biodiesel (55 million bu. of U.S. soybeans in 2024).

But that won't happen, explains the NFU report, because "Producing even a small fraction of the huge SAF demand from grains and oilseeds... will exert upward pressure on food prices—especially as we simultaneously add two billion people to our global population."

That means "These food price impacts will hit the poorest and hungriest hardest, but will also have negative impacts on nearly every family on Earth."

In fact, Qualman adds, "SAF may come to stand for 'Sacrificing Affordable Food'" because the "SAF project will put the food-purchasing dollars of Earth's poorest billion people into competition with the vacation dollars of the richest billion."

In short, Qualman says, "It's just not going to work. It's fiction."

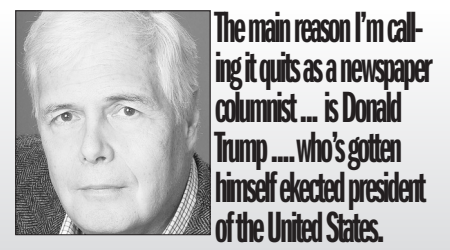
And, he warns, "(A)ny plan to fuel that doubling of air travel largely from the planet's oversubscribed land base reveals an ignorance of the magnitude by which we have already transgressed planetary boundaries—how far we have already moved outside the 'safe operating space for humanity'..."

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



Good-Bye And Good Luck: Why I Won't Be Writing Any More Columns

After giving the matter some thought, I have decided that I've become unsuited to the low art of writing newspaper columns any longer. My deficiencies to participate in the current conversation are many. For one thing, I have never listened to a podcast. I prefer reading things, a more efficient way to gather and retain information. So while I've heard of this Joe Rogan fellow, I've no good idea what he's all about. I gather he endorsed Trump, and that's

enough for me. But then I used to listen to Rush Limbaugh on my truck radio sometimes, and generally found him preposterous. I gather Rogan has inherited his audience of ignorant soreheads and members of the "I hate girls" club—yearning desperately for female companionship, but ashamed to admit it. Furthermore, I do not own, and have never wanted, an iPhone. My sainted wife, maybe the least "tech savvy" person you could ever meet, spends a great deal of time struggling with hers, arguing constantly with that snippy bitch Siri. I get by with a steam-powered flip phone which rings about twice a week—normally somebody I'm not eager to talk to. Gifted with the fashion sense of a cowherd, I have never wanted to become an "influencer" anyway. When I really want to dress up, I go with L.L. Bean. Just the other day, I encountered the on-line meanderings of one Jack Posobiec, a right-wing influencer who came up with a brilliant idea: "What if instead of a vaccine we just were able to get exposed to a weak version of the virus that enabled us to build the antibodies we need to fight the real thing?" Yeah, what if? Here is how Wikipedia defines the term: "A vaccine typically contains an agent that resembles a disease-causing microorganism and is often made from weakened or killed forms of the microbe....The agent stimulates the body's immune system to recognize the agent as a threat." Talk about reinventing the wheel!

Something else I learned courtesy of Kevin Drum's invaluable website is that fewer than half of Republicans in an Axios/Ipsos poll say they trust the Center for Disease Control for health information. Sixty-eight percent trust Donald Trump. Don't tell me it's not a cult. So yes, the main reason I'm calling it quits as a newspaper columnist—this will be my last outing in this space—is Donald Trump, the incompetent sociopath and career criminal who's gotten himself elected president of the United States. I'm not afraid of him; my contempt is absolute. I just don't want to spend the rest of my life thinking and writing about him. That a near-majority thought him worthy of the presidency is too depressing to contemplate. One way or another, Trump will bring the American experiment to ruins. But nothing says I have to chronicle the catastrophe. I only get one life. The happy misanthrope and *Baltimore Sun* columnist H.L. Mencken predicted all this more than a century ago. "On some great and glorious day," Mencken wrote in 1917 "the plain folks of the land will reach their heart's desire at last and the White House will be adorned by a downright moron." Dudes, we're there. Donald Trump isn't merely ignorant, he exists in fear and loathing of anybody who's not. "The most costly of all follies" Mencken wrote on another occasion, "is to believe passionately in the palpably not true. It is the chief occupation of mankind." Salon columnist Amanda Marcotte put it this way after watching one of those tele-

vised focus groups from the heartland on CNN: "'What quickly becomes evident about the median voters in an American focus group is how profoundly opposed they are to even the most basic factual information. On the contrary, it's a community with a pathological aversion to reality, where people compulsively react to anything truth-shaped with hostility, running as hard as they can toward disinformation. They are addicted to BS.'" When chronicles are written about the decline and fall of the American republic, the opening chapters will no doubt describe the founding of Fox News and the cowardly inability of other news organizations to confront the reality of a Soviet-Style propaganda network in their midst. But they won't be written by me, because I've reached the end of my rope. I do want to thank my editors in Kansas City and at newspapers large and small who have published my work over the years. Also, the many kind readers who have written inquiring about my health and commenting upon my work. Thanks as well for the brilliance and dedication of the medical professionals (Indian immigrants many of them) who have restored my health and congenital optimism over the past year, I do look forward to haranguing my poor wife Diane and innocent civilians down at the dog park instead of churning out newspaper columns. Take care, y'all.

Gene Lyons is a former columnist, a winner of the National Magazine Award, and co-author of "The Hunting of the President."

Sweeps Don't Solve Homelessness

Instead, governments should prioritize safe, affordable, dignified, and permanent housing for all.

By FARRAH HASSEN

This summer, the Supreme Court's Grants Pass ruling made it much easier for local governments to criminalize homelessness. Since then, cities and states across the country have stepped up their harassment of people for the "crime" of not having a place to live. Penalizing homelessness has increasingly taken the form of crackdowns on encampments — also known as "sweeps," which have received bipartisan support. California Governor Gavin Newsom has ordered state agencies to ramp up encampment sweeps, while President-elect Donald Trump has also pledged to ban encampments and move people to "tent cities" far from public view. Evidence shows that these sweeps are

harmful and unproductive — and not to mention dehumanizing. Housing justice advocates caution that sweeps disrupt peoples' lives by severing their ties to case workers, medical care, and other vital services. Many unhoused people also have their personal documents and other critical belongings seized or tossed, which makes it even harder to find housing and work. According to a ProPublica investigation, authorities in multiple cities have confiscated basic survival items like tents and blankets, as well as medical supplies like CPAP machines and insulin. Other people lost items like phones and tools that impacted their ability to work. Teresa Stratton from Portland told ProPublica that her husband's ashes were even taken in a sweep. "I wonder where he is," she said. "I hope he's not in the dump." Over the summer, the city of Sacramento, California forcefully evicted 48 residents — mostly women over 55 with disabilities — from a self-governed encampment known as Camp Resolution. The camp was located at a vacant lot and had been authorized by the city, which also owned the trailers where residents lived. One of the residents who'd been at the hospital during the sweep was assured that her belongings would be kept safe. How-

ever, she told me she lost everything she'd worked so hard to acquire, including her car. The loss of her home and community of two years, along with her possessions, was already traumatizing. But now, like most of the camp residents, she was forced back onto the streets — even though the city had promised not to sweep the lot until every resident had been placed in permanent housing. Aside from being inhumane, the seizure of personal belongings raises serious constitutional questions — especially since sweeps often take place with little to no warning and authorities often fail to properly store belongings. Six unhoused New Yorkers recently sued the city on Fourth Amendment grounds, citing these practices. Sweeps, like punitive fines and arrests, don't address the root of the problem — they just trap people in cycles of poverty and homelessness. Encampments can pose challenges to local communities, but their prevalence stems from our nation's failure to ensure the fundamental human right to housing. People experiencing homelessness are often derided as an "eyesore" and blamed for their plight. However, government policies have allowed housing, a basic necessity for survival, to become commodified and controlled by corporations and billionaire in-

vestors for profit. Meanwhile, the federal minimum wage has remained stagnant at \$7.25 since 2009 and rent is now unaffordable for half of all tenants. Alongside eroding social safety nets, these policies have resulted in a housing affordability crisis that's left at least 653,000 people without housing nationwide. While shelters can help some people move indoors temporarily, they aren't a real housing solution, either. Human rights groups report that shelters often don't meet adequate standards of housing or accommodate people with disabilities. Many treat people like they're incarcerated by imposing curfews and other restrictions, such as not allowing pets. Safety and privacy at shelters are also growing concerns. Officials justify sweeps for safety and sanitation reasons, but in the end they harm and displace people who have nowhere else to go. Instead, governments should prioritize safe, affordable, dignified, and permanent housing for all, coupled with supportive services. Anything else is sweeping the problem under the rug.

Farrah Hassen, J.D., is a writer, policy analyst, and adjunct professor in the Department of Political Science at Cal Poly Pomona.

Fear New Year? Time to Summon Your Inner Molly

By JOHN YOUNG

"You can't ignore politics, no matter how much you'd like to." — Molly Ivins In the quest toward a wiser and more just society, my wife is on the front lines. Meaning she's the first to read the words my fingers formulate here. Last week when, as usual, I asked her to read my weekly piece, she responded, "Is it going to depress me?" Translation: "More about the criminal who conned his way back to the most powerful position on Earth? I can't take it." I almost yanked my offering from my bride's gentle hands. I pondered writing an "All is lost. Farewell, dear readers" valedictory. Then I thought of one of America's greatest commentators — one who did justice to injustice with a wink and a drawl. One who didn't suffer fools gladly, but who as-

sailed foolishness gleefully. She and I were kindred in many ways, the most important being tone. Let's get there: "The thing about democracy, beloveds, is that it is not neat, orderly or quiet. It requires a certain relish for confusion." — Molly Ivins. Confusion? Oh, yeah: The players in the next presidential administration are already acting out a "Wild Kingdom" segment. Cue Marlin Perkins: "Watch now as frantic vulture hatchlings get their first taste of flesh." A power-drunk brawl has erupted over HB1 visas for skilled labor: Elon Musk wants more of them to benefit him and his tech bros. No way, says the MAGA bigot brigade. "On hundred percent moratorium on all immigration," screeches Steve Bannon, telling Musk and pals, "We're going to rip your face off" on this. Musk's counter-suggestion: "F@\$&k yourselves in your face." Unelected, un-empowered, and already a-gurgle in sewer water. What fun! "Ignorance is the root of all evil." — Molly Ivins Based on last year's election, strategists

must re-cut the three-way "Democrat, Republican, Independent" electorate pie to four slices instead: "Democrat, Republican, Independent, Oblivious." Right-wing responses to the New Year's morning truck attack in New Orleans showed how the pumps of stupidity can be primed. Credit talkers on Fox Spews who inspired their Golden Idol to blame the New Orleans truck-ramming tragedy on illegal immigrants. As anyone who can count "one, two, three" would find out shortly, the killer was a U.S. citizen, Houston resident and Army veteran. Not one to wait that long: On Truth Social, he who wears ignorance like a crown screamed, "This is what happens when you have OPEN BORDERS." You mean people leaking out of Texas? Shades of "They're eating pets," the high-political-mileage campaign canard so vigorously denied by Ohio officials. Anyone who would listen to self-possessed rumor-mongers over the findings of responsible local officials is, to be clear, a dolt. "What stuns me most is not even that the system has been so badly corrupted by money. It is that so few people get the connection between their lives and what the

bozos do." — Molly Ivins. Who elected Elon Musk? No one. He just bought his way into an apparent decision-making role in a government with which he does billions of dollars in "bidness." That's Molly-speak. Having purchased the candidate of his choice, it appears Musk will be in position to bully his way to the cutting of billions of dollars in programs that help non-billionaires: Medicaid, food stamps, aid to low-income schools. This to finance tax cuts for people who don't need them, like him. We should not endure this silently. "He's further evidence that the Great Scriptwriter in the sky has an overdeveloped sense of irony." — Molly Ivins. Molly wrote that about her favorite foil, George W. Bush. We can only imagine what she would have to say about the melon felon whom Musk's billions helped elect. Speaking of Musk: When a suicide bomber blew up a rented Tesla Cybertruck outside a Trump property in Las Vegas, Elon threatened to sue headline writers over any connotation that such a vehicle, which even

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colognes,” e-messages the soon-to- be president of the United States) among other Trump-themed novelties. In 2024 roughly half of America’s voters chose this pushcart vendor for their commander-in-chief, the first time in three tries that he won the popular vote.

Would the Christian virtues that made Jimmy Carter an attractive candidate in 1976 eliminate him from consideration today? Signs of slow culture death are all around us, in America and elsewhere, but the persistent appeal of Donald Trump is a special case. No one thinks he’s a good man; dozens of firsthand witnesses have made the case that he’s a stupid man, and probably a madman. The presidential election left me stunned — not surprised, not at all, but stunned by the potential for agony we’ve inflicted upon ourselves. This man, this job, at this critical moment of combustible geopolitics? It’s like playing Russian roulette with the whole American experiment. If we are to survive this administration, it will take a major stroke of luck. And probably several.

Trump’s first wave of nominations for his cabinet and other key offices seemed so crazy, they raised a painful question I can’t answer. Was this just Trump the belligerent nine-year-old acting out, thumbing his nose and raising his middle finger at his defeated rivals, as in “Take that, Nancy Pelosi” and “Chew on this one, Hillary”? Or is he actually so deep in the twilight zone that he thinks these nominees — Gaetz, Hegseth, Kennedy, McMahon, Gabbard — are appropriate? The second, clueless option is terrifying. Matt Gaetz for Attorney General? His congressional colleagues exposed and censured him because he was caught paying women for sex, but one glimpse of Rep. Gaetz explains why no woman would do it for free. It’s hard to imagine a more outrageous choice for high office. Maybe Trump could pardon Harvey Weinstein and put him in charge of ... women’s health?

Would Roger Stone look sharp in the black robe of a Supreme Court Justice? But the most dangerous of all the fringe characters Trump has embraced for his administration is, by far, the mega-billionaire Elon Musk. Musk was reported to have spent a quarter of a billion dollars to get Trump elected. If cash actually produces votes — and a businessman as successful as Musk must understand cost-effectiveness — then it’s not farfetched, considering the close vote, to say that Elon bought the White House for Donald. In return, he gets to head the new Department of Government Efficiency, which promises to cut costs by eliminating professionals from the Washington bureaucracy. But Musk’s ambitions will hardly be satisfied by a place at the table in the White House or at Mar-a-Lago. Who is

this man? The world’s wealthiest human is edging closer to running the United States, perhaps, but he has his eye on the whole planet, and beyond.

The X (ex-Twitter) social medium he owns aspires to rule the cybersphere, his Tesla electric cars hope to rule the road, and SpaceX rocketry is his bid for outer space. This is a very strange man as well as a very powerful one, as you know if you’ve read about his domestic arrangements and the names he gives his many children. His eccentricity is not harmless. He has close business ties to China, a history of fulsome praise for Xi Jinping and a telephone relationship with Vladimir Putin. His online outbursts have been increasingly angry and alt-right. And the latest Musk news is that he has embraced the far-right, Nazi-nostalgic Alternative for Germany party in the hope of influencing German politics. Donald Trump and the entire USA are just pawns on the big chessboard where Elon Musk is playing his global game.

What does he want from the simple, pitifully vain, arguably demented Trump except unregulated carte blanche for all his projects? I can’t say what drives this man, but I’m sure it’s even deeper and darker than greed. This unholy alliance between Big Tech and Big Talk, featuring two of the most peculiar autocrats alive, is certain to inflict deep wounds on a fragile democracy. That sinking feeling we can’t avoid is not irrational.

Watching Musk and Trump dismantle America will be like watching psychos microwave puppies.

On the far side of the pain and disgust we’ve already suffered and steeled ourselves to endure, is there some way a patriot can hope to navigate the second Trump administration? Maybe the first step is to stifle any natural temptation to minimize the threat. Trump is more than a dirty joke, an inflated orange-painted clown, a national mortification. He’s a president with “nothing but contempt for our democratic institutions, our Constitution and the rule of law.” That’s not the judgment of a liberal Democrat or another caustic columnist, but his longest-serving first-term chief of staff, John Kelly. Gen. Kelly, the no-nonsense Marine who encountered nothing but nonsense in the Trump White House (he once slammed the MAGA-thug Corey Lewandowski against an office wall), is on record admitting that Trump fits the definition of a fascist and has kind words for Hitler.

Of course it’s as bad as all that. The MAGA cult is as toxic and difficult to eradicate as COVID-19. It’s a carnival of deception and denial where a brutal misogynist and accused rapist can win the votes of a majority of suburban women, not to mention 65% of the nation’s evangelicals, surely one of the most appalling displays of mass hypocrisy in political history. MAGA is re-

action in action, where pampered young Republicans who only want to be richer than their fathers mingle socially with fascist commandos who’d be comfortable in SS uniforms. A *New York Times* reporter who attended the annual black-tie gala of the New York Young Republican Club witnessed that mix at its most naïve, with young men in tuxedos and those mandatory cauliflower haircuts cheering wildly as keynote speaker Steve Bannon called for “retribution” against Trump’s enemies. Many of them even lined up to have their pictures taken with conspiracy Nazi Jack Posobiec, the infamous propagator of Pizzagate. Matt Gaetz, Corey Lewandowski and the British Brexit champion Nigel Farage worked the crowd.

The reporter, Shawn McCreesh, described the merry reactionaries as “baby-faced.” Reading his story, with photos, was like watching an unsuccessful attempt at CPR. America, America. These are the rightward-bound sons and daughters of the plutocrats who were polled for a Nov. 6 *Times* story headed “Wall Street Is Thrilled” by Trump’s victory. They’re the wannabe Elon Musks and Vivek Ramaswamys of the next digital age. The best seats for their gala cost \$4700. I guess I keep hoping, in spite of recent experience, that stories like this one will reach the blue-collar, red-state voters who anchor the MAGA base, and convince a critical few of them that Trump and his rich Republicans are neither their friends nor their salvation.

Set aside the culture wars? I wish. But the most pressing of the critical issues that face this democracy today is income inequality. It’s way beyond outrage. There are over 800 American billionaires, nearly a third of the world’s total, and they increased their wealth by more than a trillion dollars in 2024. Nearly all of them with a ready suitcase seem to be on their way to Washington to help Donald Trump. He’s picked at least 13 billionaires to play key roles in his administration, and his cabinet picks alone are worth \$10.7 billion, more than the gross domestic product of New Zealand or Finland. At the same time, the number of homeless Americans has increased by 30% since 2023, to 770,000, and tent cities are springing up all over the map. The number of homeless families with children increased nearly 40% in 2024. In rural areas of the red-state South, as many as 48% of children suffered food insecurity in 2023; in 2024 50 million Americans received charitable food assistance, 10 million more than in 2019.

In a country this rich, these numbers are a national disgrace, capitalism gone cruel. The Democrats, it’s fair to note, haven’t succeeded in stemming the scandalous flow of wealth to those who already own nearly everything. But at least Joe Biden’s cabinet was only worth \$118 million, pocket change for Trump’s new frater-

nity brothers. Even as they promised working people everything and delivered them nothing, Republicans very successfully branded the rest of us, at least the college graduates, as “the elite.” This would be hilarious if it didn’t clearly influence elections. None of my elite friends own private jets or mega-yachts, unlike most of Trump’s gang. In his final column for the *Times*, the Nobel Laureate economist Paul Krugman offers us some faint hope: “At some point the public will realize that most of the politicians railing against elites actually *are* elites in every sense that matters, and start to hold them accountable.”

Don’t hold your breath. While most of Krugman’s American peers are still struggling to locate some light at the end of this dismal tunnel, foreign journalists have been brutally honest. The Irishman Fintan O’Toole, writing in the *New York Review of Books*, gives it to us straight: “Trump’s second coming may not quite herald the end of the world, but it will hand the ship of state over to a motley crew of libertines and libertarians, control freaks and fanatics ... It will be a non-stop show, its cacophonous soundtrack amplified by Elon Musk and the thriving denizens of the digital nanosphere.”

O’Toole even predicts “mass roundups” and Stalin-style show trials. This is not paranoid exaggeration. But when I’m trying to let in a ray of light, I remember an event in Washington just four days after the fatal election. It was a 45th anniversary celebration for old friends of ours. He had served in both the Carter and Clinton administrations, and their Washington friends are predominantly A-list Democrats who held office under Carter, Clinton and Obama. It was a distinguished gathering, unofficially emceed by John Podesta, Bill Clinton’s chief of staff and the chairman of Hillary’s presidential campaign.

Needless to say, the prevailing post-election emotion was grief, if not despair. But the mood lightened gradually, aided by certain beverages, and toward the end of the evening a DJ started playing rock songs of the ‘60s and ‘70s. As we were saying goodnight, I looked back and saw this whole crowd of Democrats in their seventies and eighties stomping, jumping and twisting. I can’t dance anymore, but I left the place grinning. Does hope spring eternal?

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 delennisI@gmail.com.

Using the NOLA Tragedy to Hide Trump’s Bait and Switch on Immigration

By SABRINA HAAKE

When a radicalized US Army veteran mowed down 15 people in New Orleans, Donald Trump wasted no time in pointing his finger, blaming immigrants and a non-existent ‘open border’ for the tragedy:

“This is what happens when you have OPEN BORDERS... The DOJ, FBI, and Democrat state and local prosecutors... are incompetent and corrupt, having spent all of their waking hours unlawfully attacking their political opponent, ME.... Democrats should be ashamed of themselves for allowing this to happen to our Country.”

On-brand, Trump ignored police intelligence that identified the offender as a native US citizen, a former U.S. Army staff

sergeant and combat veteran from Texas.

Also on-brand, Trump co-opted the massacre to redirect attention from his bait and switch on immigration. After convincing 49% of the nation’s voters that immigrants were the root of all evil, leading to a 1% win Fox News calls a landslide, Trump sided with Elon Musk to defend hiring more foreigners for high-paid jobs under the H1-B visa program.

Johnson helps Trump gaslight his base

House Speaker Mike Johnson (R-La.) echoed Trump’s lie about New Orleans, telling Fox viewers on Thursday that he and Congressional Republicans had repeatedly warned the Biden administration “about the wide open border,” and “dangerous people coming here in droves and setting up potentially terrorist cells around the country.”

Aside from coordinated gaslighting, neither Trump nor Johnson mentioned how Trump deliberately tanked the bi-partisan border bill almost a year ago, just so he could scapegoat immigrants throughout the election. If Democrats borrowed Republicans’ firehose of lies, they’d bullhorn that NOLA’s victims would be alive today had

Trump not killed immigration reform a year ago.

Trump/Johnson’s perfidy aside, no-one has forgotten Trump’s re-election mantra that “illegals” were stealing American jobs, murdering Americans and eating their pets. The internecine war between MAGA’s anti-immigrant faction and Trump’s techbro donors is a by-product of Trump’s own disordered thinking, and it is just the beginning.

The H1-B debacle

The heart of MAGA’s current discontent is the H1-B program, which allows employers to hire nonimmigrant aliens as workers in specialty occupations. According to the US Department of Labor, a ‘specialty occupation’ is one that requires highly specialized knowledge and at least a bachelor’s degree or its equivalent.

Found at 8 U.S.C. § 1182 et seq, the law requires employers to pay H1-B employees the prevailing wage for their job title and location, which is meant to protect workers from exploitation. H1-B critics note that, in addition to the potential for exploitation, hiring aliens disincentivizes companies from developing and hiring American talent.

Last month Elon Musk, who brazenly purchased his proximity to power with

wealth built in part on arguably exploited H1-B talent, threatened to go to “war” to protect the program.

After being highly critical of immigrants in general and the H1-B visa program in particular, and after restricting access to foreign worker visas in the past, Trump has switched his tune to match Musk’s. Trump now states that he has “many H-1B visas on my properties. I’ve been a believer in H-1B. I have used it many times. It’s a great program.” Trump, whose most educated talent pool includes convicted tax fraud accountants and lawyers facing debarment, has not explained why cooks, servers, housekeepers and groundskeepers at his motels would need high tech visa clearances.

Defunding education then calling the uneducated ‘retarded’

Aside from exploiting foreign workers desperate to remain in the U.S., H1-B also rewards Republicans for defunding public education, punishing uneducated Americans whom Musk and the brologarchy deem too “retarded” to power America’s high-tech work force.

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Trump’s Mob Runs Wild. Why is Anyone Shocked?

By DICK POLMAN

*Jan. 6 was the fourth anniversary of our National Day of Shame. To mark the occasion, I'm re-posting the column I wrote after the smoke cleared and the bodies had been carted off. I stand by every word, even though a plurality of 2024 voters didn't give a sh*t.*

The domestic terrorism that we witnessed [Jan. 6, 2021] was always bound to happen. The feral creature who nurtured it had long signaled us that it was coming. I watched in horror and fury, as did you, but I was not shocked to see the MAGA rabble running wild. What’s really shocking is that anyone could possibly have been shocked.

All day, in the running commentary from pundits and politicians, we heard variations of “I can’t believe this is happening in the United States of America!” and “I never thought I’d see the day!” and (my favorite) “This is not us!” Of course it’s us. Five years ago, a demagogic scumbag whose candidacy should’ve been snuffed in an instant told us exactly who and what he was ... and he wound up in the White House, installed by an oblivious feckless electorate, abetted (until this dark witching hour) by cynics and opportunists who relentlessly looked the other way.

Trump – whose seditious instincts were

always in plain sight; who habitually retweeted violent images; who publicly fantasized, early on, about “knocking the crap” out of people; who lauded neo-Nazis as “very fine people”; who boasted last year that he has “the tough people, but they don’t play it tough – until they go to a certain point, and then it would be very, very bad”; who declared yesterday that the Capitol insurrectionists were “very special” – is a sick animal who doesn’t know any better. But the Republicans who long indulged him presumably knew better. The desecration of democracy, beamed to the world yesterday, is on them. The blood of the dead and injured is on them.

Bystanders like me could see what was coming. Why couldn’t they? Way back in October of 2016, I warned that Trump’s “dissing of democracy will live in infamy,” that he was a “clear and present danger to our democratic values,” and that he’d wreak havoc with “his wingnut peanut gallery, which has a bottomless thirst for his serial lies and demagogic drivels.” But as that ‘16 campaign wore on, Republicans excused his extremism and convinced themselves that he could be controlled; as Mitch McConnell said in a podcast, “I’m comfortable supporting him.”

How sickening it was yesterday to hear Republicans say they were shocked, shocked, that chaos reigned in the U.S. Capitol. The Senate Republicans’ Twitter feed declared, “This is not American. This must stop.” Michael Gallagher, a House Republican who’d voted with Trump 88 percent of the time and who’d opposed the impeachment probe, said on TV (as he sheltered in place), “This is insane. I haven’t seen anything like this since I deployed to Iraq. The

president needs to call it off.” House Republican leader Kevin McCarthy said, “People have taken this too far... This is unacceptable. This is not the direction in which we should go.”

Gee, I wonder why Trump’s thugs took it “too far.” Is it perhaps Trump’s Republican enablers gave them the green light, egging them on for months by amplifying the loser’s toxic lies about a “rigged” election? A few hours after McCarthy whined that the violence was “unacceptable,” take a wild guess what he did on the House floor. He joined 120 other traitors to democracy, refusing to certify President-elect Biden’s victory.

Even after the looting and vandalism had ceased, Senate and House Republicans still refused to denounce Trump by name. When the Electoral College proceedings recommenced after six hours of limbo, they still refused to call out his seditious behavior, which violated federal law. They assailed the insurrectionists – without identifying why the insurrectionists had acted. Or in whose name they had acted.

A rare Republican who did so was Pennsylvania Senator Pat Toomey. Nevertheless, his floor statement was hopelessly muddled. On the one hand, he denounced Trump as a “demagogue.” On the other hand, he made it clear that he’d supported Trump’s re-election. Did he suddenly discover, only in the wake of yesterday’s violence, that Trump was a demagogue? Or did he perchance have an inkling that Trump has been demagogic all along – yet still somehow deserved a second term?

If this government was even minimally functioning, if checks and balances meant anything beyond the high-flown words, Trump would be removed from office forth-

with – either in a last-ditch 25th Amendment move, or via speedy impeachment and removal. A president of the United States fomented a violent insurrection against a co-equal branch; the evidence unfurled in front of our eyes. But it appears – I’d love to be wrong – that nothing will happen. Apparently we must sit tight for 13 more days and hope that yesterday’s disgrace was just a one-off.

Shame should be forever heaped on the purblind enablers who refused to recognize what had long been inevitable. Perhaps the most prescient warning was voiced eight months ago, by global politics professor Brian Klaas, an expert on authoritarianism. He wrote:

“What will happen if Trump takes to Twitter to say he actually won? It’s not hard to see how deadly that could become... When people in positions of authority and influence invoke the language of political violence and then lose power, violence often ensues. It would be a mistake to assume the United States is somehow immune... nobody should be surprised if Trump tries to discredit the 2020 election – no matter the consequences – if he loses.”

No matter the consequences. Those who long played deaf and dumb have no right to whine now. Nor do they deserve to hold public office. To borrow a phrase from the Old Testament, having sowed the wind, they reaped the whirlwind.

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Did Musk Abuse Visa Program – And US Workers?

By JOE CONASON

Elon Musk’s aggressive defense of the H-1B visa program – which permits his companies Tesla and SpaceX to bring engineers and other workers from overseas – has aroused fury among his erstwhile admirers on the far right. Despite his ongoing efforts to identify himself with the most extreme nationalists, xenophobes and racists both here and across Europe, they suspect that the world’s richest man is driven not by love of his adopted country but by his lust for money.

Fresh evidence that Donald Trump’s new best friend is motivated by greed rather than MAGA fervor has emerged via Electrek, a popular website that covers the electric vehicle and green energy industries (and has sometimes been accused of excessive solicitude for Musk and Tesla, or worse).

Electrek reported that after a massive

wave of layoffs at Tesla last spring, the company replaced many of its higher-paid American employees with foreign workers holding H-1B visas. In the wake of Musk’s bruising online feud with other Trump allies – most prominently Steve Bannon and Laura Loomer – a number of whistleblowers reportedly showed up to expose the EV giant’s alleged mistreatment of Americans working there.

"Over the last few days, several current and former Tesla workers reached out to Electrek to reveal that Tesla ramped up its use of H-1B visas to replace US workers it let go during a wave of layoffs earlier this year," according to a story by its editor-in-chief, Fred Lambert, that led the website on Dec. 30.

Last April, Electrek reported that Tesla dismissed about 15,000 U.S. employees, mostly in Texas and California – but then the company moved to fill those same jobs with imported labor at lower cost.

"Current and former Tesla employees said that many of the laid-off US workers were replaced by foreign workers using H-1B visas," the website reported on Dec. 30. "These claims are backed by US Department of Labor data, which show that Tesla

requested over 2,000 H-1B visas during the time it was laying off US workers. ... Tesla workers said that many employees let go were more senior engineers with higher compensation and they have been replaced with junior engineers from foreign countries at a lower pay."

Lambert offered his own nuanced view of the controversy, which is that H-1B visas may well have a legitimate role in supporting U.S. tech industries but can also be abused – which may be what Musk has been doing. He points out that the H-1B rules afford corporations like Tesla enormous power over the visa-holding workers, who can only remain here as long as they are employed by the firm that sponsored them. In other words, those workers have far less autonomy and clout than unionized worker in auto – and we already know how much Musk hates unions.

One need not endorse the bigotry of Bannon and Loomer – nor their ridiculous views on immigration – to acknowledge that they are probably right about Musk and other bosses lining up to exploit MAGA "nationalism" for their own power and enrichment.

As for the president-elect, of course he

has been on both sides of the H-1B debate, depending on whatever profits him at the moment. Various subsidiaries of the Trump Organization have hired thousands of foreign workers, using both the H-1B and related H-2B visa programs – yet that didn’t stop candidate Trump from denouncing those programs as “very bad” and “unfair” for American workers when he was first running for president in 2016.

Charlatans like Musk and Trump are fortunate that the MAGA herd tends to be ignorant and gullible – which is why Republicans can pretend to support American workers and complain about the “globalists” and “elitists” who are quietly financing their campaigns.

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.

Haake...

Continued from previous page

Proving that a broken clock is still correct twice a day, rightwing provocateur Laura Loomer noted that these high tech jobs “should be given to American STEM students,” and claims Musk et al are enriching themselves at the expense of MAGA loyalists. Musk responded with characteristic immaturity, telling critics to go f-ck themselves in the face, prompting Steve Bannon to call Musk a “toddler” who needed a “wellness check.” Matt Gaetz chided Musk for trying to “engineer” immigration policies, while conservative Ann Coulter showed an uncharacteristic concern for labor, stating, “American workers can leave a company. Imported H1-B workers can’t. Tech wants indentured servants, not high-skilled workers.”

Musk inadvertently bolstered his critics’ argument when he admitted that H1-B engineers accept lower salaries just to work in the US. As Musk framed the debate, “It’s much easier to bring in skilled workers who might not do quite as good a job but will work for a fraction of the cost and be happy just to be here.” Got exploitation, anyone?

Fox anchors will sell Trump until they can’t

The world’s richest man, Musk prefers to pay less for talented employees and no surprise there. What is yet unknown is how MAGA will react when Trump repeatedly kicks them to the curb.

Trump created anti-immigrant fervor to attract low-information voters, but as long as Citizens United is good law, Republicans will always side with their wealthy donors over MAGA. Similar dynamics will surface when Republicans try to cut Social Security, impose regressive tariffs, or trim the ACA to fund tax cuts for the rich; the intraparty rifts have only just begun.

As Trump crosses the line from ignorant bombast to dangerous, even Fox News anchors will eventually abandon him given his lame duck status. Too bad Rupert Murdoch worked so hard to bash immigrants and accents— he could have filled those seats for less.

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Young...

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before detonation looks like space debris on wheels, is somehow unsafe.

There’s rich irony: He who helped bankroll the return of the Great Liar, and whose media platform X is harbor for bogus claims and conspiracy theories, tells us to get our facts straight.

Well, folks, this is where we are. All one can say is: Don’t stop paying attention.

John F. Kennedy assembled what scholars came to call the “best and brightest.” We

are just now getting a preview of the “worst and gooniest.”

I refuse to be depressed, however. I choose to be in defense mode – defense of humanity’s good name, and the nation so many great and brave people built.

“Politics is not a picture on a wall or a television sitcom that you can decide you don’t much care for.” – Molly Ivins.

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10 Wins Against Inequality to Celebrate in 2024

Champions in the fight against inequality face formidable challenges in 2025. But by working together at all levels—from the shop floor to state houses to the halls of Congress—we can still find ways to build power.

By SARAH ANDERSON and CHRIS MILLS RODRIGO

In dark times like these, shining a light on successful efforts to reverse our country's extreme inequality is more important than ever. As we looked back on 2024, we actually found plenty to celebrate. Here are 10 inspiring wins that deserve more attention.

1. Labor Breakthrough in the South

Volkswagen workers in Chattanooga, Tennessee voted overwhelmingly in April to join the United Auto Workers (UAW), a landmark win for labor organizing in the South. The region has suffered deeply because of its low-road, anti-union economic model. Seven out of ten states with the highest levels of poverty are in the South, according to the Economic Policy Institute.

Another UAW election, at a Mercedes-Benz facility in Vance, Alabama, where management was more aggressively anti-union, went the other way in May. But the union has vowed to continue organizing in the region. "This is a David and Goliath fight," UAW President Shawn Fain said after the Mercedes loss. "Sometimes Goliath wins a battle. But David wins the war."

2. Union Momentum at Amazon

Organizing workers at Amazon—now the nation's second largest private employer—has been a white whale of the labor movement for years. Aside from a breakthrough union election win in Staten Island, puncturing the e-commerce giant's anti-labor strategy has been challenging. That is, until this year, when the Teamsters made sizable gains.

The National Labor Relations Board ruled this summer that Amazon should be considered a joint employer of the delivery drivers it subcontracts, opening up that class of workers to organize. And organize they did—according to the Teamsters, over 5,000 drivers have joined the union at nine Amazon locations. Warehouse workers have made advances as well. In California, Ama-

zon employees in San Francisco and at the company's air hub in San Bernardino are now demanding union recognition.

3. Grocery Mega-Merger Blocked

For the past two years, the United Food and Commercial Workers union has led a coalition of more than 100 organizations against the proposed merger of grocery giants Kroger and Albertsons. The union predicted the mega-merger would result in "lost jobs, closed stores, food deserts, and higher prices."

By contrast, corporate executives stood to make a killing. At Albertsons alone, the proposed merger agreement would've delivered as much as \$146 million to the firm's top 10 officials.

On Dec. 10, one federal court judge and another in Washington state sided with the Federal Trade Commission and issued temporary injunctions against the deal. The following day, Albertsons threw in the towel on what would've been the biggest grocery store merger in U.S. history. "This is the first time the FTC has ever sought to block a merger not just because it's gonna be bad for consumers, but also for workers," FTC chair Lina Khan said shortly after the decision.

4. Ballot Wins on Taxes, Wages, Paid Leave

Despite the red wave on Nov. 5, voters in several states passed ballot initiatives to adopt inequality-fighting policies that most Republican politicians oppose.

In the red states of Nebraska, Missouri, and Alaska, voters approved guaranteed paid leave, while Missouri and Alaska also passed state minimum wage hikes.

Washington state voters rejected a hedge fund-financed ballot proposal to repeal the state's path-breaking capital gains tax on the rich. They also beat back an effort to gut a state-operated long-term care insurance program. In Illinois, voters adopted a non-binding measure expressing support for an extra 3% tax on income of over \$1 million.

5. TurboTax Got Turbo-Trounced

In 2024, for the first time ever, over 100,000 Americans filed their tax returns digitally directly to the IRS. The agency's Direct File system went live in 12 pilot states, breaking the dominance that for-profit tax preparation companies have enjoyed for years.

"This is an important fight to ensure greedy tax prep companies don't continue to rake in money from filers who are simply doing their civic duty," wrote Public Citizen's Susan Harley for Inequality.org.

Direct file also advances racial justice. Color of Change and the Groundwork Collaborative exposed how Intuit's TurboTax and H&R Block target Black and low-income communities for costly and unnecessary services.

Unfortunately, this fight is not over.

House Republicans are urging President-elect Donald Trump to kill the IRS's free direct file service on Day One of his second administration.

6. Biden's Worker Protection Spree

President Joe Biden adopted a range of pathbreaking executive actions to protect U.S. workers—including safeguards against toiling in extreme heat, broader overtime pay coverage, and new measures protecting organizing rights. He also authorized rules to crack down on bosses who misclassify employees as independent contractors or force them to sign noncompete agreements.

The beauty of executive actions: no need for Congressional approval. The downside: The next president has the power to roll them back.

Will that happen under Trump, a self-declared but dubious champion of the working class? We shall see. In the meantime, the National Employment Law Project and several other organizations have put together a guide on how state policymakers could enact similar standards at the subfederal level.

7. Grounding Private Jets

Did you know that private jets pollute 10 to 20 times more per passenger than commercial airplanes? And the typical private jet owner, with a net worth of nearly \$200 million, actually pays a far smaller share of air safety fees than commercial coach passengers, according to Institute for Policy Studies research.

In 2024, Stop Private Jet Expansion, a 100-organization coalition, won two major victories in their campaign to block the expansion of New England's largest private jet airport, Hanscom Field outside Boston. Massachusetts state rejected the developer's environmental impact submission, demanding supplemental information. As part of a comprehensive climate bill, the state legislature also updated the charter of Massport, the agency that will decide the future of the airport, to require them to consider carbon emissions and climate change in their decision-making.

8. Arming Millions of Davids Against Wall Street Goliaths

Elon Musk has called for "deleting" the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau. What's his problem with this federal agency? For Musk and his finance bro buddies, it appears the CFPB has been overly effective in helping ordinary Americans stand up to big money interests.

Recently the agency announced it's forcing shady "credit repair" companies to return \$1.8 billion in illegal junk fees to 4.3 million Americans. The agency also just issued new limits on overdraft fees that will save consumers billions more. During its nearly 14-year history, the CFPB has won nearly \$21 billion in compensation for victims of fraud, racial discrimination in lending, and other fi-

nancial abuse.

"Weakening the CFPB, slowing its work, or steering it to favor industry over the public interest," explains the advocacy group Americans for Financial Reform, "would give bad actors a green light to do their worst and further deepen this country's racial wealth gap."

9. Public Money for the Public Good

For four decades, procurement rules made it difficult for local and state policymakers to ensure that federally funded projects create good jobs. With megabillions in new public investment about to flow into infrastructure and clean energy projects, a labor-community alliance known as the Local Opportunities Coalition led the charge to get rid of these anti-worker vestiges of the conservative Reagan era.

Finally, in 2024, the Biden administration got the job done. Now state and local governments can give companies a leg up in bidding competitions if they commit to creating specific numbers of jobs with minimum levels of pay and benefits. They can also require hiring preferences for local workers and disadvantaged communities, ban the use of contract funds for union-busting, and prohibit employers from misclassifying workers as "independent contractors" to skirt labor laws.

10. Communities Standing up for Quality Care

Whatever happens on the national political stage over the next four years, local communities can still win important fights for a more just society.

One particularly inspiring example from 2024: the battles to protect county-owned nursing homes in rural Wisconsin against privatization. Study after study has shown that private equity-owned facilities have lower-quality care and higher mortality rates. And yet many Republican lawmakers are backing for-profit corporations' efforts to take over this critical service.

As veteran community organizer George Goehl has reported, Wisconsin seniors put up a strong fight this year. They succeeded in ousting pro-privatization members of at least three county boards and are continuing to organize to protect their healthcare from corporate greed.

Champions in the fight against inequality face formidable challenges. But by working together at all levels—from the shop floor to state houses to the halls of Congress—we can still find ways to build power and move our country towards a just economy that works for everyone.

Sarah Anderson directs the Global Economy Project of the Institute for Policy Studies, and is a co-editor of Inequality.org, where this appeared. Chris Mills Rodrigo is the managing editor of Inequality.org.

Let's Try Something Different in How We Deal with Polio

Finding middle ground is hard. Why not just give ground instead!

By ALEXANDRA PETRI

“As a Democratic member of Congress, I know my party will be tempted to hold fast against Mr. Trump at every turn: uniting against his bills, blocking his nominees and grinding the machinery of the House and the Senate to a halt. That would be a mistake. Only by working together to find compromise on parts of the president-elect's agenda can we make progress for Americans who are clearly demanding change in the economy, immigration, crime and other top issues.” — “Let's Try Something Different in How We Deal With Trump,” Rep. Tom Suozzi (D-New York), in a *New York Times* op-ed

Look, some people are still naive enough to believe that polio is, for lack of a better word, “bad.” And recent signs haven't been encouraging! It seems like the disease

wants to do exactly what it did last time: cripple children and put them in iron lungs. But what if instead of fighting it, we ... didn't?

When I look at how people voted this election, I am forced to conclude: Some of you want polio. Who am I to stand against that desire? Someone with values?

Do I think polio is good? No! Of course not. But some people do, and I just think it would be a mistake not to give them the opportunity to set the course of vaccine policy for the next four years. Which, again, isn't what I want. But compromise is important. That was why people voted for me, someone who said he didn't like polio, so that I could surprise them by wanting to hear polio out. That's just good politics.

It's not only polio. Everywhere you look, there are battles that once felt existentially important in which you can just surrender, as I'm sure Donald Trump is eager to tell Ukraine. And I am ready to start doing that work — first on polio, then on everything else.

Listen, I'm not naive. I know that every indication so far has been that only one side is willing to compromise on anything. That gives us bargaining power! Or is it the other side that gets the bargaining power ... ? Hang on, let me go look this up. This feels important to get right! Well, let me keep

going with my argument, but I will come back and look this up. Don't let me forget!

Where was I? Right: Having core values means that sometimes you have to stand up for them, even when it feels like an uphill battle. For instance, the belief that trans people deserve protection from those who would legislate them out of public spaces and eliminate their right to medical self-determination — a bottom line that I would never budge on, except to completely throw away that principle if I ever decide it's politically expedient. Which I think I might just have done! Whoops!

But, hey, that's what principles are: inconvenient. Except for my bedrock principle: that those who want the opposite of what I stand for and refuse to work with me on any issue probably know something that I don't, and I should listen to them. That I will never abandon.

When I see someone who wants to put polio back on the map, I just see one more opportunity for compromise. Why, if enough of us say, “You know what, in all that ranting about fluoride, I heard one word that made a kind of sense! Say more! I bet we can find common ground!” maybe the other side will stop believing what they believe and change their entire worldview! Isn't that what happened to Scrooge? It's not? Well, never mind.

If I just listen hard enough and agree to find common ground, I am certain the other party will be the one to change. That's usually what makes people change: when you give up defending your position completely! Then they budge. I hope! That's certainly what I'm counting on for the next four-plus years!

When I read the sentence “Unless enough people find the spine to oppose his appointment, Robert F. Kennedy Jr. will soon be in charge of the Department of Health and Human Services,” what I see is not a call to find some spine (impossible) and remind others of the stakes of not doing so. When has anyone found a congressional spine, except RFK Jr. while out on one of his weekly Hikes in Search of Surprising Things to Put Into His Freezer?

No, what that sentence means is: We need to start thinking of ways to compromise now! Compromise public health, compromise public safety, compromise all of our principles! Because that's what the country needs: more things to be compromised.

And I, for one, am excited.

Alexandra Petri is a Washington Post columnist offering a satiric take on the news and opinions of the day. She is the author of 'AP's US History: Important American Documents (I Made Up).'”

MARY SANCHEZ



Don't Call MAGA Supporters Lazy

OK slacker nation, listen up. Two of President-elect Donald Trump's helpers – Vivek Ramaswamy and Elon Musk – laid out what's wrong with America, according to them anyway. While most of the nation was enjoying the holidays with family and friends, these two decided to outline America the slothful. Ramaswamy took to X and pontificated that for at least three decades, but likely longer, the nation has been a culture adrift. He believes that we spend way too much time leisurely shopping and catching up on reruns of long defunct sitcoms, like "Friends." "A culture that celebrates the prom queen over the math olympiad champ, or the jock over the valedictorian, will not produce the best engineers," Ramaswamy stated.

Hence, the need for more foreign-born workers, people who arrive with valuable engineering and STEM skills is the fault of American laziness. In another snippet, Ramaswamy said native-born masses "venerated mediocrity over excellence for way too long." Musk joined in, posting on X, "The number of people who are super talented engineers AND super motivated in the USA is far too low." Musk is South African-born and Ramaswamy's parents are from India. Musk says that he first came to the U.S. on a visa involved in the conversation, the H-1B. It's intended to allow companies to fill college-educated specialty positions, like software engineering roles, when there aren't enough native-born people available. But don't tell MAGA supporters that they're lazy. Ramaswamy and Musk have been roasted for their remarks. The two men stomped on the MAGA ethos that plays off a fervent belief in American exceptionalism. According to this ethos, to criticize the U.S., to admit to its flaws and inequities, is disloyalty. If there is any room allowed for criticism, easy scapegoats can be cited: immigrants, the leaders of Democratic-led cities, or anyone who can be dismissed as too "liberal." For the MAGA ideologues, suggesting that the nation's problems are caused by sluggo Americans and that foreigners are necessary to keep industries vibrant is akin to treason. How unfortunate for MAGA that it's also partly true. In recent decades, the percentage of immigrants who arrive with college degrees

has risen. The nation imports, via the H-1B visa, talented people, especially from India and China. Ramaswamy also broadcasted a sentiment that is heard in immigrant circles, be they college-educated, or people who work manual labor jobs. Immigrants are highly aware that they're performing work that many U.S.-born people might snub their noses at, or simply aren't qualified to perform. But Ramaswamy veered into fantasy-land when he insinuated that people in his parents' native India are more disciplined toward higher education and hard work than U.S.-born people. The college attainment rate for India is about 13%, far lower than for native-born Americans – 35%. Most Indians, a nation of 1.4 billion, finish only elementary school, or they remain illiterate. It's due to opportunity, not intellect or aptitude. The world squanders human potential. And the U.S. needs immigrants. Baby boomers are retiring, with not enough younger workers replacing them. As technology reshapes workplaces, there are and will continue to be a need for foreign-born workers. Demographics alone call for it. The H-1B is one route to legal hiring of temporary workers. But the visa is notoriously misused by some industries. It can be used to undercut fairness by keeping foreigners in a form of indentured servitude because their legal status is tied to their employment. In essence, they are severely limited in a dynamic economy and must remain at their current job. Many have only a sliver of a chance of becoming legal per-

manent residents. For H-1B workers from India, the wait for a green card or legal permanent status is a lifetime, more than 100 years. Demand far exceeds the green cards made available annually by Congress. Immigrants to the U.S. are not only hardworking, intelligent people, they're also extraordinarily patient. They rightly contest their adopted nation's immigration policy and ridiculous backlogs. Trump has weighed in via social media in recent days, noting that he favors work visas like the H-1B. It's a counter to his usual nativism. Ramaswamy and Musk ought to use this as leverage. As co-chairs of the previously nonexistent and still questionably valid Department of Government Efficiency or DOGE, Trump tasked them with cutting the federal budget. One area to press is understanding the economic value of immigrants, who tend to start businesses that employ everyone. Immigrants can do so when they are allowed to break free of the tether of an H-1B temporary visa. Musk, love him or hate him, is an example. Get past the bruised feelings, MAGA. Open up to the broader picture and press Trump and Congress to do better by immigrants.

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Memo to Term Appointees: Stay Put!

Trump wants to oust the Fed chair and the IRS commissioner. They need to stay, as checks against autocratic power and hack appointees.

By ROBERT KUTTNER

President-elect Trump has tried to bully several senior officials who have term appointments into leaving office early so that he can name their replacements. They include the FBI director, the IRS commissioner, and the chair of the Federal Reserve. Appointments that are not coterminous with the presidency are one of our important checks and balances, especially against a would-be dictator like Trump. Most key regulatory commissions, by long-standing statutory law, have term appointees, though in many cases the president gets to appoint or designate the chairman. One term appointee, FBI Director Christopher Wray, told Bureau workers on Dec. 12 that he will resign at the end of President Biden's term, as Trump requested. "In my view," he said at a Bureau town meeting, "this is the best way to avoid dragging the Bureau deeper into the fray, while reinforcing the values and principles that are so important to how we do our work." This has it exactly backwards. Congress deliberately gave the FBI director a 10-year term to insulate the Bureau from politics. This did not prevent Wray's predecessor, James Comey (who was appointed by Obama), from meddling in the 2016 election at Hillary Clinton's expense. Wray, a Brahmin Republican lawyer appointed by

Trump in 2017, has been relatively independent. He infuriated Trump by cooperating with investigations of Trump's wrongdoing, and testified before the Senate that the events of January 6, 2021, were a case of "domestic terrorism." Trump's choice to succeed Wray, Kash Patel, is the worst of the worst; if confirmed, he will use the FBI for partisan retribution. Wray's term has three more years to run. It would not have been fun, but if he cared about the Bureau and the Constitution, he had a duty to stay on the job. Fed Chair Jerome Powell is another Trump target. Despite Trump's demand that he step aside, Powell, whose fixed term expires in mid-2026, has made it clear that he is not going anywhere. After Powell made that definitive statement, Trump backtracked, saying he did not plan to remove the Fed chair. We have not exactly been fans of Powell. He kept interest rates too high for too long, but he will not be Trump's pawn. It's painful to view the unaccountable and Wall Street-oriented Fed as a bulwark of democracy, but that's what things have come to. (In Trump's first term, the generals turned out to be defenders of democracy.) The IRS commissioner, Danny Werfel, has a five-year term that expires in 2027, but the law provides that he can be removed by the president. Trump has already named his choice for IRS commissioner, former Missouri Congressman Billy Long. Since leaving office, Long's main activity has been running a consulting firm advising businesses on how to take advantage of the COVID-era Employee Retention Credit, which is still available in some cases. Trump's nod to Long is a case of one grifter helping another. The IRS is also crucial because of the risk of weaponization. As I've written, the IRS could be used to go after the tax exemptions of the progressive ecosystem, whose organizations are substantially organized as 501(c)(3)s.

Speaking at the University of Texas Taxation Conference on Dec. 5, Werfel ducked a question about Billy Long. "I think the folks that should comment on them are the incoming administration, the transition team, and as appropriate, the nominees themselves," he said. Werfel implied that he might stay on as IRS commissioner for at least a few months, adding that he would stay "laser focused" on IRS readiness for the start of the next filing season in early 2025. One could imagine a tacit deal where Werfel stays a few months, Trump holds off trying to push him out, and then he steps aside. He should try to stay as long as possible. You can contrast how some term appointees are meekly going out with Rohit Chopra, director of the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau. Because of a 2020 Supreme Court ruling, the CFPB director can be fired at will on Day One of a new administration, and Chopra almost certainly will be. But that hasn't stopped him from a flurry of lawsuits against big banks, Walmart, and Rocket Mortgage, to name a few, along with creating a new credit card comparison shopping tool and issuing guidance on debt collector harassment. He's hitting the tape strong, forcing Trump to fire him while he takes popular actions protecting consumers. My first article for a national magazine was on the failed efforts of Richard Nixon to politicize the IRS, both to spy on tax returns and to punish enemies. That effort failed because of the integrity of two Republican IRS commissioners. It became an article in Nixon's impeachment. More than ever, we need that kind of integrity and grit now.

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

An Emerging US Health Care Politics?

By SETH SANDRONSKY

In his new Netflix special, entertainer Jamie Foxx shares that he suffered a debilitating stroke. The \$4.5 trillion US health care system at first failed to give him helpful treatment, which Foxx eventually received at a hospital in Atlanta. Think about the class dimensions of his experience. Foxx is a multimillionaire who in his time of medical need got a cold shoulder from the American health care industry. Where does that leave the majority of the US working class who earn much, much less? Up a creek with no paddle is the short answer, financially speaking.

In fact, insurers denying necessary health care to patients with insurance is the business model of the industry. Much human suffering follows. Meanwhile, money that insurers do not spend on patient care instead flows to the likes of UnitedHealthcare CEO Brian Thompson, gunned down in Manhattan recently. His murder is headline news, but the daily human toll from the industry's business practices is not. The contrast in press coverage is striking. Clearly, there are worthy and unworthy victims, as Noam Chomsky and Edward S. Herman detail in their book "Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media" (1988). Since Thompson's killing, the practices of the industry have been in the spotlight. Corporations such as UnitedHealthcare deny care as a matter of course.

Every dollar a health care corporation avoids spending on patient care is another greenback for executives and shareholders. This business model is harmful, shifting dollars away from patient care and health providers. Let us not forget that the daily working conditions of health providers are also the healing situations of patients. Labor has that connection to health care. Those providing and receiving medical treatment are sources of profits for health care corporations. That is how the industry operates. How will the continued denial of health care play out in the political system under Donald J. Trump's return to the White House? The answer to that question could prove momentous. Currently there is bipartisan support for the health care status quo that profits the

industry at the expense of the American public. Think about the impacts of that for working-class Democratic, independent and Republican voters. They are the losers, in brief. However, losers do not have to keep losing, politically speaking. Accordingly, there are shared class interests relative to health care in the lived experiences of tens of millions of working class Americans along a so-called political divide. The possibilities are intriguing, in my view. I see an opening for a new political formation that focuses on changing health care from its current state of a cash cow for private interests to one of a public service to improve Americans' lives. One thing seems certain. Overcoming the current status quo for health care will require the active involve-

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America Needs a National Healthcare System

The for-profit health insurance industry has attached itself to us like a giant, bloodsucking tick and “Scientific Racism” is part of the reason why

By THOM HARTMANN

There was only one person at a recent G7 meeting representing a country where an illness can destroy an entire family, leaving them bankrupt and homeless, with the repercussions of that sudden fall into poverty echoing down through generations.

Most Americans have no idea that the United States is quite literally the only country in the developed world that doesn't define healthcare as an absolute right for all of its citizens. That's it. We're the only one left.

The United States spends more on “healthcare” than any other country in the world: about 17% of GDP.

Switzerland, Germany, France, Sweden and Japan all average around 11%, and Canada, Denmark, Belgium, Austria, Norway, Netherlands, United Kingdom, New Zealand and Australia all come in between 9.3% and 10.5%.

Health insurance premiums right now make up about 22% of all taxable payroll, whereas Medicare For All would run an estimated 10%.

We are literally the only developed country in the world with an entire multi-billion-dollar for-profit industry devoted to parasitically extracting money from us to then turn over to healthcare providers on our behalf. The for-profit health insurance industry has attached itself to us like a giant, bloodsucking tick.

And it's not like we haven't tried.

Presidents Theodore Roosevelt,

Franklin Roosevelt, Harry Truman, Jack Kennedy and Lyndon Johnson all proposed and made an effort to bring a national healthcare system to the United States. Here's one example really worth watching where President Kennedy is pushing a single-payer system (as opposed to Britain's “socialist” model):

They all failed, and when I did a deep dive into the topic two years ago for my book “The Hidden History of American Healthcare” I found two major barriers to our removing that tick from our backs.

The early opposition, more than 100 years ago, to a national healthcare system came from southern White congressmen (they were all men) and senators who didn't want even the possibility that Black people could benefit, health-wise, from White people's tax dollars. (This thinking apparently still motivates many White Southern politicians.)

The leader of that healthcare-opposition movement in the late 19th and early 20th centuries was a German immigrant named Frederick Hoffman, as I mentioned in a recent newsletter. Hoffman was a senior executive for the Prudential Insurance Company, and wrote several books about the racial inferiority of Black people, a topic he traveled the country lecturing about.

His most well-known book was titled “Race Traits and Tendencies of the American Negro.” It became a major best-seller across America when it was first published for the American Economic Association by the Macmillan Company in 1896, the same year the Supreme Court's Plessy v. Ferguson decision legally turned the entire US into an apartheid state.

Hoffman taught that Black people, in the absence of slavery, were so physically and intellectually inferior to Whites that if they were simply deprived of healthcare the entire race would die out in a few generations. Denying healthcare to Black people, he said, would solve the “race problem” in America.

Southern politicians quoted Hoffman at length, he was invited to speak before Congress, and was hailed as a pioneer in the field of “scientific racism.” “Race Traits” was

one of the most influential books of its era.

By the 1920s, the insurance company he was a vice president of was moving from life insurance into the health insurance field, which brought an added incentive to lobby hard against any sort of a national healthcare plan.

Which brings us to the second reason America has no national healthcare system: profits.

“Dollar” Bill McGuire, a recent CEO of America's largest health insurer, United-Health, made about \$1.5 billion dollars during his time with that company. To avoid prosecution in 2007 he had to cough up \$468 million, but still walked away a billionaire. Stephen J Hemsley, his successor, made off with around half a billion.

And that's just one of multiple giant insurance companies feeding at the trough of your healthcare needs.

Much of that money, and the pay for the multiple senior executives at that and other insurance companies who make more than \$1 million a year, came from saying “No!” to people who file claims for payment of their healthcare costs.

This became so painful for Cigna Vice President Wendell Potter that he resigned in disgust after a teenager he knew was denied payment for a transplant and died. He then wrote a brilliant book about his experience in the industry: “Deadly Spin: An Insurance Company Insider Speaks Out on How Corporate PR Is Killing Health Care and Deceiving Americans.”

Companies offering such “primary” health insurance simply don't exist (or are tiny) in almost every other developed country in the world. Mostly, where they do exist, they serve wealthier people looking for “extras” beyond the national system, like luxury hospital suites or air ambulances when overseas. (Switzerland is the outlier with exclusively private insurance, but it's subsidized, mandatory, and non-profit.)

If Americans don't know this, they intuit it.

In the 2020 election there were quite a few issues on statewide ballots around the country. Only three of them outpolled Joe Biden's win, and expanding Medicaid to

cover everybody was at the top of that list. (The other two were raising the minimum wage and legalizing pot.)

The last successful effort to provide government funded, single-payer healthcare insurance was when Lyndon Johnson passed Medicare and Medicaid (both single-payer systems) in the 1960s. It was a hell of an effort, but the health insurance industry was then a tiny fraction of its current size.

In 1978, when conservatives on the Supreme Court legalized corporations owning politicians with their Buckley v Belotti decision (written by Justice Louis Powell of “Powell Memo” fame), they made the entire process of replacing a profitable industry with government-funded programs like single-payer vastly more difficult, regardless of how much good they may do for the citizens of the nation.

The Court then doubled-down on that decision in 2010, when the all-conservative vote on Citizens United cemented the power of billionaires and giant corporations to own politicians and even write and influence legislation and the legislative process.

Medicare For All, like Canada has, would save American families thousands every year immediately and do away with the 500,000+ annual bankruptcies in this country that happen only because somebody in the family got sick. But it would kill the billions every week in profits of the half-dozen corporate giants that dominate the health insurance industry.

This won't be happening with a billionaire in the White House, but if we want to bring America into the 21st century with the next administration, we need to begin working, planning, and waking up voters now.

It'll be a big lift: keep it on your radar and pass it along.

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.

As an Ex-President, Jimmy Carter Fought for Peace

He did more to advocate for peace as an ex-president than most politicians did in their entire career.

By KATRINA VANDEN HEUVEL

Former president Jimmy Carter has died at the age of 100. After leaving office in 1981, he enjoyed by far the longest retirement of any president in history—just over 42 years.

Recent tributes have invariably described Carter as a decent, dedicated public servant; a longtime Sunday school teacher who built homes with Habitat for Humanity. A humble man who lived modestly and who, unlike his successors, did not enrich himself

But this narrative belies the quietly radical approach Carter took to the post-presidency. By fiercely advocating for peace, and playing an active and bipartisan role in international diplomacy, Carter set a venerable standard for how politicians can serve the public long after leaving office. He did more to advocate for peace as an ex-president than most politicians do in the entirety of their careers.

President Carter and his wife, Rosalynn, founded the Carter Center in 1982, with an explicit mission to alleviate human suffering. The Center “wages peace” by resolving global conflicts, advancing human rights, and monitoring over 100 elections in almost 40 countries. The Nobel Committee cited these efforts as a reason for making Carter the first ex-US president to win the Nobel Peace Prize. (Other presidents have received the prize, but all while in office.)

His commitment to peace has made

Carter a go-to envoy to North Korea for decades. In 1994, he and Rosalynn were the first people to cross the demilitarized zone since the Korean War—and President Carter engaged in talks with President Kim that defused then-intensifying nuclear tensions. He went again in 2010, on behalf of the Obama administration, to secure the release of an American prisoner, after North Korea specifically requested his presence. He even offered to represent the Trump administration, though, needless to say, they didn't take him up on it.

In 2007, he cofounded The Elders, a group of statesmen committed to world peace and human rights, alongside former Irish president Mary Robinson, Archbishop Desmond Tutu, and former South African president Nelson Mandela. Carter played a key role in the group's inaugural trip to Sudan to bring attention to the war in Darfur. He later led delegations to Israel and Palestine in support of a two-state solution, and in 2015 met with President Vladimir Putin in Russia to discuss, among other topics, the conflict in Ukraine.

Carter took positions few American elected officials would dare to take, let alone former presidents. In his 2006 book, Palestine: Peace Not Apartheid, he charged Israel with human rights abuses in occupied Palestinian territory. The book generated outrage—he faced accusations of antisemitism, condemnation from leaders within his own party, and resignations from the Carter Center—but Carter stood firm. (Years later, Steve Berman, who led those resignations, would write a letter apologizing to the president for doing so. Carter responded with a handwritten note insisting that the apology was unnecessary, that he understood the way his critics reacted, and that Berman would be welcome to return to the Center.)

Carter had no qualms about criticizing his successors, either. In a 2016 *New York Times* op-ed, he called on President Barack Obama to recognize the state of Palestine. He published another the year before, criticizing Obama's call for the resignation of

Syrian President Bashar al-Assad. In that piece, he recalled stepping in when the US withdrew ambassadors from Syria, and in so doing he perfectly articulated his unique position in global diplomacy: “Bashar and his father, Hafez, had a policy of not speaking to anyone at the American Embassy during those periods of estrangement, but they would talk to me.”

For 42 years, Jimmy Carter has been the quintessential elder statesman. In a time when former presidents are more likely to spend their days promoting themselves rather than the general welfare, Carter stands head and shoulders above the rest. Leaders today could learn from how he leveraged his post-presidential power.

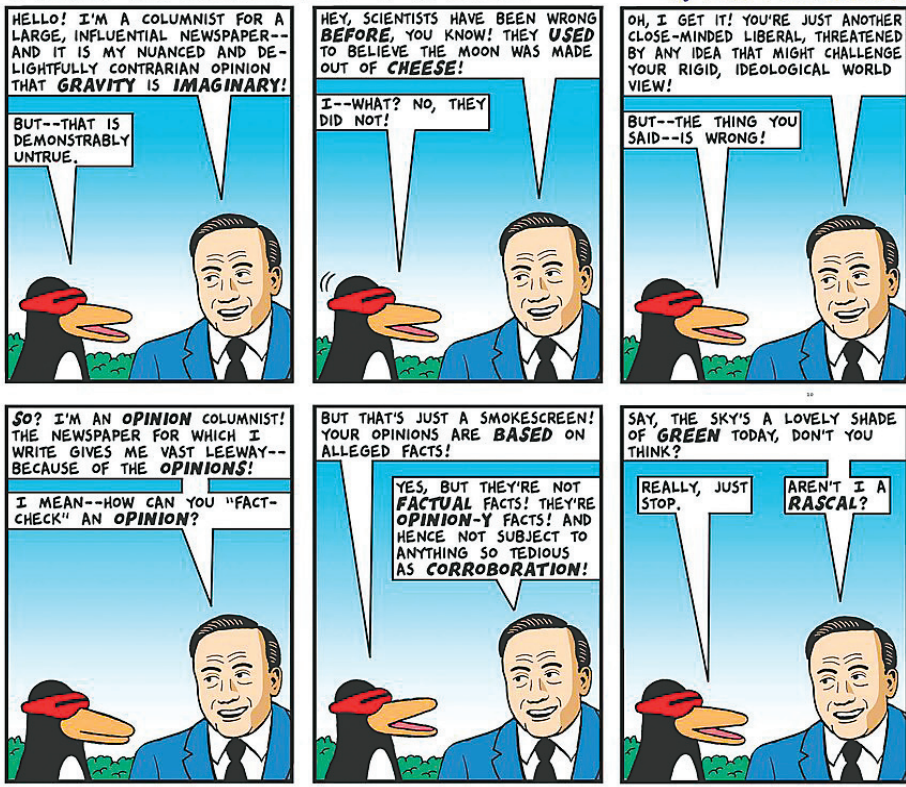
In the coming days and weeks, Carter's

legacy will be written about at length. His presidency will be discussed, as will his decades out of office. Across the entirety of his career, we should remember his fearlessness in the cause of peace, and his faith in the democratic institutions he fought to protect. As he himself said, “We take peace not as a dormant situation, but as one to be fought for—like winning an armed conflict.” The best way to honor Carter's legacy would be to wage peace for as long as we can, everywhere in the world, with everything we've got.

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

THIS MODERN WORLD

by TOM TOMORROW



What Is Our Collective Solution to Health Care Injustice?

The fight over health care in the U.S. is about competing narratives: profit-making versus collective well-being. We need to articulate a publicly funded solution now—before corporate spin silences us.

By SONALI KOLHATKAR

The Dec. 4 killing of UnitedHealthcare CEO Brian Thompson and the public outrage over the state of health care it sparked, is a tale of many competing narratives: the killer’s story, the public’s story, the industry’s story, and the politicians’ and punditocracy’s story. Which one wins out determines whether the United States ultimately replaces the healthcare system we know with a publicly funded version or continues to accept the flawed one we have.

Sweep away all the news spin, and at its heart, Brian Thompson’s killing has highlighted two crucial narratives, the first of which is that armed violence is a way to solve problems. Guns are a force so ubiquitous in our society today that we have become collectively numb to their destruction. It is a uniquely American act of desperation aimed at the industry that only someone like Mangione could be lionized for.

Secondly, the long-overdue prevailing story emerging from the incident is the injustice baked into our healthcare system that leaves nearly no one in the nation un-

touched. The story that has yet to be embraced collectively is what a systemic solution to the crisis looks like. That solution must center on publicly-funded healthcare and a complete dismantling of the insurance industry.

Luigi Mangione, arrested after a days-long manhunt, hardly fits the profile of a vulnerable member of society wronged by Big Health Insurance. White, male, physically fit (other than the debilitating back pain he appears to have recently suffered), born into privilege, and sporting a head of thick hair and a winning smile, he is a man whose political leanings don’t fit neatly into boxes that allow either the left or the right to unequivocally claim him or damn him. And yet he is just about the only archetype of a CEO-killer able to provoke the sort of public admiration in our White supremacist patriarchal world that Robin Hood would have been envious of.

I suspect that, like me, many people of color breathed a sigh of relief that the alleged killer wasn’t a Brown or Black man, or an undocumented immigrant. If he were any of those things, the narrative of a CEO’s murder would have been less about the CEO and more about the murderer. White men are allowed the space to be flawed human beings. Their motivations and mental health are interrogated since their race and gender absolve them of anything else. The “ideal hero” did the quintessentially American deed.

The fact that the CEO-killer wrote the words “deny,” “defend,” and “depose,” on bullet casings—words often used to describe the health insurance industry’s tactics—made it clear from the outside that this was an act meant to tell a story: that a death-dealing industry governed by wealthy corporate fat cats deserves to be dismantled, that its fate has come, that its leaders need to be taken down.

The killer struck a chord so deep that the industry and the punditocracy supporting it didn’t have time to articulate a counternarrative before many among the public

began celebrating the cold-blooded murder. Americans began rooting for a man who carried out the ultimate revenge fantasy of anyone who’s ever been denied coverage. “Wanted” posters for other healthcare CEOs emerged on the streets of New York City, for “denying medical care for corporate profit.” Comments filled with deep satisfaction and biting sarcasm over Thompson’s killing appeared on Reddit boards. Merchandise inspired by the words on the bullet casings sold on retail websites such as Amazon. Ballads were sung on TikTok.

Stories are powerful. They can move us into action—individual vigilante violence or collective movement building toward solutions that benefit us all.

For decades, counter-narratives by pro-industry groups kept us paralyzed into inaction. For example, 15 years ago, when the nation had the chance to rid itself of parasitic health insurance companies, a vocal “Astroturf” group called the Tea Party, parading as a grassroots formation, stymied President Barack Obama’s attempt to fundamentally reform healthcare. Obama didn’t even back the best alternative—Medicare for all—and only went as far as proposing a “public option” to private health insurance, where people could buy into publicly funded health plans. The then-president explained that with a public option, “no government bureaucrat or insurance company bureaucrat gets between you and the coverage that you need.”

Republicans, centrist Democrats, and their well-funded proxies fought back hard with powerful narratives, making wild claims about government “death panels,” and killed the public option. The version of the Affordable Care Act that ultimately passed was a gift to the insurance industry with a few bright spots, such as the end of “pre-existing conditions” as a basis for price hikes. The story that private, for-profit health insurance is superior to publicly funded healthcare won out. It was such a powerful tale that the health insurance industry had us rooting for the profits of bil-

lionaires and against our own interests.

Now, a CEO is dead, allegedly at the hands of a telegenic White shooter, in an act that has seemingly broken our collective psychosis. Many claim the murder is merely retaliation for the untold numbers killed by health insurance denials of care. Thompson’s death has unleashed countless horror stories about the industry’s predations, while the response of wealthy executives and defenders of the industry has been, well, pathetic. UnitedHealth Group CEO Andrew Witty wrote in a *New York Times* op-ed, “No one would design a system like the one we have,” and still he offered nothing more than greater transparency in how denials are decided upon rather than pledging to reduce or eliminate denials of coverage.

Peter Thiel, billionaire and co-founder of PayPal, spent 10 seconds sweating and thinking of a response to a question about public glee over the CEO’s killing before making an incoherent and nonsensical statement.

This is a moment like no other, an opportunity to rewrite the narratives around healthcare, to re-cast it as a human right, a necessity akin to public education, not a profit-making opportunity for Thompson, Witty, and health insurance shareholders.

I fear that, unless we articulate concrete demands for publicly funded healthcare, we may lose this opportunity. Since Mangione’s arrest, there have been concerns of copycat attacks against other insurance CEOs. A Florida woman was arrested for merely saying to a representative of Blue Cross Blue Shield after having a claim denied, “Delay, deny, depose. You people are next.” Apparently, death threats are commonplace for health insurance executives. According to the *Wall Street Journal*, “Vicky Gregg, the former CEO of BlueCross BlueShield of Tennessee, said she got repeated death threats when she was in the job years ago.”

Can we unite around, not just our common hatred of a system that preys on us, but on the system that will solve the crisis?

Continued on page 17

ROBERT REICH



Advice and Consent or Total Submission?

The cast of characters Trump has chosen to populate his second term is a Star Wars cantina of fanatics, extremists, conspiracy theorists, sexual harassers, and disreputable no-goods. They have little or no experience running government, let alone expertise in the issues confronting the agencies and departments Trump wants them to lead.

In late January, the Senate will hold confirmation hearings on them. As soon as they’re completed and Trump takes the oath of office on Jan. 20, the Senate will vote on them. Most if not all Senate Democrats will vote against them, so Trump can afford to lose the votes of only three Senate Republicans.

The question, therefore, is whether at least four Senate Republicans have enough integrity to refuse to confirm the worst of them. The worst of the worst are:

Pete Hegseth, Trump’s pick for secretary of defense. Hegseth has a reputation for sexual harassment, including an allegation of assault in 2017. (His own mother accused him in writing of repeatedly abusing women but subsequently disavowed the statement.) According to a recent report, Hegseth was ousted from leadership roles

in two military veterans organizations following allegations of financial mismanagement, aggressive drunkenness, and sexist behavior.

Nonetheless, Hegseth has appeared to win over key Senate Republicans. Iowa Senator Joni Ernst, an Armed Services Committee member and the Senate’s first female combat veteran, has been deeply concerned about sexual harassment and assault in the military (where she says she was assaulted). But Trump Republicans have threatened to run a primary challenger against her if she doesn’t support Hegseth — which seems to have changed her attitude toward him.

Of all Trump’s nominations, Hegseth is probably closest to Trump in character and temperament, which should be damning enough to stop his confirmation. He was scheduled to appear before the Senate Armed Services Committee for his confirmation hearing on Jan. 14. Stay tuned.

Kash Patel, Trump’s pick to direct the FBI. He has called for firing the top ranks of the FBI, prosecuting leakers and journalists, and replacing the national security workforce with “people who won’t undermine the president’s agenda.”

Patel has even created a list of whom he dubs “government gangsters” — headlined by outgoing FBI Director Christopher Wray and Attorney General Merrick Garland — who he says “must be held accountable and exposed in 2024.” He has pledged to investigate Trump’s political opponents and “come after the people in the media who lied about American citizens who helped Joe Biden rig the presidential election.”

Of all Trump’s picks, Patel may be the most dangerous.

Tulsi Gabbard, Trump’s pick for director of national intelligence. She has publicly called for the U.S. to allow Syrian President Bashar Al-Assad to remain in power and traveled to Syria to meet with him. She even challenged U.S. intelligence that found Assad’s forces had used chemical weapons.

Gabbard is close to Russian President Vladimir Putin and a favorite on Russian propaganda. In 2022, she used her platform to amplify a Russian talking point that

the U.S. had somehow provoked Putin to invade Ukraine.

Why in the world would Trump want her to head national intelligence — unless, of course, Trump himself is compromised?

Robert F. Kennedy Jr., Trump’s pick for heading the Department of Health and Human Resources. Kennedy Jr. is a well-known anti-vaxxer who has made the baseless claims that COVID-19 was “targeted to attack Caucasians and Black people” and that “the people who are most immune are Ashkenazi Jews and Chinese.”

Kennedy Jr. keeps repeating the long-debunked claim that vaccines cause autism in kids, along with his insistence that the COVID-19 vaccine has killed more people than it’s saved, which is another lie.

He’s a wacko. Nonetheless, his critiques of corporate influence over food and drugs might possibly gain the votes of two members of the Democratic caucus: Bernie

Sanders and John Fetterman.

The Constitution (Article II, Section 2, Clause 2), gives the Senate the power of “advice and consent” over a president’s key appointments. Advice and consent require careful screening, not outright submission to the will of an incoming president.

If you live in a state with Republican senators (or in Sanders’ Vermont or Fetterman’s Pennsylvania), you might remind them that they have a constitutional duty to not allow the U.S. government to fall into the hands of unqualified and potentially dangerous people like the four mentioned in this column.

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.” See robertreich.substack.com.



MAGA takes on Elon Musk's 'Tech Bros'

By CLARENCE PAGE

Just weeks before President-elect Donald Trump was scheduled to return to the White House, the coterie of American tech oligarchs who played a decisive role in re-electing him was busy exerting their own power in ways that suggest the MAGA coalition may be heading for a crack-up.

Trump famously invited fellow billionaires Elon Musk and Vivek Ramaswamy to lead an effort to cut government spending and federal payrolls. But in December Musk went rogue and used his vast social media reach to scuttle a spending bill he didn't like, complicating Trump's and the GOP's fiscal plans in the new session of Congress.

Then on the day after Christmas, Ramaswamy dropped an essay-length tweet on X lecturing Americans on the deficiencies of our "culture" that necessitate the use of H-1B visas to import tech workers into the United States from places like India.

Many Trump diehards were not pleased. A large and very vocal segment of MAGA world instantly cried that Trumpism was being betrayed.

For Trump voters, in large part, the last election was about immigration. It was also about unseating a class of "elites" who supposedly run the government and the media and other institutions for their own interests and to the detriment of a very large group

of people who supported Trump: exurban and rural working people who mostly don't have college degrees.

To these voters, "America first" means policies that put their interests before those of immigrants and foreigners. Yet here was Ramaswamy, touting a visa program that allows thousands of foreign engineers and other skilled immigrants to take jobs that Americans supposedly don't have the skills or the numbers to fill.

One of the best-known beneficiaries of the H-1B visa program is none other than Musk, whose car company, Tesla, has hired workers using the program. Like many others in his position, Musk defends the industry's need for the program.

The H-1B visa program is hotly debated in policy circles. Does it fill positions that American tech talent cannot, or is it exploited to secure cheap labor from easily intimidated migrants at the expense of qualified American workers?

These and other issues merit deeper investigation and public debate. But Ramaswamy, born in the U.S. to parents who moved here from India, preferred to treat the subject with a half-sermon, half-pep talk that sounded a lot like blaming the victim.

"The reason top tech companies often hire foreign-born & first-generation engineers over 'native' Americans isn't because of an innate American IQ deficit (a lazy & wrong explanation)," he tweeted. "A key part of it comes down to the c-word: culture."

Ah, yes. We've heard this line of argument before. And I don't necessarily disagree. I believe if you can generate and maintain a culture of excellence, meaning you accept nothing short of putting your

best effort into producing the best results, you're halfway on your way to success.

"Tough questions demand tough answers & if we're really serious about fixing the problem, we have to confront the TRUTH," Ramaswamy went on, citing a culture that "venerate(s) mediocrity over excellence," that celebrates the prom queen over the math olympiad champ and the jock over the valedictorian — a set of touchstones that strike even me as dated.

He went on to say he knows many immigrant parents in the 1990s who actively limited their kids' TV viewing because the shows "promoted mediocrity ... and their kids went on to become wildly successful STEM graduates."

He recommended tough-love movies like "Whiplash," which is excellent but in my view shows more toughness than love, and called for fewer reruns of "Friends."

"More math tutoring, fewer sleepovers. More weekend science competitions, fewer Saturday morning cartoons. More books, less TV. More creating, less 'chillin.' More extracurriculars, less 'hanging out at the mall.'"

Normalcy as a goal for students and parents, Ramaswamy argued, "doesn't cut it in a hyper-competitive global market for technical talent. And if we pretend like it does, we'll have our asses handed to us by China."

With that, my memory flashed back to my childhood, when I was inspired by watching America send its first astronauts into space. After the Soviet Union beat us into space with the Sputnik satellite, President Dwight Eisenhower and later administrations launched a race to orbit and

beyond.

Indeed, Ramaswamy concluded his message by writing, "This can be our Sputnik moment. We've awakened from slumber before & we can do it again."

Well, maybe. I agree with Ramaswamy on the need to promote excellence in education. That's a good way to keep America's economy the best in the world and to promote opportunity for all.

Unfortunately, we Americans seem to be a lot more divided and itching to fight each other than we were in the Eisenhower and Kennedy years. And, as I observed above, even the MAGA movement shows signs of rupture over the question of whom government policy should serve.

The less-educated working class voters and the hyper-educated tech world seemed to get along fine when the goal was defeating the Democrats in November. Everybody could bond over blaming immigrants and elites.

Now a new set of elites is flexing its muscles, and it has its own ideas about using immigrant labor for its own ends.

It's not clear whether the America-first MAGA will hold sway over Trump or whether he'll bend to the wishes of the tech brologarchy.

Beyond these two factions, however, the American public has a strong interest in both maintaining our nation's technological dominance and ensuring broader prosperity for all our fellow citizens. If we can stop fighting about what we want long enough, we have a better chance of getting it.

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

THE BIG PICTURE/*Glynn Wilson*

Project 2025: Will American Democracy Survive Trump's Second Term?

BIRMINGHAM, Ala. - Snowflakes are falling on the morning of Jan. 6 but it will not be enough to cover the ground over most of the South.

It might lift some spirits for a few minutes, but the way 2025 started with a bang in New Orleans and Las Vegas does not bode well for a happy new year for American democracy or the planet.

As flags fly at half-staff for former President Jimmy Carter, however, and we honor his amazing life with a national day of mourning, you have to wonder how his life's

example might inspire at least some of us to strive to be better human beings in 2025.

As a country, we are in deep trouble. There is no getting around that as Liar-in-Chief Donald Trump is sworn in again and has vowed to set the violent mob free that attacked the Capitol four years ago and nearly brought down the United States government while Capitol police let them on the grounds and in the building and out again without a single arrest

Yes, the F.B.I. and Department of Justice did find many of them, arrested them after the fact, put them on trial and got more than 1,000 convictions, many for assaulting police officers. But Attorney General Merrick Garland's cowardly slow-rolling of the prosecution of Trump for his role in inciting that insurrection is as much to blame for his political comeback as anything done by the Republican Party, the Heritage Foundation or Fox News.

J.D. Vance is now a heartbeat away from the presidency, helped onto the national stage by the Catholic cult Opus Dei,

which produced the radical Project 2025 to transform our democracy into a monarchy-like crypto- and Christo-fascist theocracy with an authoritarian dictator. If something happens to Trump, he will be the one to implement the plan to undo everything we've worked to build for the past 250 years.

If Trump keeps his promise to pardon the Jan. 6 insurrectionists they will all be back on the streets soon and ready to cause more havoc. If he keeps his promise to raise tariffs on imported goods again, it will send shockwaves through the global economy and likely bring inflation roaring back with prices spiking higher than ever.

So please forgive me for writing a pessimistic first column of 2025. It is a bit of relief that I finished my work in Washington, D.C., in the fall and headed for warmer and less stressful climes. Burned out on covering daily news and politics anyway, my plan is to spend the next few months working on a third edition of my memoir, "Jump on the Bus: Make Democracy Work Again," and a new book about the life and times of an old friend of mine, Wayne Perkins of rock and roll fame.

Perkins played guitar on Rolling Stones records and nearly became one of them, helped Lynyrd Skynyrd write some of their

first hit songs, and was arguably instrumental in Bob Marley's success on the international stage. He got to know Joni Mitchell in California in the early 1970s and played on her iconic "Court and Spark" album, and toured with Leon Russell and blues-rock guitar pioneer Lonnie Mack.

Yet he remains a virtual unknown to many since he never quite reached the zenith of fame and fortune like many of his peers in our generation. In more ways than one, I can relate. I shared the same rock and roll dream he had back then, but saw the writing on the wall and became a journalist instead. In spite of a lot of success, including writing for *The New York Times* for a few years, I've never gotten rich and famous as a news writer.

Oh, well. There's still time. If providence provides, I may visit some old stomping grounds in New Orleans myself this year, then head out West in the spring. That's if I am not arrested or murdered as one of Trump's "enemies within."

Wish us luck, dear readers, and if there's really any justice or mercy in the world, we will see you down the road.

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

Thinking About North Carolina

By GENE NICHOL

Like a lot of Tar Heel Democrats, I still think a good deal about the election. I'll concede I feel modestly more optimistic than I did two months ago, largely because Carolina did better, comparatively, than a lot of states. But electing Donald Trump is still, literally, the worst result I can imagine. And our thievingly partisan electoral districts continue to rob us of democracy.

Still, I'm proud of our divided status. Roy Cooper has proven, for two terms, to be a popular and effective governor — saving us from the worst possibilities. And the 2024 election of a Democratic governor, lieutenant governor, attorney general, secretary of state, school superintendent and supreme court justice mark us as distinct. We pushed back at the darkness and managed a meaningful glimpse of the light. I'm confident it will grow. Maybe others aren't but I am.

There is, of course, the question why.

Why Democrats have, here, shown surprising might? I don't have an answer. Some of it could be history. Our roots as a more moderate southern state are purposely exaggerated. But we did have Terry Sanford when Alabama welcomed George Wallace. And we haven't forgotten everything.

There's also, as ever, significant blood pumping in the North Carolina progressive, activist community. Moral Monday didn't grow here by accident. Rev. Barber is a singular leader. But he found fertile soil, like others before him.

And there is much heroism in the N.C. Democratic Party ranks, new and old, high and low. I'm always inspired by the grit and the steel of its best soldiers; and the caucuses in Raleigh show more heart and nerve than they get credit for. I'm also much taken with Anderson Clayton and the other new officers of the state party. I've begun to think their brand of engaged, community-based politics might eventually merge movement and partisan efforts in the Tar Heel State. That would be something to see.

I've also begun to think more about North Carolina Republicanism — the folks who have ruled our General Assembly for 15 years. I've come to believe there's a dif-

ference between them and the worst slates of Trumpists. My views, at bottom, would be neither welcome nor complimentary, I'm sure. But remember, they've been at this far longer than Trump has. They dominated North Carolina before he came down the absurd staircase. And I doubt Phil Berger ever thought he needed instruction from the 45th president about how to subjugate Tar Heels.

Unlike Trump, most N.C. Republican leaders don't seem to think cruelty alone can be the message. They aren't apt to publicly dwell on s—hole countries, dog eating immigrants, poisoned blood, and filthy, dirty disgusting women.

In fact, N.C. Republicans seem certain they have to mislead voters to prevail in elections. They want voter ID's to prevent fraud, which doesn't exist. They slash poor people's benefits to help them out. They want the worst unemployment compensation program in the country to bolster people's independence. They pass bathroom bills to stop women from being assaulted. They cut education budgets to make schools better. They end the estate tax to help out the little folks.

They govern by façade. But they do that because they don't think they could get away

with telling the truth. They don't think Tar Heels would stand for it. It's a compliment of sorts, even if of the most back-handed sort.

All this makes me think that Democratic truth-telling has a good future in North Carolina. Even if it takes a while for the rest of the country to come around. And federalism, at long last, is our friend.

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.

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The Sad News of January: Scrooge Lives On and On

Every January, I search for the reformed Scrooge — the one beloved of Christmas tales. Instead, the misanthrope springs back. The old Scrooge was cheap: He threatened to dock Bob Cratchit a few pounds for a few hours off on Christmas Day, he refused to contribute alms to the poor, he ate a diet of gruel. Yet beyond cheapness, he was mean. Human suffering did not pierce his heart. If poor people died, it would decrease the surplus population (echoing Malthus’ fears about over population).

Here are contenders for the Old Scrooge award. First runner-up: JD Vance. His memoir, “Hillbilly Eulogy,” reeked of “social darwinism,” the self-satisfaction of people who attribute their climb out of poverty to their own drive. The corollary is that those who don’t make it to Yale Law School, then to a hedge fund, lack the true grit character of this era’s Horatio Alger. And candidate Vance’s eagerness to deport all “undocumented” migrants, including those working full-time jobs, was cruel. His explanation, that native-born Americans were waiting in the wings, eager to take those jobs, was specious, refuted by a phalanx of economists; yet he persevered in lying that “the others” (mostly dark-skinned) were

taking jobs from “Americans” (paler hues). JD Vance doesn’t capture the Scrooge award, though, because, however Scroogian the rhetoric, he as senator did not directly harm anybody. Indirectly, but not overtly. Maybe next year he will win the award.

Next runner-up: Elon Musk. In his zeal to pare government, he will sprinkle the federal workforce with pink slips, saving billions of dollars. Of course, some of those pink-slipped workers bolster our nation’s water, air, food supply. Some work in schools and hospitals. Some weigh the scales of justice in favor of the downtrodden. Just as crucially, Mr. Musk despises much of the American workforce. He wants immigration visas for the skilled high-tech workers, but considers much of America’s workforce sub-par. If he had been Scrooge, he would have fired Bob Cratchit and outsourced the clerical work. But, again, he hasn’t yet wreaked havoc. So he takes a pass.

This year the overwhelming winner of the Scrooge award: the U.S. District Court in North Dakota Judge Daniel Traynor, speaking for the majority, ruled that the Dreamers — the DACA generation — should not have access to the Obamacare Affordable Care Marketplace that has given so many Americans health insurance.

The Dreamers languish in immigration limbo. They came here illegally as children, some as infants. (Many have younger siblings, born in the United States, and consequently citizens). They have never truly lived in their “native” lands; they rarely can speak the language; and their parents may have gotten green cards to stay legally. Successive Congresses have tackled with the Dreamers: to send them back to a place they don’t know even though they have lived virtually their whole lives here, gone to school, graduated into professional-level jobs? Even President Trump, avid to deport/deport/deport, has hesitated to rush to deport them, but has tentatively prom-

ised, maybe, a path to stay. (Currently Dreamers have no legal pathway to citizenship. Marriage does not automatically guarantee a green card.)

As for health insurance, the Biden Administration allowed the Affordable Care Marketplace to cover them, as of November 2024. The rationale was both humane and commonsensical: we don’t want people too ill to work, carrying communicable diseases that don’t get treated, unable to get affordable vaccinations. For the Dreamer generation, the costs are not momentous: they are generally too young to incur the debilitating costly diseases of their grandparents. (Indeed, the conservative solons eager to pare Medicaid should look not so much to the young pregnant women and children, but to the grandparents in nursing homes.)

Back to the Biden ruling. Attorneys General in 19 states sued to stop the ruling, to end coverage for Dreamers. The rationale: access to the Affordable Care Marketplace would create a “powerful incentive” for Dreamers to remain in the United States, although this is the only home they have known. The justification for this meanness: access to insurance poses a substantial “monetary risk” to states.

The states bear mention: Kansas and North Dakota, the lead plaintiffs, were joined by Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Idaho, Indiana, Iowa, Kentucky, Missouri, Montana, Nebraska, New Hampshire, Ohio, South Carolina, South Dakota, Tennessee, Texas and Virginia.

Scrooge the misanthrope would have been impressed with this Court. While he didn’t help the people suffering around him; he didn’t kick them, piling additional misery upon them. This Court truly merits the award.

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Wondering About Wonder Drugs

By SAM URETSKY

The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) approves 40 to 50 drugs a year. Some are new molecules, while other approvals are of older drugs for new uses. Most don’t get much attention, but some become commercially important. In 1974, Upjohn (now a division of Pfizer), released ibuprofen, the first non-steroidal anti-inflammatory, not counting aspirin, and if seemed as if the drug was a cure for arthritis. It’s not. In 1977 Smith Kline (the name changes a lot) released cimetidine for treatment of ulcers — and then offered a false reason for why the drug’s benefits didn’t last very long— ulcers are actually caused by bacteria

But in 2005 the grail was found — or so it seems. About 1906, Frank J. Kellogg, the brother of the cereal maker, founded Kellogg’s Safe Fat Reducer, and other companies were promising weight loss nostrums, such as Marjorie Hamilton’s Obesity Cure (\$15, which would be about \$560 today.) At that time, the closest thing to a drug that worked was thyroid extract, which can be dangerous. In 2002 Amylin developed exenatide, the first GLP-1 agonist, and later formed an alliance with Lilly in to bring the drug to market. Exenatide was approved by

the FDA in April 2005, for people whose diabetes is not well controlled on other oral medications.

There have been a number of modifications of the original molecule, but in July 2024 the journal *Nature* published a report that combined two current interests, Artificial Intelligence and GLP-1: Using large language models to assess public perceptions around glucagon-like peptide-1 receptor agonists on social media. The abstract begins: “The prevalence of obesity has been increasing worldwide, with substantial implications for public health. Obesity is independently associated with cardiovascular morbidity and mortality and is estimated to cost the health system over \$200 billion dollars annually. Glucagon-like peptide-1 receptor agonists (GLP-1 RAs) have emerged as a practice-changing therapy for weight loss and cardiovascular risk reduction independent of diabetes.” They used AI to analyze 390,000 discussions of the effects of GLP-1 in Reddit discussions. The results showed a mainly neutral-to-positive view of these medications, but the analysis of the findings of this large a review may show new side effects not previously seen in clinical nor reported in previous trials. This type of study may even show a direction for further study.

On Dec. 5, 2024, Medscape published a report, “GLP-1s Hold Promise for Addiction but Questions Remain.” While there have not been serious controlled studies of these drugs, there has been chatter about po-

tential use for treating drug addiction and alcoholism.

There have been several drugs in this class, marketed by different names for diabetes and for weight loss:

- Semaglutide:
 - Brand names: Ozempic (for diabetes), Wegovy (for weight loss)
 - Manufacturer: Novo Nordisk
 - Semaglutide was the top-selling drug in the United States in 2023, with sales of almost \$14 billion
 - Liraglutide:
 - Brand names: Victoza (for diabetes), Saxenda (for weight loss)
 - Manufacturer: Novo Nordisk
 - Dulaglutide:
 - Brand name: Trulicity
 - Manufacturer: Eli Lilly
 - Exenatide:
 - Brand names: Byetta, Bydureon
 - Manufacturer: Eli Lilly
 - Dual Agonists:
 - Tirzepatide:
 - Brand names: Mounjaro (for diabetes), Zepbound (for weight loss)
 - Manufacturer: Eli Lilly
- With the number of GLP-1 agonists and the demand for effective weight loss, there has been interest in which, if any, is the best, with advertising to follow. YouTube is rife with advertising claiming that one or the other is best. *Cureus* (vol16, no4) published a meta analysis of nine different studies to see if there were significant benefits, one to the

other. While semaglutide was marginally more effective at weight loss, there was no stand-out. The authors note that there have been newer drugs in the same general class that have not been available for comparative studies. Mounjaro® (tirzepatide) and Zepbound® (tirzepatide), which act on two different receptors, is apparently more effective at causing weight loss than the other drugs, but there have not enough studies to determine which is most effective, safest, or even cost effective.

Still, it is important to realize that these drugs are generally safe and effective, and a discussion in Medscape (12/6/24) was titled “No, Diet and Exercise Are Not Better Than Drugs for Obesity” which begins, “They’re literally not better. Idealistically, sure, but literally not. And there’s really no debate. Meaning there’s never been a reproducible diet and exercise intervention that has led to anywhere near the average weight lost by those taking obesity medications. Furthermore, when it comes to the durability of weight lost, the gulf between outcomes with diet and exercise vs obesity medications is even more dramatic.”

We’ve come along way since Marjorie Hamilton (about 1910) reported “fat is simply thickened nutrition.” It might be called “Indiana Jones and the weight loss remedy that actually works!”

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America First Imperialism

I want to think it’s a joke. An ad-lib. But it wasn’t the first time he said it.

Greenland. The Panama Canal. Canada. Renaming the Gulf of Mexico. Annexation of foreign lands. Military force.

During what *The New York Times* described as “a rambling, hourlong news conference” Jan. 7, then President-elect Donald Trump described Greenland and the Panama Canal as vital to American interests and that they should be in U.S. possession. He also talked about annexing Canada, and refused to rule out military force to achieve his expansionist goals.

“We need them for economic security — the Panama Canal was built for our military,” he said. Asked again if he would rule out the use of military force, he said: “I’m not going to commit to that. You might have to do something.”

The threats were rebuffed clearly and firmly by Denmark and Greenland, by Panama, and by Canada. Many in the foreign policy establishment sought to contextualize the remarks as a negotiating ploy or as Trump being Trump.

These responses, however, fail to capture the truly dangerous nature of what Trump said underplay the threat this new Trump presidency poses.

Trump is and always has been a bully. He uses whatever power he has at his disposal. It is how he operated in busi-

ness and how he managed his first term in office. He has no regard for norms or rules (they’re for suckers), and views every relationship as transactional. And he is uniquely and dangerously American.

Expansionism and empire building are in our DNA, beginning with the earliest wars against indigenous North Americans and encompassing the westward expansion and numerous foreign adventures. While annexing territory has been off the table for decades, our most recent wars — in Iraq and Afghanistan — and much of our foreign policy have been focused on creating friendly client states around the globe.

What Trump is suggesting, in broad strokes, is not new. And, given his narrow win and lack of a mandate, it would seem politically foolish.

So why does he keep raising these scenarios? Maggie Haberman of *The New York Times* told Anderson Cooper that the three “goals” needed to be addressed separately, that taking over Greenland and Panama have been “floated for decades,” mostly by the right. His “chatter about Canada” was “clearly much more of a troll” and a “dominance play.”

Zeeshan Aleem, writing for MSNBC, mined the same rhetorical space. He called Trump a “pure showman.”

Claiming he wants to rename the Gulf as he threatens Mexico with tariffs is culture war bait that changes nothing — but it gives Trump an easy way to beat his chest and scratch the itch of the chauvinist without actually doing anything meaningful.

But Trump is more than just showman, as he proved during his first term, and his “distractions,” his efforts to “flood

the information zone” are more than just misdirections or a ploy. We consistently underestimate who he is and how he sees his role in the White House. We are afraid to take him at his word, to fully engage with the danger he poses.

Trump is a wannabe-autocrat, a fascist. His models are Vladimir Putin in Russia and Viktor Orban in Hungary. And he’s said as much.

He plans to be a dictator on Day One and launch what would be the largest deportation program in our history. Can he do it? The logistics will make it difficult, but actually getting it done is less important than the message it sends.

He plans to use libel laws and other legal means to cow the press. Will it work? It already has, as the behavior of the *Washington Post* and *L.A. Times* over the last few months attests.

Trump and his allies in Congress have signaled that they will use the IRS, the police and military, and other tools of power to clamp down on protest, to silence critics.

This imperial, expansionist rhetoric is part and parcel of this. America is exceptional, Trump says. Our needs are paramount, he says. We are being cheated, he says. America First demands this. All of this is part of the same argument.

Ignoring these connections, pretending they are just Trump being Trump only makes the threat worse. This is not a joke.

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WAYNE O'LEARY

Mr. Roosevelt Gives a Speech

The Republicans, you have to admit, know what they want. It's all spelled out in the pages of Project 2025, but even if it weren't, it's been lodged in the reptilian brains of GOP partisans for as long as anyone can remember.

What the Republicans' attitude boils down to is this: a visceral hatred of government and everything it does, from its regulatory and investigative powers to its taxing and budgetary powers. And the solution, whether committed to paper or eating away at the brain cells of the party faithful, amounts to an urgent commandment: Destroy government, especially the federal government, and all its works, cripple and immobilize it in every way possible, so that Republican minds can rest easy at night and sleep the sleep of the comfortably deluded.

The GOP has been an ideologically consistent party for literally decades; its beliefs have followed a straight, undeviating line from the Social Darwinism of the late 19th century through the New Era of Coolidge and Hoover, the somnolence of the Eisenhower years, the Goldwater revolt, the Reagan Revolution, the Tea Party uprising, and, lastly, Donald Trump's MAGA movement of today.

Nothing of significance changes: taxes are bad and so are labor unions; profit is good and so are corporations; laissez-faire is the economic ideal; rugged individualism is the mythical little engine that can; and liberal government is the wasteful, inefficient worm in the apple. Looking abroad, isolationism is the goal and militant nationalism

the means of guaranteeing it.

A looming expression of the GOP belief system in action is the incoming administration's phantom Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE), which Trumpian true believers Elon Musk and Vivek Ramaswamy are poised to introduce to Washington. These two members of the Billionaire Boys Club would slash federal regulations to the bone, shrink the public sector by \$2 trillion (or fully one-third), and cut the government workforce by 25%, supposedly balancing the federal budget without revenue enhancements.

Such workforce reductions, according to the sympathetic but dubious center-right think tank the Manhattan Institute, would actually reduce Washington's real spending by barely 1%, since keeping the government open would necessitate replacing fired workers with expensive private contractors, whose cost would simply be moved off the books. In theory, however, classic Republican budgetary austerity would be maintained.

It's been said that President-elect Trump is an exception to the long, unvaried history of Republican conservatism. It's true he moves to the beat of his own drummer, but his drummer leans heavily right; it's why Republicans back him. On all the essentials -- hatred of taxes, opposition to government spending, antiregulation, xenophobia -- Trump follows the GOP script.

It's a script based on an essentially negative view of human nature; that is, people are basically greedy, selfish and mean-spirited, and any (liberal) attempt to redirect their inbred instincts will prove foolish, counterproductive and, most of all, a waste of taxpayers' money -- meaning the taxpayers who have most of it under the plutocratic American system.

There's always been a counter to this conservative conception of the world, one represented by the Democratic Party's more humane and positive worldview, but the De-

mocrats, as often happens, are presently offering an enfeebled response. The more liberal of the two parties is weighed down by constant kowtowing to its multiple minority interest groups, which pull in several directions at once, and by an ideological split personality that regularly produces an inability to unite around a philosophically progressive approach to politics. Call it the big-tent syndrome.

It's necessary to go back multiple generations, back as far as the 1930s and the Roosevelt administration, in fact, to find a common progressive core capable of mounting a defense against a surging conservatism. It's known as New Deal liberalism, the fundamental political persuasion that created the modern Democratic Party, but that has been under attack, both within and without, since its inception. The best articulation of this embattled doctrine was contained in a barely remembered speech from Franklin D. Roosevelt's initial campaign for the presidency.

On Sept. 23, 1932, at the Commonwealth Club in San Francisco, the Democratic candidate delivered a groundbreaking address on progressive government that concluded his tour of the Western states; it was still regarded years later as the high point of his maiden run for the White House. To Howard Zinn, who included it in his collection *New Deal Thought* (1966), the speech represented the essence of the Roosevelt creed. Other notable historians (Richard Hofstadter, Arthur Schlesinger Jr.) placed it in the forefront of FDR's public pronouncements.

The speech, primarily drafted by New Deal brain trust Adolph A. Berle Jr, a renowned foe of corporate concentration leading to oligopoly, argued for a new "economic constitutional order" that would enlarge the federal role and introduce national planning to better balance economic risks and rewards. Starting with a survey of America's historical development, Roosevelt

acknowledged the part played by "ruthless, ambitious" men, the entrepreneurial speculators, manipulators and financiers who had built the country, but whose expansionary excesses had now led to uncontrolled business monopoly, waste, exploitation and corrupting power. "Put plainly," he added, using a nautical analogy, "we are steering a steady course toward economic oligarchy, if we are not there already."

The result was a growing diminishment of equal opportunity, an inability to accommodate large immigration flows, distribute wealth equitably, and provide for an adequate national standard of living. A new social contract, involving corporate business, was needed to ensure "enlightened administration" of the American economy that would control inflationary booms and recessionary busts. Private economic power was a public trust that, if not observed by America's big business establishment, would have to be enforced by government.

What's remarkable is that the San Francisco address, aimed at a country convulsed by the Great Depression, adapts so readily to the present era. The avaricious millionaires of FDR's time were little different from the rapacious billionaires of our own -- the Musks and Bezos. The destructive unemployment of then differed only in degree from the debilitating inflation of now. The psychic hopelessness of the 1930s varied little in its impact from the optimism gap of the 2020s.

For the moment, those who fail to see the comparison, dismissing it out of hand, are in charge and will be for a while yet. But the rejoinder is out there in the form of a past leader who was the catalyst for a different viewpoint. His little speech deserves a re-reading.

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

Political Economy Contradictions as We Lurch Into 2025

By RICHARD D. WOLFF

The Republicans (GOP), traditionally the U.S.'s anti-tax party, now promise to use tariffs to wage trade wars, to massively deport immigrants, and to stop drug traffic. But tariffs are simply the name of one kind of tax (on imported goods and services). So the GOP becomes both anti-tax and pro-tax. Likewise, the traditional party of minimal government, today's GOP now favors massive subsidies to industries that big government will select as well as economic sanctions and bans on enterprises and whole countries that big government will select. Beyond the right-wing ideology and financial self-serving, Donald Trump reflects deeper contradictions in the GOP's evolution.

The GOP, traditionally the laissez-faire party of private enterprise, now favors increased government control of what private enterprises can and cannot offer in markets for reproductive healthcare, control medications and devices, and also for vaccines and drugs. The GOP, traditionally supporting "freedom," now insists on blocking the free movement of people across borders and favors protectionist economic policy over a commitment to "free trade." Some of Trump's cabinet nominees voice traditional GOP views while others pronounce the new anti-traditional positions. Some nominees do both. Trump does not resolve the deep contradictions in the GOP's message, thereby confusing both its messengers and its public audiences. In the moment, those contradictions give Trump some power. Amid the confusion, he decides. But soon conflicts among U.S. policies will expose the incoherence of Trump's project and thereby sap his power.

The Democratic party was, at least since the Great Depression of the 1930s, the "progressive" party of working people, unions, and oppressed minorities. Yet the rise of the "centrists" across recent decades shifted the Democrats rightward. As they became grateful recipients of corporate and billionaires'

donations, the Democrats increasingly supported the donor class by fielding "moderate" candidates, moderating their policies and programs, and publicly marginalizing the party's remaining progressive wing. Privately, the Democrats' centrist leaders pleaded and maneuvered to retain the traditional support of labor unions, oppressed minorities, and educated professionals. Moderation rendered the Democrats' pursuit of gains for their traditional supporters ever less effective. So too did Democrats' hold on those constituencies' electoral commitments and loyalties dissipate. Success with donors contradicted deepening failures with voters, most starkly exposed in the 2024 election.

Multiple, intense, and persistent contradictions within both parties suggest that some underlying, historic shifts may be underway. In my view, the first of those shifts is the peaking and subsequent decline in recent decades of the U.S. empire and its allies (especially the G7). This shift reflects and feeds the concurrent rise of the Global South, China, and the BRICS. A second shift is the accumulation of U.S. capitalism's internal economic problems and difficulties. These are inadequately acknowledged, let alone solved. Chief among the problems are the long-term worsening of wealth and income inequalities and the persistent boom-bust or recession-inflation cycles for which no solution has been found.

In short, both the GOP and the Democrats have denied both shifts. Indeed, denial has so far been the parties' shared response to the linked declines of global empire and domestic capitalism. Denial rarely solves problems. It usually enables or provokes them to worsen until they explode.

The key contradictions roiling political parties and their economic policies work parallel effects among professional economists. Unresolved, stale debates among economists react back upon policies, politicians, and public discourse to render them frustratingly powerless to fix what the public sees increasingly as a broken system. Starting with Adam Smith, David Ricardo, and the doctrine of laissez-faire and, especially since John Maynard Keynes, a huge portion of the profession has centered its work around an ongoing, seemingly endless debate. The question is whether our capitalist system is

best served by minimal versus large, ongoing government interventions in its operation. Should we privilege pro-laissez-faire economics (the so-called neoclassical tradition) or governmental interventionist economics (the so-called Keynesian tradition) or some "synthesis" of both?

This debate figured prominently in U.S. university economics classes 20, 40, and 60 years ago much as it does in such classes today. The themes of that debate echoed prominently in the language of politics then and now. Occasionally, a few politicians recognized that the overdrawn oppositions, in theory, did not correspond all that well with actual practical politics. Nixon once said, "We are all Keynesian now." Bill Clinton boasted that he had "ended welfare as we know it." Trump regularly excoriates Democrats as "radical left lunatics" and includes "fascists" among them. All three presidents were proved wrong, albeit quite self-assured, in making such confused and confusing statements.

Yet the centrality of the private-versus-government dispute in both economic theory and policy continues. Its social usefulness lies more in what it excludes rather than in anything positive it includes. Putting that debate at the core of economics has helped prevent alternative cores from emerging that would challenge both neoclassical and Keynesian economics. One such alternative core would question whether top-down hierarchical organizations of production (the employer-employee model) better serve societies than horizontally egalitarian, democratic organizations (the worker coop model). Debates might then focus on which organization of production better preserves the natural environment, reduces income and wealth inequalities, overcomes cyclical economic instability, or advances the physical and mental health of people.

The contradictions agitating discourses and practices these days may stem from the exhaustion of old economic and political traditions even as a new tradition is not yet clearly emerging. On the one hand, the U.S. and the UK now join Europe in turning clearly toward government-run protectionism instead of free trade. On the other, state-supervised China and India, among others, support free trade. The economic growth

records of the USSR in the 20th century and of China in the 21st century undermine preferences for private over state-regulated capitalisms. The old debate yields no new light on such central economic issues these days as the rise of the BRICS bloc in the world economy relative to the declines of an already smaller G7 bloc and the U.S. dollar in world trade.

Of course, economists and politicians whose resumes mark them as leading proponents of neoclassical economics and privatization keep trying--like their Keynesian counterparts--to sustain the old debates that made them relevant. If they succeed, it will be because a still prevailing system prefers to rehash the old rather than welcome and explore what is emerging. In any case, however, relentless change will continue to work its ways on a passing U.S. empire and its capitalist system.

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The Worst News from 2024: CO2 Went up again, as Tundra Starts to Emit Carbon

By JUAN COLE

ANN ARBOR – The wars in Ukraine, Gaza, Israel, Lebanon, Sudan, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo made 2024 a hard year to bear for anyone following them, and unfortunately it was all too easy to spend the year doomscrolling through the horrid video feeds that testified to humanity’s inhumanity.

The fate of the whole Earth — of its trillions of life forms, including billions of humans — also took a turn for the worse. The World Meteorological Organization projected total global carbon dioxide (CO2) emissions in 2024 to be 41.6 billion tons. Some 37.4 billion of that was from humans burning petroleum, fossil gas, and coal. The rest was from deforestation. 2024 was the hottest year on record, and likely the hottest

in 125,000 years, though some of its ferocity was from the lingering cyclical El Niño that has now subsided.

Speaking of deforestation, NOAA is reporting the disturbing news that “After storing carbon dioxide in frozen soil for millennia, the Arctic tundra is being transformed by frequent wildfires into an overall source of carbon to the atmosphere, which is already absorbing record levels of heat-trapping fossil fuel pollution.”

No, no, not that. The arctic tundra is starting to put out CO2? That is very disturbing news.

Here’s the bad news: In 2023, global carbon dioxide emissions came to 40.6 billion tons.

That means emissions increased in 2024. This is nine years after the Paris Conference, 27 years after the Kyoto protocol.

We know that carbon dioxide and methane cause global heating and that they are changing the climate in extremely dangerous ways. Hundreds of millions of people will be displaced by heat, aridification, and sea level rise. People will die. Whole animal species could be wiped out. Food shortages loom.

So there is no excuse for increasing our emissions, which for the most part means burning more coal, gas and oil. Why would you do that? Are you, like, insane?

The UIAA reports on a study in The Cryosphere, “2024 data from 5,500 glaciers across the Andes show the mountains have lost 25% of their ice coverage since the Little Ice Age, and that their tropical glaciers are melting 10 times faster than the cumulative global average.” The best case scenario is that they only lose another 25% of their mass over the next 75 years, but it could be as much as 50%. All that water will make its way into the seas and cause sea level rise.

All the hurricanes in 2024 were fiercer because of climate change, by 15-25 mph. That is, if a hurricane would have had 125 mph winds in the old days, it would have up to 150 mph winds today because the oceans are much hotter.

The US government is largely pro-carbon, continuing to subsidize petroleum and gas to the tune of billions. This, even though the United States is currently the second-largest emitter of greenhouse gases, and by far the largest historically.

The US government is about to get even more pro-carbon. But the US government’s budget is \$4 trillion a year, and the US GDP is \$29 trillion, so the society far outweighs the government. We have to keep fighting against carbon. This is not an individual responsibility. We can only succeed by changing big structures — pressuring businesses and local and state communities. We can still make essential progress even with strong headwinds. And, every ton of carbon dioxide we don’t release into the atmosphere is a win for humanity over the next few centuries. And, look. Things are going to get hard. There will be severe challenges. But we can find ways to overcome them. If we act now.

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Summit of the Americans Can Spread Democracy Instead of War

By JASON SIBERT

Colorado senators Michael Bennet and John Hickenlooper, both Democrats, and Senator Bill Cassidy (R-La.) recently celebrated the final passage of their Summit of the Americas Act to strengthen U.S. diplomatic leadership in the Western Hemisphere, according to a press release from Bennett’s office.

The Summit of the Americas convenes heads of state to bolster ties and promote regional partnerships, most recently in Los Angeles in 2022. The Summit is more important than many in Colorado and the United States realize.

“Coloradans understand that the Americas share more than a hemisphere; we share a braided culture, an economy, and a common destiny that we must write

together,” said Bennet said in the release. “By passing this legislation, Congress has committed the United States to continue deepening these relationships by institutionalizing such summits at least every four years.”

In the release, Hickenlooper said, “The Summit of the Americas provides us and our democratic partners in the Western Hemisphere with a unique forum to tackle the world’s largest issues and deepen our economic ties.” Cassidy said: “The Summit of the Americas is key to building a stronger, more prosperous hemisphere. The Senate reaffirmed its commitment to strengthening ties and promoting economic growth across the Western Hemisphere.”

The Summit of the Americas Act directs the Secretary of State to support the Summit of the Americas, codify the existing State Department unit to ensure the implementation of Summit commitments and work with other US agencies to ensure continued US participation. The bill also expresses support for the Cities Summit of the Americas — Denver hosted the inaugural summit in 2023 — to continue as a key element of the larger Summit. In 1994, President Bill Clinton convened the first Summit

of the Americas in Miami to promote prosperity and enhance democracy throughout the Americas. Succeeding summits have elevated these and other issues like climate change and immigration.

In 2021 Bennet supported Colorado’s bid to host the 2022 Summit of the Americas, which took place in Los Angeles. Bennet and Hickenlooper led the effort to help Colorado’s bid to host the Summit of the Americas. Bennet spoke at Denver’s first-ever Cities Summit in the Americas in 2023. Bennet and Cassidy are also the lead sponsors of the Americas Act, a bipartisan and bicameral bill to drive shared economic prosperity, strengthen democracy in our hemisphere, counter the influence of China and Russia, and address some of the causes of migration.

This upcoming conference is vital for the future of the democratic way of life because it allows us to project the power of an idea — democracy - in our hemisphere, and ideas are an essential component of foreign policy. The upcoming conference would be termed by foreign policy types as soft power or using non-military means to project power. This is important because of the influence the authoritarian orbit—led by Rus-

sia and China—is building in the region.

Since soft power doesn’t involve military power, it’s not lethal — a good thing. However, it doesn’t create jobs like the military-industrial complex in congresspeople’s districts and senator’s states. So, it lacks a certain amount of economic appeal. Soft power shouldn’t be counted out in the current Cold War. Suppose we can win people to our cause via the Summit of the Americas Act, other diplomatic mechanisms, or perhaps an increase in the presence of the Peace Corps in Latin America. Can you see more young Americans helping lift up the people of Latin America in Peace Corps service? It just might help spread the idea of democracy, and remember, democracies usually don’t war against one another, or at least that’s what history teaches us.

If our current war digs in, then China or Russia might try to put a military installation in this hemisphere, kicking off a more significant arms race than we’ve seen so far. Let’s hope that doesn’t happen. Can soft power carry the day?

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Forget Greenland, the Panama Canal and Canada — Trump Should Invite Taiwan to Become a U.S. Territory

By JOEL D. JOSEPH

Donald Trump’s ambition to buy Greenland, take over the Panama Canal and add Canada as the 51st state are bound to fail. Greenland and Denmark said that they would not sell the island to the United States or to anyone else. Under the Panama Canal Treaty, Panama has sovereignty over the canal. Canada, with national health insurance and strict gun control laws, does not want to become part of the United States.

However, a more important acquisition would be Taiwan. Guam, the Virgin Islands and Puerto Rico are all U.S. territories, and Taiwan could become one. Trump should invite Taiwan to become a U.S. territory and then the people of Taiwan could vote to accept or reject the invitation.

The Philippines was a U.S. territory from 1898 until 1946. The Philippines are 700 miles from Taiwan while Guam is 1,700 miles away. Puerto Rico is 1,000 miles from the mainland of the United States. Hawaii was a U.S. territory from 1898 until it became a state in 1959. In 1849, the United States and Hawaii concluded a treaty of

friendship that served as the basis of official relations between the parties.

Taiwan is the world’s largest producer of microchips. The United States is very dependent on this source of computer components. Microchips power computers, regulate automobile systems and are part of most modern electronic gadgets.

China, of course, will be upset with the U.S. inviting Taiwan to become a part of the United States. China will argue that we would be interfering with their “domestic” concerns. But Taiwan is a democratic nation and should be allowed to make its own independent decisions.

China, China, China

Of course, if Taiwan becomes a U.S. territory the United States would be bound to defend it. Every U.S. territory has major American military installations. The American Navy virtually controls the Island of Guam. There are also naval bases in Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands.

A July, 2007 Congressional Research Service Report confirmed that U.S. policy has not recognized China’s sovereignty over Taiwan. In 1979, China pressured the United States to end diplomatic relations with Taiwan. President Carter caved into massive Chinese pressure. In response, Congress passed the Taiwan Relations Act. The Peoples Republic of China continues to view the U.S. Taiwan Relations Act as “an unwarranted intrusion by the United States into the internal affairs of China.” However, the United States has continued to supply Taiwan with aircraft and other weaponry and China has continued to protest. China has threatened to invade Taiwan, but has never

done so.

American Military Bases

Pearl Harbor, a massive United States Naval facility, was attacked in 1941 before Hawaii became a state. In the Philippines, the United States had access to nine military bases. Some of these bases were formerly American bases, but now are controlled by the Philippine government. The United States gave the Philippines its independence in 1946 after 48 years as a territory.

U.S. territories have non-voting members in Congress. Residents of U.S. territories can easily gain American citizenship. Residents of the U.S. territories— Puerto Rico, the U.S. Virgin Islands, Guam, American Samoa, and the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands — are generally not required to pay federal income taxes on income whose source is within the territory.

Congress can establish the rules for admission of Taiwan as a U.S. territory. The law would include rules on citizenship, taxation, military bases, military service and other issues. If Taiwan were to become a U.S. territory, China would most likely not invade the island nation because such an invasion could start World War III. Similarly, if we had invited the Ukraine into NATO 20 years ago Russia would not have invaded. We should learn from the Ukraine War and pre-emptively invite Taiwan to become part of the United States.

Joel Joseph is a civil rights attorney who represented 60 members of Congress challenging the constitutionality of the Panama Canal Treaty. Email joeldjoseph@gmail.com.

Kolhatkar...

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That is our challenge. We have only a small window of time before the industry and the punditocracy that backs it could beat us into submission, convincing us that sympathy over the murder of one man ought to eclipse the neglect of millions and that there is no alternative to the unjust system we are living with.

Even Obama ultimately backed a Medicare-for-all system, albeit after he was out of office. Senator Bernie Sanders, one of the most stalwart champions of publicly funded healthcare, has called for the building of a political movement rather than random acts of violence, to replace health insurance with a single-payer system.

Sanders said, “The way we’re going to reform our healthcare system is having people come together and understanding that it is the right of every American to be able to walk into a doctor’s office when they need to and not have to take out their wallet.” We deserve nothing less than that.

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

Pardons Turn the Truth Around – Then and Now

By JAMIE STIEHM

Yes, I was there on Jan. 6, 2021, in the sacred temple of democracy when a mob’s deadly rampage darkened democracy and injured 140 police officers in a president’s plot to undo the election he lost.

That was the best day of President-elect Donald Trump’s life: crowd size, TV ratings, a siege, all of it for three hours. That tragic day burns in my memory.

To skip stones on history’s river: The present reminds me of Reconstruction’s end, when the meaning of the Civil War got lost in a blizzard of presidential pardons.

But American memory is short.

Four years later, instead of facing crime and punishment, Trump is coming back to crow on that very ground. A day of infamy is recast as a day of glory. *The New York Times* published: “How Trump Flipped Script and Made Jan. 6 an Asset.”

Hundreds of conspirators and marauders in prison may get pardons on “day one” of Trump’s return to power. The article reads like a mea culpa. The newspaper of record,

the *Times*, is late to awake: “(T)hey were now political prisoners, hostages, martyrs. Patriots.”

Never before had a president incited violence against the government. The day was not chosen by chance. Jan. 6 was the day the Constitution directed Congress to certify the election results. Trump, his advisers and the 30,000 who showed up at his invitation (“will be wild”) knew the House and Senate would be sitting ducks, captive in Capitol chambers.

So they broke into the Capitol’s doors and windows, swarming the marble terrace designed by Frederick Law Olmsted. Trapped in the House chamber, we heard breaking glass, footsteps getting closer, shouts and gunfire. The rioters breached the Senate but not the House. We were lucky to escape down a secret staircase into lockdown.

The bloodshed might have been much worse.

The Trump mob had a list of who they wanted and was thirsty for vengeance, even for the vice president of the United States, Mike Pence. He resisted the president’s pressure to go along with the plan. Not for nothing is “retribution,” to punish his political opponents, a Trump campaign promise.

Trump means it. He has no humor, irony, self-deprecation or sophisticated charm. He is entirely literal, and for shame, we’ve failed to take his rants and ramblings seriously.

Roeder and Mangione

By BARRY FRIEDMAN

On May 31, 2009, Scott Roeder walked into the Reformation Lutheran Church in Wichita, Kansas, and shot an usher, George Tiller, in the head.

Tiller wasn’t just an usher, though. He was also a physician who — and this is what so vexed Roeder — performed abortions at Wichita’s Women’s Health Care Services. At his trial, Roeder, who was eventually convicted of murder, told the jury that after he became born-again in 1992 — he had been watching *The 700 Club* — “I knelt down and I accepted Christ as my savior.” He also told the jury that a year later, in 1993, he began thinking about killing Tiller. He said he was defending the lives of newborns.

Tiller’s wife was in church that day and watched her husband get shot in the head.

Roeder wasn’t the only one who wanted Tiller dead. Sixteen years earlier, Rachelle “Shelley” Shannon, also born-again, tried to kill him as well, shooting him five times while he sat in his car. She had also been charged and convicted of arson and using acid to stop abortions at other clinics.

Shannon and Roeder are — and this goes without saying — pro-life.

In the ’90s, Operation Rescue, an anti-abortion group, posted names and address and photographs of those who worked at clinics such as Tiller’s. Women’s Health Care Services had been firebombed, the staff threatened. Bill O’Reilly, then at Fox News, called out “Tiller the Baby Killer” many

times. After Tiller’s murder, when Operation Rescue was questioned about its involvement with and encouragement of Roeder, a spokesperson, Cheryl Sullenger, said that while it was true she had spoken to Roeder, she said he always made the initial contact.

As gruesome as Tiller’s murder, in some respect what followed was even worse.

Rev. Rusty Thomas, was the director of Operation Save America at the time, said, “He died the way he lived. His was a bloody death. Someone ‘chose’ to end George Tiller’s life this morning, in his church.”

Randall Terry, founder of Operation Rescue, could barely contain his glee about the killing, said, “George Tiller was a mass murderer. We grieve for him that he did not have time to properly prepare his soul to face God.”

On a documentary about the case, MSNBC’s Rachel Maddow commented, “Scott Roeder was linked to a number of different political and protest groups. One of the things that was hard to report on at the time was the widespread evidence of people celebrating the murder — it was all over the web, on Twitter, on Facebook, on blog comments.”

Which brings me to Luigi Mangione, the man accused of killing UnitedHealthcare’s CEO, Brian Thompson, in New York City in December, and to a similar glee, only this time from the left. I’m not entirely convinced the response on social media truly reflected the nation’s pulse on this, but there has been a disturbing amount of praise and solidarity for and with Mangione. Amazon and Etsy had to remove T-shirts inscribed “Free Luigi” and “Deny, Defend, Depose” (words Mangione allegedly inscribed in the

To paint the parallel, of all presidents, Trump most resembles Andrew Johnson, not Andrew Jackson. A whirlwind of rage, Johnson was barely literate. The former tailor was impeached during his one term (1865-69). Naming the Tennessee senator as vice president was Abraham Lincoln’s worst mistake, but he never lived to see all the damage Johnson did.

Lincoln’s policy on the post-war period was that Confederate political leaders and military officers — the elite — should take a loyalty oath before various states were readmitted to the Union.

This process of disarming the power structure would take some real time. Congress then added teeth to it. Union soldiers would be stationed in Southern states to enforce order and protect freed Black people from violence.

This program, Reconstruction, resembled the Biden presidency after Trump’s medical, political and economic shambles.

Lincoln freed millions of enslaved people, yet their fates going forward from the war’s end in 1865 was an exceptionally difficult and delicate political task perhaps only he could have resolved. But he was slain in 1865.

Witness: The murderous White supremacist Ku Klux Klan was born in 1865, in Johnson’s home state of Tennessee. Soon

shell casings of the gun he used) from their sites, and a GoFundMe account for him has raised more than \$200,000 for his defense.

After the shooting, Mangione, like Roeder, fled. He was arrested five days later in a McDonald’s in Pennsylvania. Both Mangione and Roeder — Roeder in his statements in court and Mangione in a notebook he kept — expressed righteous indignation and certainty in their actions. Like Roeder, who had no direct involvement or experience with George Tiller, or with abortion, Mangione hadn’t been wronged by UnitedHealthcare. No one in his family had been denied coverage for any medical procedure by United or any other health insurance giant. Mangione was not avenging a loved one’s death at the hands of soulless insurance giants. He did not shoot Thompson on that street in Manhattan, drop the gun, and wait for the cops to arrest him to alleviate his personal hell, which might have changed the narrative some, had he been a grieving father or son avenging a murder brought on by corporate avarice and soullessness.

But that doesn’t matter to those supporting Mangione. They have created their own narrative.

The pistol recovered from his backpack at that McDonald’s was known as a “ghost gun,” those typically made with a 3D printer and tweaked from an FMDA Glock. The FMDA is an acronym for “Free Men Don’t Ask.” About 45,240 suspected ghost guns, according to the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms, were recovered from crime scenes between 2016 and 2021 — 692 of which were homicides or attempted homicides.

How come we’re not talking about this

“Black Codes” in the South were forerunners of Jim Crow segregation and voter suppression.

The Old South was never really conquered, especially with a Southern sympathizer in the White House. Robert E. Lee, symbol of stubborn rebellion, received a pardon, not a treason trial. And Johnson opposed Reconstruction.

Staunch believers in the “Lost Cause” of the war over slavery entered an era of restoration. By spring 1866, Johnson’s administration granted 7,000 pardons to ex-Confederates.

The next president, Ulysses S. Grant, confronted Klan racial violence, as proved by historian Fergus Bordewich (an excellent source on the post-Civil War period, as was John Hope Franklin).

But along came the 1876 election dirty deal: Ohio’s Rutherford B. Hayes was made president only if Reconstruction ended in the South. A slew of pardons can betray the truth, then and now.

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part of the story? Where is the outrage and apoplexy from the supporters of gun control that a lunatic made a gun at home and used it to commit a homicide? Was there none because one of those guns was used to kill a “bad guy”? Is that where we are? Because if it is, we on the left are as hypocritical and selectively outraged as gun fetishists say we are. Righteous indignation, no matter which side embraces it, is the slipperiest of all slopes. Those who are smiling about, much less celebrating, the actions of Luigi Mangione, as if it will somehow be a watershed moment in an admittedly awful, rapacious healthcare system — and will, by some magic, bring us to more equitable healthcare in this country — are fooling themselves. When it comes to those contextualizing killers like Mangione and Roeder, today’s left looks a lot like yesterday’s right.

As of yet, there is nothing like “Tiller the Baby Killer” to describe the sins of Brian Thompson, who leaves behind a wife and two children. But that may be because “Thompson” is tougher to rhyme.

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Mocking the Disabled is Cruel and Immoral – Especially When the President Does It

As a speech scientist and speech-language pathologist, I hope Donald Trump’s supporters will push back on his mockery of people with disabilities.

By ERIC S. JACKSON

For most people, verbal communication is a seamless, unthinking act. But for individuals with communication disorders — such as stuttering, aphasia, or other speech and language impairments — speech is anything but automatic. They must not only consider what they say but also how they say it, knowing their manner of speaking might elicit judgment, dismissal, or

ridicule.

And soon they’ll have to worry about that ridicule coming from the White House again.

President-elect Donald Trump has repeatedly mocked people with disabilities, including his infamous imitation of a reporter with a congenital movement disorder and President Joe Biden’s stuttering, often to eruptions of laughter from his supporters. Trump also allegedly told his nephew to let his son with developmental disabilities die.

When the most powerful leader in the world engages in this behavior, it sends a chilling message: Some people are less deserving of respect simply because of their disabilities or how they express themselves.

Worse still, many of Trump’s defenders normalize his behavior, arguing that his comments are “just words” or “Trump being Trump.” This allows stigma and discrimination to flourish, embedding them deeper into the fabric of our society.

For individuals with communication disorders, this means more judgment, more misunderstanding, and fewer opportunities to participate fully in society. To accept or ex-

cuse this behavior is to condone cruelty and undermine the principles of empathy and respect that should define us as a nation.

In fact, verbal attacks and public ridicule significantly exacerbate neurodevelopmental disorders like stuttering. These cruel reactions can make it significantly more difficult, at a neural level, for the individual to focus on their message and say what they want to say. So individuals with communication disorders often choose to limit their talking — and ultimately their participation in society.

Negative perceptions about stuttering perpetuate feelings of inadequacy and unworthiness. Trump’s mockery of stuttering and other disabilities exacerbates this and signals to his supporters that such ridicule is acceptable — or worse, inconsequential.

This issue should transcend debates about political correctness, “wokeness,” and whatever else. It’s a moral judgment — especially when it’s linked with his policy agenda, which includes trying to eliminate the Department of Education. Among other things, the department provides funding for students with disabilities.

If people genuinely care about human-

ity, they should understand that Trump’s propensity to mock individuals with disorders or differences isn’t a trivial lapse in behavior. It’s a direct attack on humanity itself.

Communication is not just a human right, it is the cornerstone of community, understanding, and progress. To mock someone for the way they speak, or for any other disability, is to undermine their humanity.

Will we stand up for the dignity of all individuals, or will we allow mockery and disdain to dictate our national discourse?

Those who voted for Trump, particularly those who don’t face the daily struggles of disability, bear a special responsibility to push back against this behavior. They must recognize that their silence is complicity — and that the defense of dignity transcends politics.

Dr. Eric S. Jackson is a clinician-scientist, speech-language pathologist, and an associate professor in the Communicative Sciences and Disorders department at New York University. He’s a Public Voices Fellow of The OpEd Project. This op-ed was distributed by OtherWords.org.

We Need Anticipatory Strategies for Oncoming Trumpism

Now is the time to prepare anticipatory strategies against what the vengeful, avaricious, lawless Trump and his Trumpsters have boasted out loud about daily. Don't wait until Trump's inauguration. A short list of suggestions follows:

1. The civil servants and their unions better organize a personal presentation to their new bosses, most of whom are ignorant about the agencies they head other than to want to dismantle or enfeeble them. Be proactive or you will be always playing defense.
2. Daring peaceful resisters in marches and rallies, beware of infiltrating provocateurs promoting violence. If you're engaging in non-violent, civil disobedience, beware that Trump can't wait to call you "terrorists" and use unbridled police power for arrests and prosecutions demanding long sentences.
3. Trump and the Trumpsters, with his militias in waiting, as on the border, will contrive a phony threat from what they will label domestic "terrorists" to pulverize or intimidate their opponents. Trump thrived on

the MAGA extremists and will give them "red meat," if only to keep them occupied and loyal. They will demand action based on Trump's wild campaign rhetoric.

4. Being a convicted criminal himself, Trump will take federal cops off the corporate crime beat, reduce taxes on the wealthy and giant companies, ignore climate violence, add more bloat to the wasteful military budget, and increase pandemic threats with fake dismissals of looming perils. Don't count on the business guys. They don't like daily chaos, disruption and uncertainty that goes with Trump's insatiable daily ego that must be fed constantly, but most CEOs won't criticize Trump.

5. Trump fears the Israeli lobby and their genocidal leader Netanyahu. His first term proved that in spades. Now he'll back whatever Netanyahu, the Israeli war criminal, does. Annexing the West Bank, demanding more billions from American taxpayers to continue the bombing, killing and pillaging in the Middle East region is just the tip of the iceberg.

6. Lastly, Trump will drive a level of White House dictatorial lawlessness never before seen. His rhetoric and record strengthen this prediction. Remember his July 2019 declaration "With Article II, I can do whatever I want as President." He acted on that all the time. (See prior columns at nader.org and also read "Wrecking America: How Trump's Lawbreaking and Lies Betray All" by Mark Green and Ralph Nader).

The anticipatory strategies here must be diverse, covering all three branches of

TED RALL Theory of the Non-Voter

Non-voters are the biggest (potential) voting bloc in American politics. In midterm, state and local elections, more eligible voters choose not to exercise their franchise than to do so.

Pundits and political sociologists ignore non-voters. Nobody polls them. Nobody asks them why they don't vote. Nobody asks them what issues they care about. Nobody asks them what it would take them to get them to vote, or who they would vote for if they did. Whether this lack of interest in non-voters is due to a lack of imagination or contempt based on the belief that they are lazy and apathetic, the result is that we don't know much about the political leanings and motivations (or lack thereof) of the majority of our fellow citizens. There are tens of millions of them. They are an untapped resource and, until recently, there has been little attempt to reach out to them.

Democratic Party strategists largely assume that there is little point dedicating precious campaign resources to an attempt to lure non-voters to the polls. From Bill Clinton

in 1992 to Kamala Harris in 2024, the party has been primarily focused on trying to appeal to swing voters and moderate Republicans, even though there don't seem to be very many of them.

Donald Trump's first win disproved the hypothesis that you can't get the third or more of eligible citizens who normally sit out presidential elections to come to the polls. 15% of the people who cast a ballot in November 2016 were first-time voters, up from 9% in 2012. True, Donald Trump's coalition included people who vote Republican no matter what as well as traditional conservatives. But the key to his takeover of the GOP was his ability to motivate people who previously weren't even registered to vote.

The 2016 election also highlighted the political impact of non-voting. Non-voters skewed Democratic, accounting for 55% as opposed to 41% for Republicans. Hillary Clinton lost because she wasn't able to motivate enough of her own party's supporters.

The cliché of the non-voter is that they are politically disengaged. If that is true, it falls short of painting the full picture. Some 3.5% of those who voted for Bernie Sanders in the 2016 primaries sat out the general election; they were more than enough to cost Clinton the race. But primary voters are far more engaged than general election voters. They didn't forget to vote for Hillary. They made an active choice to be passive because they disliked both major-party candidates.

The Truth Tastes Good

By FRANK LINGO

"Thank you very much. You're fantastic people to welcome me back as your President Trump 2.0. Well, a lot of you are fantastic, the White people at least.

"I've got a big story to tell today that you probably haven't heard yet. This is huge, lemme tell ya. And I have this on reliable abominous sources that the Q Anon people are actual cannibals. That's right, and they like to eat liberals, can you believe it? I'm bringing them in to be my personal chefs.

"I was invited to their Biden Barbeque the other night where they were having Joe for dinner. I didn't go because I like Mickey D's better but I heard it was pretty good if you like old meat.

"So you're probably saying 'But Donald, I just saw Biden on TV.' No, what you saw was BidenBot. Yeah, it's a droid all made up to look and sound like Joe. They had to use old technology in slo-mo so it would seem like the real

Joe.

"Next week, they're gonna have Kamala Kabobs with Obama in the oven. I'd go but I don't like dark meat. Again, I'm only telling you the true facts here as reported by unimteachable courses. It's on the internet so it must be true.

"I was gonna have Carter Cacciatore but ol' Jimmy died too soon for me to order him. Now I'm looking forward to having my old friends the Clintons for a White House lunch. Bill Burgers and Hillary Ham are on the menu.

"What's best about being back in my proper place as President-for-Life is we can control the Democrats by having our loyal friends eat them up. Then we re-create the liberals as AI robots who say and do whatever we tell them.

"I know the fake news won't tell you about all this. They'll say it's too wild and just Trump making up stories again. So you better watch my posts instead. That's where you'll get the actual factual usual truthual straight story of how to make America great again.

"Now I know a lot of liberals are griping about me, saying we shouldn't have a convict as commander-in-chief. But I have a simple solution for the situation: Have the liberals for dinner — literally. Sure, it's perfectly OK. We'll help you

government, and vectored toward the GOP. The citizen groups may have to work week-ends, alongside the labor unions hated by Trump.

Trumpy Dumpty is thin on the facts, policies and programs, but he is as cunning as a hungry shark in detecting weakness in his opponents, especially the Democratic Party. I wrote a fable in 2022 that portrays how he might think about the Party of the Donkey. Given what happened up to and on Nov. 5, 2024, it's still useful to read today. (See the link via the online version of this column.)

Jimmy Carter's Legacy

Jimmy Carter was the last president to actively open the government for engagement by citizen groups. Right after his November 1976 election, he agreed to address a huge hotel ballroom in D.C. full of local and national citizen advocates. It was a great success never again repeated by succeeding president-elects. Mr. Carter then chose civic leaders and other solid progressives to head regulatory agencies such as NHTSA, EPA, OSHA, FTC, and for other high positions in government. Starting in 1981, Ronald Reagan undermined many Carter Administration health and safety initiatives.

Mr. Carter was also the last president to authentically recognize Palestinian rights and charge the Israeli government with imposing a system of Apartheid ("worse than in South Africa," he said) over Palestine. However, he failed to get Israel to agree to a comprehensive peace settlement, including the creation of a Palestinian state, and had to settle for a peace treaty between Egypt and

Non-voters were even more powerful this year. An astonishing 19 million Americans who voted for Joe Biden in 2020 considered the choice between Kamala Harris and Donald Trump and picked the couch. She lost by 2.3 million votes.

These 19 million people were registered to vote. We know that they know how to vote; they did it four years ago in the middle of a pandemic. And we know that they voted Democratic! More states have early voting and mail-in ballots, so it was easier to vote in 2024. Logically, a more appealing Democrat than Kamala Harris might have received their support.

A full picture of American public opinion would include numerous thorough studies and surveys of people who sometimes vote and sit out elections at other times (this year's Trump campaign reached out to these "irregular" and "low propensity" voters), those who never vote but our register to vote, and those who are not registered. But the biggest factor here is obviously the defining characteristic of U.S. electoral politics: the two-party system. Democracies with two-party systems tend to have lower voter turnout than parliamentary democracies where multiple parties representing a wide range of ideological orientations are viable and active participants. The increasing percentage of Americans who self-identify as "independent" means that it is constantly less likely that a voter will agree with one of the two candidates of two polarized parties.

Israel.

Citizen Carter was easily our greatest former president. For over 40 years his indefatigable work ethic was applied to advancing peace efforts, initiating health programs in developing countries, supervising fair elections overseas and, with Rosalynn, joining Habitat for Humanity as a manual laborer (he was an expert woodworker, among his many skills) to build houses around the country for needy families.

The range of interests expressed through his 32 books and conferences revealed a practical, results-oriented, humble Renaissance man. His compassion and honesty infused the Carter Center to this day.

He nourished the norms of personal and civic decency, dialogue, truth-telling and working for a just society, expressing his Christian faith in action.

Compare Jimmy Carter's life with the rancid, corrupt, cowardly politicians spoiling today's Washington landscapes.

There are legitimate criticisms of Carter's foreign and domestic policies that others will examine. But overall, his legacy will live on to inspire future generations of Americans to elevate their expectations and strive toward them with civic dedication and commitment.

I was always in awe of how efficiently he used his time every day— and truly amazed by his relentless productivity. This alone would have been a worthy book by Mr. Carter were it not for his genuine humility.

Ralph Nader is a consumer advocate, lawyer and author. See www.nader.org or [facebook.com/ralphnader](https://www.facebook.com/ralphnader).

In a two-party system like ours, a voter who doesn't much care for either candidate has three choices. They can suck it up and choose "the lesser evil," vote for a third-party candidate who almost certainly doesn't stand a chance, or sit out the election.

A significant subset of the first category is the negative message voter, who casts a ballot for the challenger against the incumbent in order to indicate their displeasure. With only two parties to choose from, these voters flail back-and-forth. Since a vote is a vote and doesn't come attached to a footnote, neither the parties nor the news media ever receives the message. As more voters realize the futility of rage and spite voting, there is a general trend toward not voting at all.

Because they are oblivious to the left-leaning voters they are failing to motivate, and unlike the Republicans haven't made the slightest effort to change that, Democrats have more to worry about in the short term. In the long run, however, the realization that non-voters are making an active choice not to bother with the political system is a major warning that the whole system may not be viable for much longer.

Ted Rall, political cartoonist, columnist and graphic novelist, co-hosts the left-vs-right DMZ America podcast with fellow cartoonist Scott Stantis. His latest book is the graphic novel "2024: Revisited." Write him c/o his website (rall.com), Twitter @tedrall

make a lifelike libbot that looks and sounds just like them so even their kids won't know the difference. Then we won't prosecute anyone for breaking the unjust laws against cannibalism, because really it's a patriotic thing to eat these freaks for freedom.

"And for any of you attending the Inauguration dinner who are watching your weight, we offer options like lo-cal Pelosi Pizza and slimjim Schumer Salami.

"Before I go, I should remind you that I promised to take care of women whether they like it or not. As J.D. Vance might say, a woman's place is cooking in the kitchen. So they should like it as long as we cook them at about 400 degrees.

"So goodnight and let's make America taste great again."

*Frank Lingo, based in Lawrence, Kansas, is a former columnist for the **Kansas City Star** and author of the novel "Earth Vote." This column contains satire and the editors do not approve of cannibalism. Email: lingofrank@gmail.com. See his website: Greenbeat.world*

Savoring the Darkness in Alaska

By TIM LYDON

In my part of Alaska, not far from Anchorage, winter solstice is always a dark day, but not because of the lack of light. Instead, I lament the impending loss of winter's long nights, with all their calm and beauty.

This makes me a contrarian amid all the hoopla over returning light. Yet, as we freefall into a climate-changed world, it seems more people are giving darkness and its benefits a fresh look.

We begin feeling the loss of darkness only a few weeks after solstice. By February, the low-angle lighting that has graced our lives since November is gone, chased off by a sun that arcs higher each day. Some years, if the weather is too clear, it ends even earlier.

I'm no curmudgeon, and I think sunshine has its place. In summer, I like to grow a few potatoes, and I appreciate birdsongs and the general flowering of things. Still, the dark of winter just makes me happy.

I'm cheeriest on nights like tonight, when my walk home from work is brightened only by streetlamps and lighted windows reflecting on snow. Unseen flurries melt against my face as I pass our snow-quieted ballfields, where an owl gives a lone cheer from her bleacher seats high in a cottonwood. Sometimes I hear coyotes in the woods beyond. They remind me that lynx, hares, moose, and others

remain busily active in the dark.

On clear nights, my little eyes can see over 2 million light-years to the Andromeda Galaxy, or even nearer neighbors like Betelgeuse, the Pleiades and our local bear, Ursa Major, overhead. Sometimes there's the aurora, too, flowing and even lancing across the sky, backlighting snowy peaks and the ghoulish crowns of ancient hemlocks.

Even by day the darkness seems comfortingly near, as my shadow attests. While in summer it cowers close, hiding from the sun, in winter it freely wanders the snowy hills with me, stretching far ahead like a comically slender space alien as we cross fields of diamonds. Beyond, low-angle light tints the mountains pink and purple.

My town is full of walkers. In the dark, we don headlamps and reflective vests, while our dogs sport lighted collars. We look festive, like our homes at this time of year. And while I'm all for safety, I cut my light when there are no cars. My pupils swell to drink in the night's ambient light. Snow illuminates the world and trees become silhouettes among the stars.

The beauty of all this captivates me, but darkness offers more than aesthetics. With sleep hygiene back in fashion, we know dark nights promote healthy sleep, the deep kind that recharges our bodies and reboots our minds.

In these hot times, the coolness of the dark is also gaining value. In the north, winter's long nights help protect our snow, which insulates glaciers, permafrost and sea ice. Each is an essential component of our local landscapes, but they are globally important, too, for maintaining sea levels, storing carbon and moderating weather.

It's true in the temperate zones, too, where winter's reprieve from the sun helps the Colorado and Columbia rivers and all their tributaries maintain the cool temperatures that native fish need throughout the year.

In summer, every minute of darkness helps preserve that coolness, slowing the evapotranspiration that increasingly taxes lakes, rivers and wetlands. It even helps desert soils and plants like the saguaro, which wisely opts to flower and transpire only at night. Wildland fires often abate in darkness, too.

Darkness also increasingly shelters workers from heat, the top weather-related killer of Americans. Especially in agriculture, the extreme heat now plaguing the Southwest and Pacific Northwest increasingly forces agricultural workers to clock in before dawn or during evenings.

But in an insidious twist, climate change is warming nights faster than days, contributing to longer autumns, shorter winters and less relief from heat stress for people, plants and animals. In a recent example in Arizona, once-sturdy saguaros dropped limbs or toppled over after experiencing record-high nighttime temperatures.

All this points to a rising need for the cool and calm of night, and the many benefits brought by darkness, dormancy and cold.

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Keeping Music in the Families

By ROB PATTERSON

Imagine the notion of one extended musical family with enough splendid music to keep you charmed, touched and thrilled for the rest of your life. Sounds intriguing, right?

In my recent column on musical artist bio-docs, I noted how Willie Nelson's family has a plethora of worthy talents across two generations. One of them, his daughter Amy, performs in the wittily-dubbed duo Folk Uke with Cathy Guthrie, daughter of Arlo Guthrie, ergo granddaughter of American folk music icon Woody Guthrie. Those connections create one awesomely talented extended near-family.

Another of the same that I wish to tout quite affirmatively here takes us across the pond to the British Isles. Then back over the Atlantic to Canada and home to the United States.

The musical event that got me pondering this particular familial connection is the

gloriously welcome release of an album that I never expected to exist: the latest by Linda Thompson, ex-wife and former musical partner of Richard Thompson, parents of two exceptionally talented apples from their tree, Teddy and Kamila aka Kami Thompson. Titled *Proxy Music*, with its cover lifted from a Roxy Music LP in cheeky homage, the album solves the challenge of her inability to sing anymore due to a vocal disorder, spasmodic dysphonia.

"I had a voice clear and true," sings daughter Kami of her mother's pipes, and with a similarly exquisite voice, to open the album. Linda wrote or co-wrote all 11 songs, which all measure up to the gold-standard of British folk-rock she and Richard set over six sublime albums between 1974 and '82. Son Teddy Thompson, a fine artist himself, produced the set, collaborated with Linda on some of the songs, and sings a track. Richard plays, sings harmony and co-wrote a number. Kami sings another under the musical monicker The Rails, shared with her husband James Walbourne, who also collaborated on two songs.

The disc is an emotionally and sonically warm as well a magnificent labor of love, a family affair without even a hit of a bad

nepotism note. All mentioned above create music of consistent excellence as superb and captivating as most any I've heard in my life. The Thompson family DNA is powerful stuff indeed.

Then there's brother and sister Rufus and Martha Wainwright each singing a song, and opening another family vector out from *Proxy Music*. They are the offspring of folk-rock humorist Loudon Wainwright III from his marriage to Kate McGarrigle, who with her sister Anna was a Canadian folk-rock duo of a comparable caliber during a parallel era as Richard and Linda.

I stifle using the term "incestuous" here, as it is, like nepotism mentioned earlier, off the mark. But yes, the abundant family talents do highly intertwine into an extended musical clan who can fill a long shelf with eminently listenable records. And on Linda's album, the cairns on the trail lead to yet another family on the closing track.

Titled "Those Damn Roches" – the expetive meant quite affectionately – it invokes the wonderful progressive (and, yes again) folk-rock trio of sisters that emerged from New York City's "new folk" boom of the late '70s, One of whom, Terre, was also married to Loudon Wainwright III. What

goes around does circle back around with these folks.

Sung by Teddy, it declares, "I love them all, bonded together in blood and song." I couldn't agree more. The number celebrates the connections among everyone, and Linda's album acts as a guidepost to a treasure trove of talent you're likely to love too.

Populist Picks

ALBUM: *Ship to Shore* by Richard Thompson – An ideal time to mention his latest release in 2024. His wry compositions, evocative howl of a voice and gloriously radiant guitar work never fail to satisfy.

ALBUM: *My Love of Country* by Teddy Thompson – I've been meaning since it came out in 2023 to plug this note-perfect homage to the mid-1960s Nashville countrypolitan sound that plays today like a dream.

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BOOK REVIEW/*Ken Winkes*

Go Back in Time with Studs Terkel

Like many progressives, I've retreated a bit since the November election. I'm not watching much tv news and I don't bird-dog all the headlines. I keep up on current events, but don't obsess about them. Instead, I often dip into a past I liked better than the present, not seeking some political Eden, but turning to writers who contributed to the person I am.

One of those writers is Louis ("Studs") Terkel, who died in 2007. I've just read one of his last books, "Touch and Go," a memoir composed of original material and extracts from some of his oral histories, including Pulitzer Prize winner "The Good War," which compiled interviews with people who lived through WWII; "Hard Times," an oral history of the Depression; "Working," which presented the voices of America's workers; and "Division Street: America," a mid-1960's collection of interviews with Americans from different economic, social and ethnic backgrounds .

Born a generation before me, Studs Terkel and the hundreds of people he interviewed for his oral histories have been talking to me for a long time. After his birth in 1912, Terkel lived most of his life in Chicago, where his parents ran a rooming house and later a hotel. It was in those places the young Terkel learned to listen. That early fascination with the spoken word led him into acting in local rep companies and eventually into a radio career that lasted 46 years. Through those years he interviewed hundreds of people, and because he was interested in all of them, he listened—and learned.

Terkel's open-mindedness did make some uncomfortable. His broadcasts during the Joe McCarthy period

brought him to the attention of the FBI. His liberal politics, speeches and his evident admiration of known Communists like Paul Robeson and controversial writers like Nelson Algren caused ABC to cancel "Studs' Place," a half hour television show staged in a small diner that served up scripted, often pointed, conversation among the diner's cast and those who dropped in for a bite to eat.

On the air or in his books, talk was always central to Terkel. From the early conversations he heard in the rooming house and hotel that brought together working people, retired salesmen, alcoholics, even aging Wobblies, Terkel learned that what people said, as much as what they did, defined them.

In his long life, Terkel met hundreds of characters. We meet many of them in "Touch and Go." As a youth, Studs heard men (and a few women) holding forth just a few streets away from his parents' hotel, in Washington Square, known familiarly and in Terkel's telling, affectionately, as Bughouse Square. Here people, whom Mark Twain might have called divine eccentrics, told their life stories, sharing their enthusiasms, lecturing to anyone who would listen. Many did listen. People gathered round the Socialists, vegetarians, preachers to hear what they had to say. In the days before television, it was communication as performance art. It was democracy in action.

I saw Terkel's depiction of Bughouse Square and its characters as both inspiration and roadmap for the master communicator that Studs became. On radio, tv or in print, his talent was being interested enough in others to listen closely to what they had to say.

That talent also defined his politics. Of course, Studs was a leftie. He recognized and admired individuals, but he knew that it is the sum of a community's actions that ultimately counts. As he put it, perhaps anticipating the Crash of 2008, "Haven't we learned anything from the Great Depression of the '30s? Haven't we learned that the Free Market (read: individual) fell on its face and begged a benign federal government (a gathering of minds) to help?"

Take that, you foolish libertarians! Take that, Elon Musk!

If you don't already know Studs Terkel, you might want to look him up. He and his works are an American treasure.

For me, "Touch and Go" was a review in the sense that I looked at Terkel again. And it was a retreat in that word's other meaning: Terkel is always a treat, and in "Touch and Go," I savored him once more.

Touch and Go. Studs Terkel, with Sydney Lewis, 269 pages, The New Press: 2007.

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

Sandronsky.

Continued from page 11

ment of more and more of the American people. Of course that will not occur overnight.

Popular movements for social progress such as universal healthcare take effort and time. The revolution, as observed well before the term woke saturated the US, will not be televised.

On that note, vested interests in the American ruling class will by any means necessary work to derail a system change for health care. That response is understandable.

There is a record of ruling class co-optation and oppression against popular movements for social justice (think of Occupy Wall Street and the Movement for Black Lives). Say what you will about the American ruling class of oligarchs and Empire, it is quite aware of its power and wealth and next steps to keep it.

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FILM REVIEW/ *Ed Rampell*

From Minnesota to Manhattan to Newport: Biopic About Balladeer Bob Dylan’s Odyssey is Positively Electrifying

Folk music heroes Woody, Seeger, Baez also loom large in “A Complete Unknown”

“A Complete Unknown” is arguably the best feature ever made about a ‘60s’ music icon. Earning Golden Globe nominations for Best Picture, plus for an unrecognizable Timothée Chalamet’s compelling portrait of Bob Dylan and Ed Norton’s depiction of Pete Seeger, with a cast singing their own songs, two-time Oscar nominee James Mangold’s Unknown is in the same artistic league as Arthur Penn’s 1969 Arlo Guthrie biopic “Alice’s Restaurant” and Hal Ashby’s 1976 “Bound for Glory,” about Depression era Dustbowl ballad composer Woody Guthrie. “Unknown” opens in 1961 with 19-year-old Dylan hitchhiking to Manhattan to discover Greenwich Village’s folk music scene – and meet his “Okie” folksinger idol.

“Unknown” cuts to a court where Seeger – who refused to be an informer when testifying before HUAC in 1955 – is tried for contempt of Congress. In his defense, the amiable folksinger whips out his banjo to play the song he calls “patriotic,” not “subversive,” but the judge stops him, finding Seeger guilty. Undeterred, outside on the courthouse steps Pete plays that song for reporters: Woody’s “This Land is Your Land.” Bystanders applaud, but a man holds a “Better Dead Than Red” sign.

Dylan learns Woody’s (Scott McNairy) hospitalized and goes to New Jersey where he finds not only Guthrie, but Seeger. The veteran folkies ask guitar-slinging “Bobby” to play, impressing both with Guthrie’s “Pastures of Plenty.” Incapacitated by Huntington’s chorea, Woody bangs on a bedside chest.

Seeger takes Bob under his wing, driving him to his home; en route, the two disagree over Little Richard’s hit heard on the car radio, cleverly foreshadowing the gener-

ational clash to come. But at Pete’s cabin in the woods, where he lives with his wife Toshie (Eriko Hatsune) and their children, the co-writer of “Where Have All the Flowers Gone?” grooms Dylan to become heir apparent of the “throne” of folk music, with its tradition as the people’s authentic voice.

Thus “anointed,” Dylan makes the rounds wherever folk music is played. At Riverside Church, Bob meets Sylvie Russo (Elle Fanning portrays a fictionalized version of Suze Rotolo, pictured beside Dylan on 1963’s “The Freewheelin’ Bob Dylan”’s cover – Mangold incorporates famed Dylan album covers into Unknown’s cinematography). The aspiring artist and student activist introduces Dylan to Greenwich Village’s countercultural scene and leftist politics. A member of the Congress of Racial Equality, which Sylvie informs Bob led the Freedom Rides to desegregate the South, she takes him to a Civil Rights demo.

Although Dylan may have already leaned Left, Sylvie/Suze was a major political influence. Onscreen, Dylan’s briefly glimpsed performing at 1963’s historic March on Washington. A month earlier Dylan played at a voter registration rally in Greenwood, Mississippi, although “Unknown” omits this, plus that real life Suze was a “Red Diaper Baby,” daughter of Communists.

While Bob’s still completely unknown, he moves into Sylvie’s Village apartment, and becomes a fixture performing at the bohemian quarter’s cafes, developing a following, landing a recording deal with Columbia. *The New York Times* dubs him “a cross between a choir boy and beatnik.” He also meets already-famous Joan Baez (Monica Barbaro). While his girlfriend studies abroad, Dylan beds Baez at Sylvie’s pad. According to “Unknown,” Bob had an erratic erotic life, but the biopic’s most sensuous scene is when, after hearing Dylan sing at a café, where he and Joan rapturously kiss.

This may be because the real passion Dylan has is for music; he’s repeatedly shown pursuing his true love: Songwriting. There’s been conjecture for decades over Bob and Joan’s affair. In “Unknown” both seem to be more musically than physically attracted to one another, using each other to advance their careers. By the time the Minnesotan arrived in Manhattan, Baez was established in the folk world. He justifies collaborating with Joan, observing she’d appeared on *Time*’s cover. When Bob privately sings as-yet unrecorded “Blowin’ in the Wind,” the ambitious songstress asks Dylan to let her publicly perform and release what Baez realizes will become a classic first, rationalizing this as giving her lesser-known lover/competitor more exposure.

After the two break up, still contracted to perform together, they musically spar during live shows, including a

droll scene where their “It Ain’t Me Babe” duet drips with sarcasm, singing/ slinging “I’m not the one you’re lookin’ for, babe.”

Meanwhile, Dylan’s star is on the rise; overseen by proud Pete, Bob’s the toast of the folk universe’s avatars, including ethnomusicologist/archivist Alan Lomax (Norbert Leo Butz). In 1963 and 1964, Bob’s a hit at the Newport Folk Festival, but the film shows his loss of privacy takes its toll on Dylan, who confesses to Johnny Cash (Boyd Holbrook) being “pulverized” by fame. (Mangold also helmed 2005’s Cash biopic “Walk the Line.”)

As the Beatles, etc., storm the music industry, enticing youth now beyond the older generation’s command, with the rollicking sound of July 1965’s single “Like a Rolling Stone,” enlivened by Al Kooper’s (Charlie Tahan) keyboards, it seemed Dylan was musically moving in that direction. Led by Lomax and Seeger, keeper of folk’s flame, the anxious Old Guard tries preventing Dylan’s backsliding towards rock, which they view as betrayal. This leads to the film’s final showdown, as Bob takes the stage at Newport July 25, 1965, wielding – gasp! – an electric guitar, triggering music’s biggest contretemps since, according to legend, Igor Stravinsky’s 1913 “The Rite of Spring” sparked a riot at Paris’s premiere.

What makes Dylan tick? Early in “Unknown” Sylvie accidentally learns Bob’s last name is really “Zimmerman,” indicating he’s hiding being Jewish. Sylvie reproaches him for not revealing truths about his Minnesota upbringing. Does Bob’s evolution from acoustic to amplified music symbolize America’s generation gap, New Left versus Old Left? Was it the quirks of genius, pursuing one’s personal artistic vision? Or was the Tambourine Man seduced by the blandishments of fame and fortune rock stardom promised? But celebrityhood is costly – when Bob attempts to woo back Sylvie, who loved him when he was completely unknown, it’s too late: “And it’s all over now, baby blue.”

Who can explain Dylan’s *raison d’etre*? The biopic’s end credits sum it up: As “The answer, my friend, is blowin’ in the wind,” plays, onscreen text states Dylan’s the only songwriter who ever win a Nobel Prize in Literature – but he didn’t attend the awards ceremony. Bob Dylan’s rhyme and reason may never be completely known...

“A Complete Unknown” opened nationwide in theaters Dec. 25.

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. A version of this first appeared at Progressive.org.

EDGE OF SPORTS/ *Dave Zirin*

In 2024, the Sports Leagues Watched the World Burn

Looking back at the year, it’s clear that the anti-Trump movement we need won’t emerge from sports.

In 2024, several seismic shifts upended the sports world. This past year, the most famous US-born basketball player under 30 emerged. Her name is Caitlin Clark, and she went from NCAA sensation at the University of Iowa to the head of a WNBA traveling roadshow that sold out arenas and brought record ratings. (She also spoke about how her straightness and whiteness factored into her popularity.) In baseball, the slugger standing astride the game, now with a World Series ring, was the Japanese mega-star of the Los Angeles Dodgers, Shohei Ohtani, and he didn’t even have to pitch. The most dominant basketball player remained the slow-footed Serbian bear with a feathery touch, Nikola Jokic, and the greatest threat to his perch was, ahead of schedule, a 20-year-old 7-foot 5-inch player from France, Victor Wembanyama. Appropriately, *Sports Illustrated*’s 2024 Sportsperson of the Year was Simone Biles—recognized not only as an all-time athlete but also for her incredible return to greatness at the Paris Olympics. These competitors did not only define their sports; they showed that diversity, opportunity, and excellence are inextricable. Their successes are a living cultural threat to the ideology of the coming administration.

But while these athletes deserve celebration, we shouldn’t forget that in 2024, the sports world faced a growing reactionary movement and, with few exceptions, chose silence. Leagues that had recently sang hymns to social justice revealed themselves to be staffed with Good Germans—and I’m not talking about Detlef Schrempf. In 2024, the idea that players should just “shut up and dribble” went from a racist Fox News taunt, taking aim at athletes like LeBron James for speaking out against police violence, to an accepted logic throughout league management and the media and even among athletes.

The stakes for silence have never been higher. The

gambling-addiction industry and streaming services desperate for commercial-ready content are dumping billions into the sports world. To be controversial as a big-league athlete is to risk generational wealth. The country has polarized. Billionaire sports owners have never been wealthier, and top player salaries are stratospheric. This is taking place alongside the impoverishment of universal youth sports, which, lacking public financial support, have turned to families to make up the difference and are now inaccessibly expensive for many.

We should all be for players getting their share, but few athletes get Juan Soto’s \$765 million deal. The story of player salaries is another story of polarization. The gap between the haves and have nots is especially clear at the collegiate level, where top athletes are finally—and justly—free to monetize their name, image, and likeness and can now access a transfer portal that gives them unprecedented freedom of movement. Yet the eye-popping stories of college athletes being offered fortunes to switch schools have also provided cover for the NCAA to do nothing to address collective-bargaining issues like unionization and healthcare. Now, you have college quarterbacks being offered millions to ditch their schools while players with less clout are paid in concussions.

The cost of standing up for justice in this political climate was too high for most leagues, athletes, and sports journalists. This was particularly true when it came to Israel’s war on Gaza. This past year Israel killed world-class—even Olympic—athletes. It used historic stadiums as places of interrogation and torture. Yet as Palestine’s athletic world burned, the sports world yawned. Palestinian athletes challenged the world’s embrace of Israel at the Olympics, yet received little media attention for their efforts. At the 2024 Paris Games, it was striking to see the contrast between the crowds cheering for Palestinian Olympians and seeing nothing in the media about the athletes, despite personal stories of incredible hardship, obstacles, and triumph: the very attributes about which NBC said represented the best of the “Olympic spirit.” Interviewing Gazan Paralympian Fadi Deeb is the memory from 2024 that I’ll carry with me the most dearly.

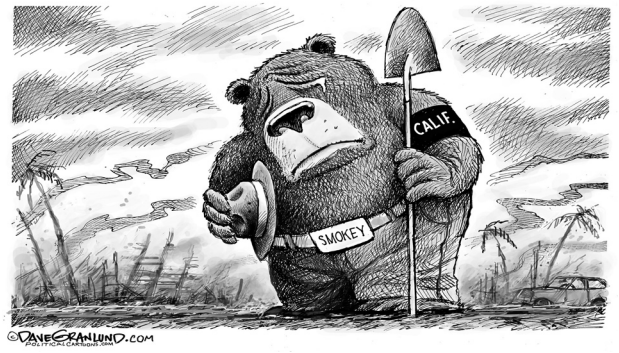
Olympic Paris was also the background to the forcible displacement of more than 12,000 people, which separated families, a grotesque human rights violation that the international press largely ignored. When politics did break through at the Games, it was mostly by ferociously anti-trans voices. The right-wing rage was directed at Algerian boxer Imane Khelif, who, despite not being trans, proved to be an effective post-truth target after she knocked out an Italian boxer, Angela Carini. That Carini was a state police officer

under the authority of Italy’s ruling fascist right received far less coverage than Donald Trump repeating the lie that Khelif was “a man” at his rallies. The hate machine was activated before Carini’s body even hit the canvas.

If the most influential corner of sports during the 2020 elections was the WNBA, this year the most politically potent voice may have come from Dana White’s Ultimate Fighting Championship. No place in the sports world is more besotted by Trump than the UFC. It’s run by White, who campaigned for Trump and spoke at the RNC. Several of his top mixed-martial-arts stars vocally supported Trump with a passion that no athlete voiced for Harris. The UFC is at the top of the fight world, occupying a space once occupied by boxing. The UFC is an entertaining product and attracts millions of young male viewers. We have seen in other countries, particularly in Eastern Europe and Brazil—documented rigorously by Karim Zidan—how mixed-martial-arts clubs and organizations can be conduits for a radical right that dominates this space from the top down. Challenging the dominant politics of these spaces—as some brave mixed martial artists and fans do—is no small task.

Moving forward, we should remember 2024 as a year that was historic between the hashmarks and on the court and that reminded us that the increasingly exclusive, profitable, and, in the case of gambling, addictive world of sports is not leading a resistance. Movements however small are going to have to be built off the field of play. Any time an athlete amplifies the struggle—especially in the case of Palestine—that should be celebrated, but at present expecting more is not a smart bet.

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AMY GOODMAN



Yip Harburg's writing dignified the downtrodden, the working class immigrants and other marginalized groups. That led to his blacklisting.

Wicked, The Wizard of Oz, and the Blacklisted Lyricist Yip Harburg

People around the globe have been watching the blockbuster musical film “Wicked” this holiday season. Based on the Broadway musical, it serves as a backstory to the 1939 film, “The Wizard of Oz,” casting that film’s villain, the Wicked Witch of the West, in a positive light, as a misunderstood and bullied child who goes on to challenge authority and expose wrong-doing.

From the mid-1950s until the early 1990s, long before streaming platforms and video on demand, television audiences

dependent on just a few major broadcast networks had to wait for the annual chance to see “The Wizard of Oz.” The much-anticipated special broadcast would typically air between Thanksgiving and Christmas, attracting millions of viewers across the country. This shared cinematic tradition popularized the fantastic tale of Dorothy, her dog Toto, and the Scarecrow, Tinman and Lion.

The film also brought global acclaim to its musical score, with iconic songs like “Follow the Yellow Brick Road” and “We’re Off to See the Wizard,” “Ding Dong the Witch is Dead” and the world-renowned classic, “Over the Rainbow.” Less well-known is the writer of the lyrics to those songs: E.Y. “Yip” Harburg. In an era of rising authoritarianism, growing inequality and an ascendant billionaire class, Yip Harburg’s socially-conscious songs, and his own struggle to overcome poverty during the Great Depression and then blacklisting during the McCarthy era – even as “The Wizard of Oz” gained fame – serve as both an inspiration and a warning.

Yip Harburg was born in 1896 in Manhattan’s Lower East Side, to poor Jewish parents who fled the anti-semitic pogroms of eastern Europe along with so many others.

In high school, he was seated alphabetically next to Ira Gershwin. They began a friendship that lasted a lifetime and shaped 20th-century American song and culture. Ernie Harburg, Yip’s son and co-author of the biography “Who Put the Rainbow in The Wizard of Oz?,” said in a 1996 interview on the *Democracy Now!* news hour, “Yip knew poverty deeply ... it was the basis of Yip’s understanding of life as

struggle.”

Yip Harburg was deep in debt after the 1929 Wall Street crash. Gershwin suggested Harburg write song lyrics. Before long, he wrote the song that captured the essence of the Great Depression, “Brother, Can You Spare a Dime?” which became a national hit and remains a timeless anthem for hard times, corporate greed and the dignity of working people:

Once I built a railroad, I made it run, made it race against time.

Once I built a railroad; now it’s done. Brother, can you spare a dime?

“The Wizard of Oz” was based on the 1900 novel “The Wonderful Wizard of Oz” by L. Frank Baum. Prior to the commercial success Baum enjoyed from the book, he worked an array of jobs, including a stint in South Dakota owning the *Aberdeen Saturday Pioneer* newspaper, from 1890-91. There he wrote editorials, including two that called for genocide against indigenous people. Just days after the Wounded Knee massacre of December 29, 1890, in which an estimated 300 Lakota elders, women and children on the nearby Pine Ridge Reservation were slaughtered by the US Army, Baum wrote, “Our only safety depends upon the total extermination of the Indians ... wipe these untamed and untamable creatures from the face of the earth.”

Yip Harburg’s writing, conversely, dignified the downtrodden, the working class, immigrants and other marginalized groups. These themes were central to the two Broadway hits Yip wrote, “Bloomer Girl,” about the women’s suffrage movement, and “Finian’s Rainbow,” which celebrated immigrants and the struggle against racism.

His lyrics attracted the attention of the House Un-American Activities Committee and U.S. Senator Joseph McCarthy who led a deeply destructive “hunt” for communists within the government and leading institutions, including Hollywood studios. McCarthy was aided by the red-baiting lawyer Roy Cohn, who would later serve as mentor to a young Donald Trump. Yip Harburg was among hundreds of writers, actors and others banned from working in film and television for the duration of the 1950s. McCarthy and his anti-communist crusade were eventually discredited, and Harburg continued his creative human rights work, until his death in 1981, aged 84.

Yip Harburg’s best-known and most loved work remains his lyrics for “The Wizard of Oz.” The film was released in the tumultuous year of 1939. Fascism was on the march in Europe and Asia, the economic impacts of the depression still plagued the working class, and racist Jim Crow laws oppressed millions of people of color.

With just a few days from Donald Trump’s inauguration to his second term as president, and with a timely focus on challenging authority ushered in by the hit movie “Wicked,” now is a good time to recall the incredible work and lyrical lessons of Yip Harburg, the man who put the rainbow in the Wizard of Oz.

*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.**

Fashion Sense: New York Designer Has Sustainability Tips You Can Use

By BONNIE JEAN FELDKAMP

I enjoy crafting and sewing, but lately I’ve become hyperaware of the waste produced to sustain this hobby. When I walk into a craft and fabric store, I feel like I could pick up the entire store and dump it directly into a landfill. It’s mostly plastic – yes, even the fabric – and it likely won’t get recycled. But I love to craft and sew. I make PJ pants and homemade ornaments for my family for Christmas. Plus, having a creative hobby is good for my mental health.

That’s why when I learned that New York fashion designer Anna Molinari is committed to sustainability, I had to talk to her. She was recently named one of Forbes’ “30 Under 30” in Art & Style.

Molinari learned to sew after watching

the reality Television series “Project Runway.” She was 8 years old, and her parents encouraged her to use the things they already had around the house for her projects. She sewed with old tapestry fabrics her mom had and random thrift store fabrics and old clothes. Little did she know it would set the foundation for her future in upcycling.

In college, Molinari learned how horrible the fashion industry is for the environment. She said, “I made the conscious decision that if I’m gonna pursue this as my career, I’m not gonna harm the environment while doing it.”

But sustainable fashion seems like an oxymoron. Edward Humes writes in his book “Total Garbage” that “Heat trapping pollutants generated by fashion production account for nearly 10% of all greenhouse gas emissions worldwide.”

But Molinari was determined to make sustainability a core philosophy in all of her designs. She only uses secondhand materials or things that already exist in the world – such as single-use plastic and soda can tabs – for her Instinct Brand fashion line. Her designs have been worn by Kelly Fox,

the host of E!’s “OMG Fashion,” and pop star Katy Perry has even requested designs from her.

“We don’t need new clothes,” Molinari stresses. “We need new ways to do clothes.”

Molinari is leading the way with her fashion. Her creations serve as commentary on waste and our disposable economy. Her gowns made of recycled soda tabs and corsets made from discarded Bubble Wrap are gorgeous and admirable. However, most Americans aren’t wearing cutting-edge or avant-garde fashion straight from the runway.

I asked Molinari: What can hobbyists like me learn from her approach?

First off, if you like to craft and sew, eBay and Etsy are your friends. “I find everything on there,” she said. “It takes some patience and some sifting, but you can really find anything you need resale.” She also recommends websites such as Poshmark and Fab Scrap to buy resale fashion and fabric. Reselling and reusing items that won’t get recycled will radically reduce the environmental impact that manufacturing and transporting goods takes.

What about those little remnants and

fabric scraps you always have left after sewing? I never know what to do with those. “One of the easiest crafts for someone who knows how to sew is to make a pillow,” Molinari said, “And I always think about just using the scraps to stuff a pillow.”

If you just cut those pieces up small, Molinari said you can literally use it to stuff any craft that requires it – quilted blankets, a stuffed animal, really anything. It’s much better than buying polyfill, which is just “straight up plastic,” she said.

For more upcycling tips and to see more of Molinari’s work, follow her on Instagram @instinct.brand or @annamo.1

Do you know anyone who’s doing cool things to make the world a better place? I want to know. Send me an email at Bonnie@WriterBonnie.com.

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ately benefited the rich and large corporations, Jake Johnson noted at CommonDreams.org (11/13).

In a 60-second ad, Americans for Prosperity (AFP) characterizes the 2017 Tax Cuts and Jobs Act as a boon to “hardworking Americans” and small businesses—and warns that allowing provisions of the law to expire at the end of this year as scheduled would be disastrous for the working class.

“This year, Congress is facing a countdown to a crisis that threatens family budgets nationwide,” Ross Connolly, AFP’s regional state director, said in a statement (11/13). “We are proud to partner with the incoming Trump administration to protect prosperity and ensure that Congress acts.”

AFP is a 501(c)(4) organization that describes itself as a “grassroots” movement despite being launched by Charles Koch and his late brother, David—two of the most notorious right-wing billionaires in U.S. politics.

The group said its new 50-state campaign represents “the largest effort by a conservative organization” to support President-elect Don-

ald Trump’s legislative agenda as he prepares to take office next week. The campaign, according to AFP, will include “over 1,000 meetings” at congressional offices, “in-district events” with activists and lawmakers, and “roundtables with job creators.”

The campaign aims to “reach millions of voters on the phone and at their doorsteps,” AFP said.

AFP’s description of the impacts of the 2017 tax law flies in the face of resounding evidence showing that wealthy Americans—not ordinary workers—were the chief beneficiaries and are poised to reap most of the rewards once again if Trump and the Republican-controlled Congress extend the measure’s soon-to-expire provisions.

STATE-LEVEL ATTACKS ON PUBLIC SCHOOLS DEcriED AS ‘PART OF A NATIONAL PLAYBOOK.’

Critics are sounding the alarm on a fresh wave of attacks on public schools by Republican state lawmakers, calling their efforts part of a broader agenda to privatize public education.

Indiana’s H.B. 1136—introduced by Reps. Jake Teshka (R-7), Jeffrey Thompson (R-28), and Timothy O’Brien (R-78)—would dissolve public school districts in which more than 50% of students attend private or charter schools based on

fall 2024 averages. All remaining public schools in affected districts would be converted to charter schools, which are privately owned and operated but taxpayer-funded. Brett Wilkins noted at CommonDreams.org (11/13).

According to Capital B Gary, “The bill’s provisions are estimated to dissolve five school corporations statewide, including Indianapolis Public Schools, Tri-Township Consolidated School Corporation in LaPorte County, Union School Corporation southeast of Muncie, and Cannelton City Schools near the Kentucky border in Perry County.”

Indianapolis Public Schools (IPS) condemned the proposal, saying it “strongly opposes House Bill 1136 or any bill this legislative session that threatens local authority and community control of public schools.”

“H.B. 1136 proposes dissolving five school corporations, including IPS, by converting schools to charter status and eliminating local school boards,” the district continued. “This harmful legislation would strip communities of their voice, destabilize our financial foundations, and further jeopardize the education of approximately 42,000 students.”

The Indiana Democratic Party said on social media in response to the bill: “The GOP supermajority is continuing their attacks on local

public schools. This time, they’re threatening to dissolve dozens of schools across the state into charters, leaving around a million Hoosiers without a traditional public school option.”

“For years, many public schools have struggled with funds being diverted to charter schools with no accountability,” the party added in a separate post. “Our public schools are the backbone of communities across the state, and we must protect them. More charter schools means less oversight for taxpayers.”

BIDEN BEQUEATHS STRONG ECONOMY FOR TRUMP.

The U.S. economy added 256,000 jobs in December, beating economist’s expectations and cementing the fact that President Joe Biden is leaving Donald Trump a strong economy as his term comes to a close, Emily Singer noted at Daily Kos (11/10).

The report showed unemployment fell to 4.1%, while wage growth rose 0.3% to an average hourly rate of \$35.69. Ultimately, wage growth in 2024 rose 3.9%—outpacing the 2.7% inflation rate, according to data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics.

The “economy remains very robust,” Harvard economics professor Jason Furman wrote in a post on X. “A variety of indicators

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Democrats’ Chance Will Come Again

By DANA MILBANK

Democrats have been in a slough of despond in the weeks since the election. Donald Trump has been enjoying the sort of honeymoon he didn’t have in 2016. Foreign leaders and business titans have been flocking to Mar-a-Lago, where Trump marveled that “everybody wants to be my friend.”

Polls show Trump’s favorability improving and a majority approving of his handling of the transition. A cowering ABC News agreed to pay \$15 million rather than test Trump’s defamation claims in court. There has been no sign of the “resistance” that pushed back against Trump’s excesses eight years ago. Democrats have been pointing fingers at Joe Biden and Kamala Harris and drafting manifestos on how to save the party.

Doug Sosnik, a veteran Democratic strategist, has a word of advice for his demoralized comrades: Relax. The transformation of the party will happen “organically,” he told me. “It’s not going to be a bunch of elite, elected officials and operatives sitting around a conference table in Washington figuring out

how to get these people in America to like us.” Rather, Sosnik sees the party developing into an “outsider, populist party” from the grass roots.

In some ways, it’s the mirror image of what happened after the 2008 election, in which the outsider tea party movement, and ultimately Trump, emerged as a backlash against President Barack Obama. At first, Republicans were reeling from their losses, which were far heavier than Democrats’ were this year. But congressional GOP leaders, particularly House Minority Whip Eric Cantor (Virginia) and Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell (Kentucky), met secretly even before Obama was sworn in to hatch plans for a comeback — based entirely on opposing everything the new president did. “If he was for it, we had to be against it,” then-Sen. George Voinovich, an Ohio Republican, explained in Michael Grunwald’s 2012 book on the era.

Democrats needn’t oppose Trump reflexively and mindlessly, as Republicans did Obama. They just need to hold the line when Trump does something truly egregious, as he did in late December when, with Elon Musk, he blew up the bipartisan spending bill. House Minority Leader Hakeem Jeffries (D-New York) maintained impressive unity: All but three House Democrats stood against the Trump-ordered scheme to suspend the debt ceiling; then, when Republicans returned to something like the original deal, Jeffries delivered the

thanks to God and Trump.

But during the weeks prior to the final House vote Mike heard tales about how well the new leader of Syria, Ahmed al-Sharaa and his Hayat Tahrir Al-Sham (HTS) group, were doing after they forced out the former ruthless dictator, Bashar al-Assad.

Curious, Mike decided to use a secret back channel to set up a one-day meeting with the new leader. No one in Washington would ever be the wiser, but he needed all the help he could get.

Seated in Sharaa’s office in Damascus and, out of politeness, drinking the strongest cup of coffee Mike had ever tasted, he said “I’ve been hearing rumors about how you’re pulling your country together without violence. I’d like to know how you’re doing that. What’s your secret plan?”

“No secret, really,” said Sharaa, slowly stroking his beard. “We’re just including all the religious and ethnic factions in our new government.”

“Really,” said Johnson with a barely discernible frown.

“Yes. And, we’re including women in all levels of government. We just appointed Maysaa Sabrine to lead the Central Bank of

robust economy.

When Trump took office in 2017, he was handed a 4.7% unemployment rate from President Barack Obama. By the time Trump left office, the unemployment rate had risen to 6.4%, which Biden had to contend with.

Trump, for his part, won a second term in office by trashing the economy and promising to lower the price of goods. However, he has since backtracked on that promise after the election.

“Look, they got them up. I’d like to bring them down. It’s hard to bring things down once they’re up. You know, it’s very hard,” Trump said in a December interview with *Time* when discussing the cost of grocery prices.

What’s more, while Trump has promised to bring prices down, his policies are expected to do the exact opposite. Experts say Trump’s plan to impose sweeping tariffs on imported goods could cause inflation to skyrocket and send the economy into a tailspin.

FOR-PROFIT US HEALTH SYSTEM CONTINUES TO LEAVE MANY MILLIONS UNINSURED EVERY YEAR. More than 10 million workers in the U.S. who held full-time jobs in 2023 still lacked health insurance for the entire year, Eloise Goldsmith noted at CommonDreams.org (11/10).

That’s just one of the troubling findings from a report released Jan. 10 that fleshes out how America’s “patchwork” system of employer-provided plans, individually purchased coverage through state-level exchanges, and Medicaid, are leaving many millions of Americans without care year after year.

The new study by the Center for Eco-

“yea” votes of all but one Democrat.

“In the short term, Democrats have lost control of their own destiny,” Sosnik argued. “The opportunity in the short term is largely or entirely based on what the Republicans do.” Luckily for the opposition party, Trump has already shown what Republicans are going to do: make a mess.

Even during the transition, Trump’s mess-making has been so consuming that it has stolen all attention from the sitting president. This has produced grumbling from some Democrats, which in turn has produced a spate of Biden-is-invisible reports.

“Biden shrinks from view ahead of Trump’s return to Washington,” wrote *Politico*.

“Biden Is Ceding Presidential Influence to Trump, and Some Democrats Are Furious,” added the *Wall Street Journal*.

The New York Times observed that Biden has “absented himself from the debate convulsing the country.” The *Washington Examiner* opined on “Biden’s disappearance.” Britain’s Telegraph reported that “Joe Biden has vanished.” *The Hill’s* headline described Biden as “AWOL.”

On “Pod Save America,” former Obama adviser Jon Favreau said “Biden seems to be disappearing from the public stage.”

One news story faulted Biden because he “remained in Washington” rather than going to France for the reopening of Notre Dame and also because he “left for a trip to

Syria. She is the former deputy governor of the bank.”

“Who will become your new President?”

“We will let the people decide. Everyone will have a vote. We are strongly encouraging women to run.”

“You mean you would be OK with having a woman President?” In Mike’s Christian fundamentalist nationalist view, having a female or many females in power was an affront to God.

Sharaa repeated what he had said during an interview with the BBC. “Of course. We’re not like the Taliban, you know. For more than eight years, HTS ruled Idlib and women attended universities. I believe there are more than 66% women in the universities now.”

“Really,” says Mike as he fidgeted with his spoon and took another sip of the brutally strong coffee.

“Really,” said Sharaa. “We’ve been studying the constitutions of several countries to figure out how to create a democracy, how to make a pluralistic society work. Where people of all faiths and ethnic backgrounds, including women, have an equal

Africa” rather than remaining in Washington, where he could be “pressing his party’s case in person.”

Much of this appears to be the product of circular reasoning. Media outlets have been covering Biden less as they (understandably) focus on Trump’s daily outrages. Then, based on the lack of coverage Biden is receiving, they conclude that he has disappeared.

In fact, the missing-in-action Biden negotiated a ceasefire between Israel and Hezbollah, visited the Amazon rainforest and Angola, hurried more funds out the door under the infrastructure bill and the Chips and Science Act (two of his administration’s signature achievements), and implemented a flurry of rules covering obesity drugs, wages for the disabled and more.

At the White House holiday party for the press on Dec. 20, the invisible president and the first lady stood for hours to shake hands and pose for photos with some 300 journalists and their guests. In what was either a technical error or a cheeky gesture, the White House then sent each of the 300 photographs to all of the attendees — irrefutable evidence of the president standing with representatives of the very news organizations that have reported him missing.

Dana Milbank is a political columnist for the Washington Post, where this appeared. Follow him on Twitter @Milbank. Email dana.milbank@washpost.com

say in government.”

Mike coughed and set his cup back down. “But what if they don’t do what you tell them to do?”

“That’s part of democracy, is it not? Isn’t that how your country has succeeded for so long?”

“Well,” Mike cleared his throat and said, “I don’t know about that. We’re looking at a new model now. Our people are yearning for something different.”

Sharaa set down his cup and rose, signaling that the meeting was over.

“Ironic.” he said. “Our people are yearning for freedom, for democracy, while yours? Not so much.”

Mike stood and reached out to shake Sharaa’s hand. “Well, good luck with that.”

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. She has a new (serious) book, “If You’d Only Listen: A Medical Memoir of Gaslighting, Grit & Grace,” available on Amazon if you can’t find it at your neighborhood bookstore. Email RosieSorenson29@yahoo.com. See RosieSorenson.com

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show the labor market has stabilized. There doesn’t seem to be any pressing reason to change interest rates any time soon.”

The report, released by the BLS, is the final full monthly report of Biden’s tenure.

It showed the U.S. had positive job growth every month Biden was in office. And average hourly wages today are higher than the \$29.92 average hourly rate when Biden took office in January 2021.

Biden touted his success with managing the U.S. economy in a statement:

“With today’s report of 256,000 new jobs in December, we have created over 16.6 million jobs over the course of my administration and this is the only administration in history to have created jobs every single month. Although I inherited the worst economic crisis in decades with unemployment above 6% when I took office, we’ve had the lowest average unemployment rate of any administration in 50 years with unemployment at 4.1% as I leave. Although forecasts were projecting it would take years to achieve a full recovery, we have had the strongest growth and employment creation of any advanced country, brought inflation back down, and achieved the soft landing that few thought was possible.”

Ultimately, the report will be the benchmark to determine the success of Trump’s soon-to-be second term in office.

It’s the second time Trump is inheriting a

nomie and Policy Research (CEPR) looked at the demographic characteristics of the uninsured population from 2018 through 2023 using Census Bureau data and found lack of healthcare coverage along class, racial, and ethnic lines, as well as disparities when it comes to levels of educational attainment.

“The Affordable Care Act has delivered insurance coverage for millions of Americans, but there are still considerable gaps in coverage—particularly for workers who find themselves too young for Medicare and who earn wages above thresholds for Medicaid coverage,” said Emma Curchin, one of the authors of the paper and a research assistant at CEPR.

“These gaps leave millions of people—many of them working full time all year—unable to secure insurance coverage. With so many unsettling questions about the future of key social safety net programs, policymakers must focus on solutions for delivering consistent insurance coverage to everyone,” she added.

After it passed in 2010, the Affordable Care Act—which sought to expand health insurance coverage, including by creating nex exchanges in the for-profit market—was able to reduce the share of the U.S. population that was without health insurance by roughly half between 2009 and 2023. While 16.7% of the population lacked insurance in 2009, the latest available data shows 8% of the population is without insurance. But even with the ACA, the study found that more than 27 million U.S. residents are without insurance, and almost 16 million of those workers have full-time jobs, part-time jobs, or are unemployed but actively seeking work.

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