

# The Progressive POPULIST

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## A Storm-Battered Louisiana Town Voted for Trump. He Has Vowed to Overturn the Law That Could Fix Its Homes.

*Donald Trump has said he will overturn a law that helps communities better weather the effects of climate change. If he follows through, he'll be reversing an initiative that has disproportionately benefited areas that make up his base.*

By SHARON LERNER for ProPublica

*This story was originally published by ProPublica.*

Cynthia Robertson could be forgiven for feeling that the banner was aimed at her. Its white-on-black lettering — “F\*\*\* BIDEN AND F\*\*\* YOU FOR VOTING FOR HIM” — hung from the wooden house right across the street from her own.

Hostility toward the outgoing Democratic president is no surprise in Sulphur, Louisiana, a red town in a red state in a country that has handed the White House and Congress to Republicans. Yet the message felt like a poke in the eye at a time when Robertson was seeking funding through Biden’s signature climate law so her nonprofit organization could repair and retrofit hurricane-battered houses in the area — including her neighbor’s. Not even a fraying tarp, a tar patch or the piece of corrugated metal tacked on the roof could keep the rain from pouring inside.

Donald Trump has vowed to overturn the law that would provide the funding, the Inflation Reduction Act, which he has referred to as the “new green scam.”

If he follows through now that he has assumed office, Trump would be rolling back a law that has disproportionately benefited red areas like Sulphur that make up his base.

Though not a single Republican legislator voted for the law, an outsized portion of its historic \$1 trillion in climate and energy provisions has benefited red congressional districts and states that voted for Trump, according to a report by E2, a group tracking the effects of the law. Red districts had the biggest growth in green jobs, the report said. Red states, including Nevada, Wyoming, Kentucky and Georgia, have seen the biggest jumps in clean energy investments, according to an August report from the Clean Investment Monitor, which tracks public and private investments

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Illustration by DOLORES CULLEN

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AN EDITORIAL

Trump the Merciless Rules

Donald Trump jumped back into action Jan. 20 with a flurry of lies, executive orders and presidential pardons designed to show he was back, and badder than ever. He also violated his "solemn" oath to uphold the Constitution on the first day, when he announced that he would ignore the 14th Amendment provision of birthright citizenship when it interferes with his deportation of migrants' children born in the United States.

Daniel Dale of CNN noted that Trump made only a smattering of false claims in his inaugural address, but later "he embarked on a lying spree" and finished the day with more than 20 lies.

In a second speech to supporters in the US Capitol Visitor Center, Trump made false claims about elections, immigration and the Jan. 6, 2021, Capitol riot, among other subjects, Dale noted. Trump then made additional false claims in a freewheeling third speech at Washington's Capital One Arena and again to reporters as he signed executive orders in the Oval Office.

President Trump's barrage of 28 executive orders in the first three days may seem familiar to anyone who paged through the Heritage Foundation's Project 2025, Avery Lotz noted at Axios. During the campaign, Trump distanced himself from the right-wing blueprint to expand executive power and reshape American life, but his new administration already seems to have taken whole sections from it.

Several of Trump's Cabinet and agency picks, including Brendan Carr and Russ Vought, wrote parts of Project 2025 or contributed to the text. Tom Homan, John Ratcliffe and Pete Hoekstra are listed among the dozens of Project 2025 contributors who aided in "development and writing."

A review of Trump's early executive orders shows clear parallels with Project 2025 on key proposals, such as dismantling diversity, equity and inclusion initiatives; loosening environmental regulations; and ending certain international agreements.

Among the executive orders was one to rescind a 1965 order by President Lyndon Johnson that barred federal contractors from employment discrimination and required them to take affirmative action to ensure equal opportunity "based on race, color, religion, and national origin."

Continuing the Big Lie Party's obsession with transgender issues, Trump signed an executive order declaring there are "two sexes, male and female" and that "sex" is not a synonym for gender identity — echoing a section of the Heritage Foundation's plan. He also rescinded Biden-era protections allowing transgender Americans to serve in the military, a throwback to his first term that Project 2025 also called for.

To fulfill his promise to "Drill, Baby, Drill," Trump signed an order promoting the use of "Alaska's vast lands and resources" for oil production on his first day in office. He also eliminated what he called Biden's "electric vehicle mandate," which actually amounted to incentives to buy electric vehicles, and rescinded a Biden executive order promoting wind energy development, as Trump halted wind turbine leases in federal land and waters and ordered review of existing leases.

Trump declared a national emergency to send active-duty US military as well as National Guardsman to the Southern border to assist in arrests along the border. He also suspended the U.S. Refugee Admissions program for Afghan refugees who worked for the US.

Rev. Mariann Budde, Episcopal bishop of Washington, D.C.,

dared to speak truth to power in a 15-minute sermon at the Washington National Cathedral the morning after the inauguration. With Trump and his family sitting in the front row, she issued a plea directly for him to "Have mercy" on "the people in our country who are scared now," and she specifically held up the fears felt by many LGBTQ+ people and immigrants at the start of Trump's second term.

Budde, in her sermon, did not criticize any specific policy promoted by Trump. Rather, she invoked familiar Christian themes of compassion, respect for human dignity, and welcoming the stranger, David Paulsen noted in *The Christian Century*.

"I ask you to have mercy, Mr. President, on those in our communities whose children fear that their parents will be taken away, and that you help those who are fleeing war zones and persecution in their own lands to find compassion and welcome here," Budde said. "Our God teaches us that we are to be merciful to the stranger, for we were all once strangers in this land."

Later, Trump told reporters he "didn't think it was a good service." Then, in an early morning social media post, he demanded Budde and "her church" apologize. Without using Budde's name, the president labeled her "a so-called bishop" and a "Radical Left hard line Trump hater" whose sermon was "ungracious" and "nasty in tone."

Imagine that. How could an Episcopal bishop, in her study of the Gospels, get the idea that it is appropriate to ask a leader to "show mercy"?

Trump's response shows he has neither mercy, nor compassion. If anything, he sees those traits as a sign of weakness.

As Bishop Budde spoke, Trump's "border czar" Tom Homan already was deploying Immigration and Customs Enforcement officers nationwide to conduct raids seeking to locate and arrest undocumented immigrants. In one such raid, at a seafood shop in Newark, N.J., ICE agents arrested at least one U.S. citizen, a Puerto Rican native who did not have a driver's license but produced a US military veteran's ID, which ICE agents rejected, as he and two other Latino employees were arrested. The store owner noted that White employees were not required to produce IDs.

Immigration raids across the country included multiple federal agencies and resulted in arrests of more than 3,500 people in the week after Trump's inauguration, according to ICE.

During the Biden administration, ICE's Enforcement and Removal Operations conducted 113,431 administrative arrests in the fiscal year that ended October 2024, the agency reported. That's about 310 arrests a day, CNN noted.

Homan has said ICE would focus on rounding up criminal migrants and not conduct mass workplace raids. But that was before Trump told ICE officials to increase numbers of arrests. Immigrant communities clearly expect mass raids, which are likely to catch "legal" and "illegal" immigrants, as well as native Latino Americans, in the dragnet.

"We are already seeing people are not showing up for work. They're not sending their children to school," Kathleen Bush-Joseph, a policy analyst at the Migration Policy Institute, told Texas Public Radio.

The California Farm Bureau said fears of raids in the Central Valley led to migrant farmworkers not showing up for work, which virtually halted the area's citrus harvest. Immigrants also are a large portion of workers at meat-packing plants around the country. Their departures could lead to much higher food prices to come.

In Trump 2.0 there is no mercy for consumers, either: — JMC

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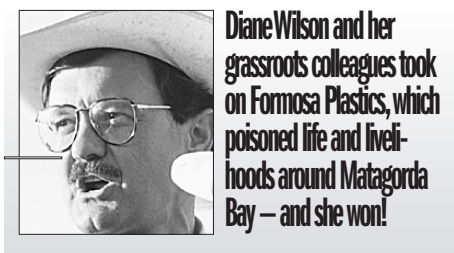
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JIM HIGHTOWER



Yes, You Can Fight the Bastards ... and Win!

It's been my honor to know a few *real* heroes — people who've selflessly dared to fight greed and oppression to advance the common good. Diane Wilson, for example. For 40 years, this fiery fourth-generation fisherwoman from the Texas Gulf Coast has battled tenaciously for the rights and very survival of the area's hardscrabble fishing families. She and her grassroots allies have taken on Formosa Plastics, a \$250 billion global corporate beast that has routinely dumped its chemical waste around Matagorda Bay, poisoning life and livelihoods. But in 2019, in a lawsuit based on massive evidence collected by Wilson and her armada of volunteer kayakers, she won a stunning court victory, forcing the contaminator to pay \$50 million for its malfeasance.

Wilson's fight was not just for her, and she did not get a penny from the Formosa settlement. But she won something richer than money — "It felt like justice," she said of the court's judgment. Importantly, the court didn't award the \$50 million to some regulatory agency, but to a public trust administered by — guess who? — Wilson's allies! So she has been working tenaciously ever since to make sure the money directly benefits the poor families Formosa ran over. Especially promising is the trust's major grant to create the people's own Matagorda Bay Fishing Cooperative. It will provide dock space, supply contracts, processing ability, local jobs — and the power for local people to forge their own future.

Why fight against overpowering odds for 40 years? Because of her strong principles ... and sheer stubbornness. "It's my home," Wilson says of the bay and its working-class community, "and I completely refuse to give it to that company to ruin."

Who Will Organize a Progressive Majority

A lot of working-class voters who live outside of blue voting areas are asking: Where the hell is the Democratic Party? Sad to say, the "Party of the People" is mired in Washington, controlled by a cadre of high-dollar consultants, corporate lobbyists, big donors and meek political leaders who've decided that "red" and rural American voters are lost causes. But grassroots progressives who live in those areas say: Bovine excrement! After all, you damn sure can't win if you don't bother to show up. So, party inertia aside, progressive advocates for working-class values, policies and people must become the ground-level organizers to build a "little-d" democratic majority. Not by writing position papers but by "going there" in person, online or otherwise. Let's tap grassroots savvy to find ways to reach and move millions of people (just a few at a time) who're now not being reached or motivated. Who will do this? Maybe you! Or someone you know: People (young or old) with talent/skills/ideas that are now not being fully used should consider this chance to make a difference. George Goehl, one of our nation's best organizers of community organizers, recently issued an open call for

creative dedicated people to do new working-class organizing all across our country. Don't know how? It basically involves learning to listen to local people. Goehl, with his team of seasoned organizers, will train and provide essential support for people whose organizing ideas are accepted. Happily, project positions come with a full-time salary, benefits and a start-up budget. The whole idea is to try new things, invest in what works ... and win! Want to throw your hat and ideas into the mix? No charge to apply. You can fill out an application at [georgegoehl.substack.com](http://georgegoehl.substack.com).

The Billionaire Bros Do the Immigrant Worker Two-Step

One thing you can say about Donald Trump is that he's absolutely clear on his furious opposition to immigrants taking American jobs. Except, of course, when the corporate honchos profiting from cheap immigrant labor are billionaire funders of Trump's campaigns — or, hello, when Trump himself is doing the hiring! A work permit program called H-1B actually allows corporate giants to import foreigners to take U.S. jobs. Trump loudly denounced this in his first term, but that was pre-Elon. When gabillionaire Elon Musk became Donald's campaign sugar daddy last year, he turned out to be a mass abuser of the H-1B loophole — apparently even firing workers in his Tesla corporation and replacing them with cheaper foreign imports. Yet, far from scolding his new best buddy, Trump did a full-body flip-flop. Now hailing H-1B as "a great program," he admits that he, too, has long used it, even when he was denouncing it as a shameful rip-off of American workers.

Trump's use of the foreign hire scheme is even chintzier than Musk's for he uses a companion H-2 loophole to import hundreds of low-paid foreigners to take jobs as cooks, waiters, housekeepers and farmworkers in his luxury resorts and hotels — including at Mar-a-Lago. Amazing. These are lordly billionaires reducing themselves to sleaze by exploiting a corporate scheme to shortchange American and foreign workers alike. Moreover, whether trying to import engineers or waiters, the law requires these uber-rich applicants to lie. They must swear that there are no American citizens available who can do these jobs. This is Jim Hightower saying ... Welcome to Don and Elon's phantasmagoric wonderland, where nothing is a lie if they say it's true.

A Billionaire vs. a Cartoonist. I'm Betting on the Cartoonist

The sorry state of corporate journalism sagged to an even lower low last month when the *Washington Post* banned publication of a piece by its own Pulitzer Prize-winning cartoonist, Ann Telnaes. Why cancel her drawing? Because it lampooned Jeff Bezos, the multibillionaire boss of Amazon — who also happens to own the *Post*. The cartoon depicts Bezos and other media titans (even Mickey Mouse) groveling at the feet of Donald Trump and offering sacks of cash. She was mocking Bezos and the others for recently sucking up to The Don by giving a million dollars each in celebration of his election. Top *Post* executives not only abandoned the paper's journalistic integrity by censoring its prized cartoonist, but they then tried to cover up their suppression by calling it a technicality. "We had just published a column on the same topic as the cartoon," weaseled a top manager, claiming he cut Telnaes' drawing merely to avoid "repetition." But hello, read any paper, watch Fox News, listen to talk radio — and you'll see that mass media relies on repetition. Moreover, cartoonists don't merely repeat a story. They add journalistic impact by literally

drawing a picture of it! Telnaes resigned on principle over this affront. Imagine Billionaire Bezos acting on any principle (besides advancing his financial principal). Yet, solely because he's rich, he can compel a paper once renown for political courage to conform to the current plutocratic order. That's how journalism dies. Democracy, too. This is Jim Hightower saying ... Yet, genuine journalism and democracy itself remain resilient, specifically because scrappy

Trump's Tribe Attacks Earth

By FRANK LINGO

Among the many monstrous moves made by F\*\*\*ing Felon 47 on his first day back in office are aggressively anti-ecological executive orders. We shouldn't let these terracidal tactics be tolerated, even if the news organizations don't give them sufficient coverage. Sure, the media have heaps of horrifying happenings to present to their public. There are the pardons of insurrectionists who attacked the United States Congress at the incitement of Felon. There's the retribution for those Justice Department officials who did their duty by prosecuting Felon's fanatic followers. There's the deportation desires of his devotees on any immigrants without white skin. There's the restrictions of reproductive rights on any people without a penis. But none of those issues are more important than protecting the planet from the worsening ways of climate chaos. If we had enlightened self-interest, we'd know this isn't about benevolence for the birds and bunnies, but for survival of our own fragile species. A Jan. 21 *New York Times* article outlined some devastating decisions by dictator Donald. One includes eliminating programs that protect communities from the pollution of environmental racism, another unlocks the authority for him to suspend environmental regulations on the pretext of a phony energy emergency. Felon 47 announced the U.S. is withdrawing from the Paris Accords, a pact almost all the world's nations joined to fight the climate crisis. It'll take a year for our reneging to take effect but you can bet our country will do nothing to help in the mean-

time. Then the Oaf of Office signed a sweeping order to stop new offshore wind projects and potentially terminate existing wind leases, as well. Additionally, our fatuous fathead signed a dangerous directive that could deliver a desired decree for deniers. It calls for the Environmental Protection Agency's administrator to reconsider the "legality and continuing applicability" of the endangerment finding. This concept stems from a 2007 Supreme Court decision which found the EPA can regulate greenhouse gas emissions because they qualify as air pollutants. Then two years later the EPA, under President Obama, concluded that six gases, including carbon dioxide and methane, are a danger to human health and must be regulated under the Clean Air Act. So now Felon 47's friends at the fiercely anti-regulatory Heritage Foundation want to challenge the Court's ruling with a goal to nullify the EPA's enforcement powers. Of course, the fossil fool firms would love to overturn the regulations that protect our atmosphere. And demon Don, who claims the climate crisis is a hoax, plans on elevating extraction and sabotaging sustainability. Not sure about you, but I have full faith in the current court's majority of Supremacists to do the right thing — the far-right thing. As we've seen many times in the last few years — whether it's about abortion, voting rights, or providing a president with impunity — their far-right thing is quite far-wrong. That would impose the minority's will on the majority and a climate catastrophe on the Earth.

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



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# LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

## Visa Wars

Apparently the MAGA love affair on immigration policy is over. DOGE Brothers Elon Musk and Vivek Ramaswamy are in one corner, with Neanderthal Steve Bannon in the opposite. Some background info before punches fly.

H1B visas originated with the 1952 Immigration and Naturalization Act and subsequent legislation. They sidestep immigration requirements in “specialty occupations” requiring advanced technical skills. H1B is the largest visa category for guest workers. It is capped at 65,000 a year for new applicants with a B.A. or work equivalent, plus 20,000 more for those with an MA or doctorate degree.

H1Bs are good for six years before reapplying. An employer sponsor is required. Amazon is currently the largest H1B employer, followed by tech giants IBM, Microsoft, Google, Apple and Intel. Musk’s Tesla is #16. In recent years the number of H1B applicants has increased exponentially, with 70% of new hires coming from India. Median salary is \$118,000 [BBC 1/8/25].

Musk and Vivek pull no punches in downplaying the low quantity and quality of the American skilled labor force and the need for overseas help. Vivek, American-born of Indian ancestry, chastises US culture as “dumbed down” and that it “celebrates the jock over the valedictorian.”

Musk once held an H1B visa from South Africa before obtaining dual citizenship in 2002. He threatens, “I will go to war” to expand H1B visas. His over \$250 million 2024 campaign contributions has Donald Trump’s attention.

Bannon, fresh off a four month prison sentence for defying a Congressional subpoena, attacked The DOGE Bros. “We’re going to rip your face off in this visa fight,” language more suitable for the WWE than the political arena.

Where does referee POTUS #45/#47 stand in this conflict? Depends when you ask the question. When wooing voters in the 2016 campaign, The Trumpster called H1B “very bad” and “unfair” to American workers. He recently changed his tune, boasting “I’m a believer in H1B ... It is a great program” and cited his own business involvement with it. Go figure.

This will not be the only issue involving MAGA infighting. Don’t expect kumbaya on tariffs, Ukraine, and other heated topics. With the fictitious “Biden Crime Family” now disproven as a sham MAGA FBI-Smirnov bribery scheme, expect the MAGA Circular Firing Squad to take aim, locked and loaded.

“Be careful what you wish for, lest it come true.” — Aesop’s Fables

ED ENGLER, *Sebring, Fla.*

### Trump is a Self-Destructive Narcissist

Traitor Trump is awfully sad — not to mention completely mad — isn’t he? Jesus Christ, please return ASAP to save us from your fake followers soiling the name of Christianity. We’ve had enough of their nonsensical bigotry and idiotic anti-science ideology.

As far as an adjudicated sexual assailant and convicted felon like Putin’s puppet Donald Trump is concerned, that self-destructive Rapepublican narcissist is already a lame duck president even before taking office again. Partisan Republican politicians who live in constant conservative fear of their fascist, hate-filled, abusive father figure Orange Hitler are without a doubt some of the weakest wimps that America has to offer.

For instance, Republican House Speaker Mike Johnson? (Yeah, not for long.) Thankfully, the endless opportunities manifesting themselves in this particular political crisis are apparent to us, the real Americans who do not make a mock-

*Send letters by email to [progpap@gmail.com](mailto:progpap@gmail.com) or write c/o PO Box 819, Manchaca, Texas 78652*

## Trump’s Master Plan: Undoing

By DON ROLLINS

“Today, I will sign a series of executive orders. With these actions, we will begin the complete restoration of America and the revolution of common sense,” — Donald Trump, Inauguration 2025 Speech

Trump is a busy man these days, what with all the paperwork he’s so publicly autographing. Indeed, executive orders are fairly flying off the Oval Office desk, reminiscent of FDR’s Depression-era first term (minus the conscience, compassion and quality cabinet) and inviting speculation as to how many crates of his preferred pen (Crayon-size Sharpies) will be exhausted

over the next four years.

As perhaps with no administration before, the orders signal Team Trump’s strategic reliance on them in order to bypass what’s left of our three-branch democracy. Once a tool of little or last resort for president fiat without congressional input, recent executive use (including Trump’s first term) has hovered between 150-250.

But on his self-labeled “Shock and Awe” first day on the job, Trump issued orders covering a record dozen government functions, each with clear instructions for change per the ultraconservative Project 2025 blueprint.

Some of the orders are as bizarre as Trump himself, none more so than the mandate to rename the Gulf of Mexico - what else, the Gulf of America. Mexico’s fed-up-to-here president, Claudia Sheinbaum’s cleverly rebuffed the notion; but it did not deter the always reliable Rep. Marjorie Tay-

ery of Jesus of Nazareth’s name. Diabolical Donald is not a Christian, not even close! Trump is an Antichrist, and you all know it too.

Deranged Donald is just another one of those so-called “Christian” conservatives who would be the first in line to unjustly execute Jesus should Christ ever return to Earth to admonish his fake followers. If you are under the incredibly ignorant impression that most Americans are now falling into line like fascists to worship Elon Musk’s moronic man crush Don the con, you have another think coming.

JAKE PICKERING, *Arcata, Calif.*

### Trump Wrecking the Environment

Like all reasoned Americans and global citizens I recoiled in horror today when Donald Trump, in an inauguration that will be remembered in infamy, told the world that we will “Drill baby drill” with regards to petroleum and new oil production. It is hard to find the right words to address this unspeakable declaration of war on our planet’s eco system and environment. Anyone with an I.Q. above room temperature realizes and accepts the reality that our beloved planet is in it’s death throes — this a direct result of human-caused global warming. Simply look at the recent and unprecedented coastal fires in California and the indescribable destruction they wrought. And the inescapable truth is this — if we as a species and a nation ignore or minimize the realities of climate catastrophe we will with immediacy enter into an apocalyptic age where the fires of California resemble a 4th of July fireworks celebration when contrasted with what’s coming.

I would very much like to hear and understand from both Trump and his hairy howling MAGA hordes how destroying the planet’s environment and ultimately human civilization will somehow “make America great again.” And this does not even factor in or take into account the extinction of untold species of animals that are a direct result of this insanity. I would suggest to all caring and decent people that instead of pursuing global environmental suicide and accelerating the planets destruction that we instead embrace a path that insures the future for our children and future generations. If we choose this course of planetary healing and species survival we could indeed “Make America great again.”

JIM SAWYER, *Edmonds, Wash.*

### Trump Ducks Consequences

Trump successfully skated away from consequence for the seditious crimes he was indicted for, not because he was judged innocent, but because he manipulated our legal system of justice with help from several corrupt judges and justices. He even avoided punishment for the one crime for which he was found guilty (34 counts!). Until Inauguration Day, these evasions from accountability were the most egregious attacks on the rule of law, and on our national security, that a public official has ever perpetrated against us.

Now, on Inauguration Day, Trump exceeded his previous deplorable, traitorous sabotage. With the blanket pardon of violent Jan. 6 rioters, Trump has subverted the legal system required for civil society. Setting free those violent insurrectionists gives them immunity to become Trump’s unofficial violent enforcers of fear and corruption, just like Nazi brownshirts were.

On Day 2, the criminal must be impeached. Contact your Congress representative.

BRUCE JOFFE, *Piedmont, Calif.*

### Humanities, Togetherness, Californians

Oh, where do I start but the essence of shock and a broken heart? The pain I share for the dire devastation you ultimately, unfortunately, all bear is truly uncontrollable in today’s troubled world of uncertainty that others shall unfortunately need to share is clear. Neither empathy nor continued strife shall bring forth an expedited better life. But our care, concern and humanity for all our

lor Greene from introducing a house bill to the same effect.

But things got serious when Trump doubled down on campaign pledges regarding immigration, convicted January 6th attackers, energy, trade, and government hiring and diversity. Once again, it’s Project 2025 come to pass.

In practical terms, everything on the list defies logic. Among the least sensible are those having to do with the World Health Organization, and the Paris climate accord - two essential, international entities Trump has despised since his first term.

Only the foolish can subscribe to the theory there will be no more global pandemics. By leaving the WHO, the U.S. will no longer fund or have access to research and containment measures. Based on everything we know, it’s a matter of when, not if another contagion takes place.

The Paris accords are also on Team

societal others — sisters and brothers — is our “right and righteous” caring of togetherness for one’s life of strife.

FRANK C. ROHRIG, *Milford, Conn.*

### Coming Soon: People’s Republic of Mar-A-Lago

On Christmas Day 2024, America’s psychotic sore winner (and still a sore loser from 2020), convicted felon Donald Trump publicly lambasted nearly everyone his Adderall-infused brain could contain, except of course for Trump’s KGB Colonel puppet master Vladimir Putin, who received absolutely no criticism from traitor Trump whatsoever, regardless of the fact that Russia had just shot down a civilian airliner killing 38 people.

Nor did deranged Donald criticize his favorite North Korean communist “little Rocket Man” Kim Jong Un either. Every time Russophile Trump speaks in public, we should be forgiven by the GOP (Greedy Old Perverts) for our preferring to hear diabolical Donald’s ridiculous right-wing propaganda in its original Russian language instead.

For being a fake billionaire, dingbat Donald sure is a fan of communist dictators, isn’t he? Perhaps Don the con will finally pay his federal taxes for once, after he trash cans the USA and replaces it with his newly created catastrophe in the making to be called the People’s Republic of Mar-a-Lago.

Just like when Vladimir Putin’s puppet Trump the chump infamously said to let Putin do whatever he wants in Ukraine (the use of nuclear weapons included), we Americans should now allow the Danes, Panamanians, Canadians, and Mexicans to “take care of” Trump before that insane orange idiot starts World War III by invading Greenland, etc.

JACK BANKER, *Eureka, Calif.*

### War on Caged People is Not Justifiable

Wouldn’t the justifiable “war” be the “war” to free 2.3 million Palestinians held captive in a cage, instead of the “war” upon the 2.3 million Palestinians held captive in the Gaza cage?

How is it possible that the justifiable “war” is the one where the captors make “war” upon defenseless people being held captive based only on ethnicity.

Held captive, nowhere to go, nowhere to hide, no way to defend themselves, like animals being fed to the slaughter, and this type of military violence upon people that Israel holds captive, then attacks — is this justifiable “war”? Nice try, Israel. Nice try, America.

Hamas has never forced Israel to hold 2.3 million Palestinians captive. Israel purposely keeps Gaza dangerous for all Palestinians by not allowing anyone the freedom to leave.

Thanks to our elevated “war” status, we in America can write off the total destruction of Gaza as “war,” but if anyone did that to us ...

FRANK ERICKSON, *Minneapolis, Minn.*

### Looking Forward to 2028

The Democrats do not have to look any further for their 2028 Presidential and Vice Presidential nominees. They already have three outstanding candidates who have been overlooked for higher office by this nation’s media — Hakeem Jeffries, Adam Schiff and Jamie Raskin.

Jeffries is my first choice. He has done an excellent job serving in the House of Representatives since 2013 and as House minority leader since January 2023. He demonstrated his leadership abilities by getting the December 2024 government spending bill passed despite strong Trump-Musk opposition and by defeating the Trump-Musk effort to raise the debt ceiling and shut down the government.

Schiff and Raskin are tied for my second and third preferences as the 2028 Presidential and Vice Presidential nominees. Both have been extremely articulate leaders in the House for a number of years and did an outstanding job in the Select Committee’s investigation into the Jan. 6, 2021, attack on the Capitol.

EDWARD L. KOVEN, *Highland Park, Ill.*

Trump’s chopping block, best evidenced by the boss’s “Drill, Baby Drill” mantra. Never mind the U.S. contributes roughly 11% of global greenhouse pollutants, second only to China. As with the WHO, Trump ended our participation in the accords during his first term, only to be reversed by the Biden administration. And now the pendulum is swinging backward.

If there’s a word to describe what we’re witnessing in these early days of Trump’s second coming, it must undoing. Undoing laws, undoing safety nets, undoing hard won progress. Time was, undoing was just a Republican strategy for campaigning. Now it’s a strategy for governing.

*Don Rollins is a retired Unitarian Universalist minister in Jackson, Ohio.*

*Email [donaldrollins@gmail.com](mailto:donaldrollins@gmail.com).*



RURAL ROUTES/ *Margot Ford McMillen*

Local Producers Provide Quality Food at Affordable Prices



We're reading a great deal on the follies of our president and how he dangles a shiny object in front of us—like the promise to cut egg prices—then when he can't get it done he immediately swaps it out for another promise—like buying Greenland or invading Panama. Yeah, that's weird. But, you know, we can do very little about POTUS's blabbing. Our efforts pay back better when we work to change things in our own communities. And then, as the changes build momentum, Washington gets a clue and, eventually, there's new policy. This truth even extends to the price of eggs. There is a lot going on in the sustainable ag world, and all of it pushed by activists in their own communities demanding more and better local production. Not long ago, I visited with an egg producer who started in 2008. The first time he went to a farmers' market with his eggs, he set up a card table in a parking lot and sold a half dozen eggs. The buyer lived alone, didn't

think she needed a full dozen. The next week, he set up his card table and sold four dozen eggs. Next week, 40 dozen. Now his business produces 42,000 eggs a week and sells to restaurants and grocery stores all over the state. The farmers' market where he started has grown, also, into a fancy shelter with a roof and walls that's open year-round. Thank you, consumers, for demanding local production. This isn't an isolated example. We have other mid-Missouri egg farmers moving into local markets instead of selling to the big consolidators at prices that barely meet (or may not meet) costs. And it's not only eggs. Veggies, plants, baked goods. When ordinary folks look for better food for our families, farmers respond. When we at home look for solutions to ordinary problems, Washington sooner or later takes notice. Shoppers at common-place grocery stores know that production from the protein sector is disappointing. Four companies control the beef industry. Tyson, American, is biggest when it comes to sales. JBS, Brazilian, follows. Then comes

Cargill, based in Minnesota, and then National Beef Packing, Brazilian. Never mind the environmental impact of Brazilian beef production that takes down the rain forest to create pasture and grain farms. Impact on the U.S. food security is more than troubling. The Biden administration kicked in to help build meat processors to serve our local communities. We'll see if they survive under the new administration that they, after all, supported. These smaller producers are building businesses that are more like the feed-your-neighbor businesses of 50 years ago. This is in contrast to the feed-the-world businesses that universities and U.S.D.A. pushed on rural America. "Get big or get out" U.S.D.A. Secretary of Agriculture Earl Butz said during his 1972-1976 reign and his words started the decline of rural America. Our prosperous small towns were doomed and so was the environment. In the farmland of our parents, animals lived in pastures lined with rows of trees where wildlife could find a place. Butz encouraged farmers to tear out fence rows and fences. Then they could ask John Deere to create monstrous equipment to plow the bigger fields. This is supposed to be efficient but truthfully, it put owners into debt. As small farmers moved out, rural America became lonelier and the Earl Butz strategies spurred industrialization. The giant fields and abandoning of rural America by families meant that chemicals were brought into service to control weeds and pests. In the 1990s, the most popular crops—corn and soybeans—were genetically modified to resist the chemicals, but that's all. The crops were changed only

to resist industry's chemicals. They weren't improved in terms of nutritional value. But small groups of consumers saw the problems and the introduction of genetically modified crops (also called GMOs) turned into the beginning of consumer resistance. Finally, we are figuring out that monster equipment and monster fields mean the end of nature and the beginning of poor food quality. Organic foods have become fashionable and there are now consumer advocacy groups promoting local production, farmers' markets, local branding and even co-operative business models in every state. Yay, us! Every now and then, it's important to remind ourselves that all politics is local. When Tip O'Neill used that phrase, repeatedly, back in the 1980s, he was saying that he could use local issues to sway national policy. One year, when he wanted to pass a billion dollar job bill, he had opposition from a lawmaker in Peoria, Illinois. O'Neill ran ads in Illinois to highlight what the bill could do for those voters and, hey presto!, the opposition caved. And even when all politics isn't local, the politics that we can affect with our actions is more likely local than national or international. Resolution #1 for 2025? Support your local communities!

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

DISPATCHES

**TRUMP'S PLAN TO RELOCATE GAZANS TO JORDAN AND EGYPT TRIGGERS OUTRAGE.** President Donald Trump said Jan. 25 he would like to see most of the population of war-torn Gaza be relocated to Jordan and Egypt, a plan that a number of observers said was tantamount to ethnic cleansing, Eloise Goldsmith noted at Common Dreams (1/26). Trump made the remarks the same day that he lifted a Biden-era hold on the supply of 2,000-pound bombs to Israel.

"I'd like Egypt to take people. And I'd like Jordan to take people," Trump said, according to the *Financial Times*. "You're talking about a million and half people, and we just clean out that whole thing." Gaza's population was 2.2 million in 2023. "He's just openly endorsing/encouraging ethnic cleansing," wrote journalist Mehdi Hasan on Jan. 25. Others chimed in with similar remarks.

Trump's comments were made nearly a week after a cease-fire deal between Israel and Hamas went into effect, halting 15 months of war that was triggered by a Hamas deadly attack on Israel Oct. 7, 2023, and which left tens of thousands of Palestinians dead, according to local health officials.

Homes, shelter, and infrastructure has also been largely decimated in the Gaza Strip by Israel's military campaign there. Trump said Gaza is "literally a demolition site right now. Almost everything's demolished and people are dying there, so I'd rather get involved with some of the Arab nations and build housing in a different location where I think they could maybe live in peace for a change," per CNN.

"What the occupation has failed to achieve through its criminal bombardment and genocide in Gaza will not be implemented through political pressures," said independent Palestinian politician Mustafa Barghouti, according to CNN. "The conspiracy of ethnic cleansing will not succeed in Gaza or the West Bank."

Trump also told reporters that he had already discussed the idea to relocate Gazans with King Abdullah of Jordan on Jan. 25. He said he planned to bring up the plan during a Jan. 26 phone call with Egyptian President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi.

Trump's proposal would be a departure from the United States' official position of forging a negotiated "two state solution" for Israel and Palestine, although some say that the United States' policies towards the region, including the nearly unqualified support for Israel during its campaign in Gaza, have undercut that goal.

Israel's far-right Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich endorsed Trump's remarks, according to CNN, saying "the idea of helping [Gazans] find other places to start new, better lives is a great idea."

**DEMS SLAM TRUMP FOR BAILING ON PLEDGE TO LOWER GROCERY PRICES.** Congressional Democrats are calling out President Trump's inaction on food prices, even though he campaigned on lowering them. On Jan. 27, 19 of them sent him a letter demanding that he act on record prices impacting American consumers, Morgan Stephens noted at Daily Kos (1/27/25).

"Your sole action on costs was an executive order that contained only the barest mention of food prices and not a single specific policy to reduce them," wrote the lawmakers. "You have tools you can use to lower grocery costs and crack down on corporate

profiteering, and we write to ask if you will commit to using those tools to make good on your promises to the American people." The letter proposed six concrete measures the White House could take to lower prices, including banning price gouging during crises like pandemics and allowing the Federal Trade Commission and Department of Agriculture to address monopoly practices in the food industry. Democrats bolstered their argument by citing recent examples of corporate price manipulation. "Last year a Kroger executive admitted in federal court that the company raised the price of eggs and milk 'significantly higher than the cost of inflation' in the years following the COVID-19 pandemic," the Democrats said. "In 2023, a federal court found that the country's largest egg producers had engaged in a pricefixing conspiracy in the mid-2000s. Major beef, poultry, and potato producers have similarly been accused of or admitted to price-fixing." Trump's presidential campaign harped on inflation and food costs, blaming former President Joe Biden for skyrocketing grocery prices. The majority of voters indicated that the economy was one of the top deciding factors in the 2024 election, if not the top reason. "First, we must get economic relief to our citizens," Trump said at the Republican National Convention in July. "Starting on Day 1, we will drive down prices and make America affordable again. We have to make it affordable. It's not affordable. People can't live like this." Yet Trump spent his first week in office focused on muting health agencies, enacting mass deportations across the country that included wrongfully detaining at least one U.S. veteran, pardoning violent Jan. 6 insurrectionists, potentially getting rid of FEMA, and dismantling DEI programs. Chocolate, beef, coffee, and orange juice are some of the foods that have seen staggering price spikes over the past year. Meanwhile, egg prices have soared to an all-time high due to inflation and

a spike in bird flu, which has led to significant shortages. Prices are expected to continue to increase 20% this year, with some states like California reporting \$8 per dozen. Some restaurants have resorted to adding a surcharge for items with eggs in them. Lowering food costs for working Americans is clearly not a top priority for the Trump administration. His vague executive order that focused on pricing directed the executive branch departments and agencies to "pursue appropriate actions" to lower prices on housing, health care, and home appliances—without any details on how to do so. Instead of taking decisive action to lower food prices, Trump's administration seems intent on raising them even higher. Case in point: the ongoing mass deportations of undocumented people, which could lead to labor shortages in industries that rely on migrant agriculture workers. This could further drive up costs for everything from food production to restaurant bills. **TRUMP'S MASS DEPORTATION PROMISE IS FAILING. SO WHY IS HE STILL BRAGGING?** Donald Trump's mass deportation promise has hit some logistical and ethical hiccups in his first week back in office, forcing his administration to abandon the numbers and instead focus on PR, Alix Breedon noted at Daily Kos (1/27). Even Trump's "border czar" Tom Homan has admitted that the feat of deporting millions of undocumented immigrants just isn't possible. While the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement is bragging on X about arrests and publishing its numbers across social media, an insider told the *Washington Post* that the Trump administration is far from happy. According to the anonymous source, the White House has issued new daily quotas on ICE agents, telling the federal officers to ramp up their hundreds of daily arrests to at least 1,200 or 1,500. *Continued on page 22*





# FROMA HARROP



Trump issued a meme coin, a form of bitcoin, right before his inauguration, with a market capitalization of \$5 billion, based on the Greater Fool Theory.

## A New Trump Presidency Inaugurates an Old Con

Right before his inauguration, Donald Trump issued a \$TRUMP meme coin featuring a defiant him pumping his fist after an assassination attempt. Shortly after their release, the market capitalization for \$TRUMP coins passed \$5 billion.

## The Oligarchs Are Coming!

By ART CULLEN

For real, not joking, listen up: Joe Biden thinks that big money might be in charge.

"I want to warn the country of some things that give me great concern. And this is a dangerous concern. And that's the dangerous concentration of power in the hands of a very few ultra-wealthy people," Biden said Jan. 16 in one of a series of swan songs. "Today, an oligarchy is taking shape in America of extreme wealth, power, and influence that literally threatens our entire democracy, our basic rights and freedoms, and a fair shot for everyone to get ahead."

That sort of sums up why Biden's presidency was a disappointment. They never quite got it.

Has he not heard of the grain traders, the meatpackers and the chemical companies?

The malefactors of great wealth described by Teddy Roosevelt never let go. Biden thinks he is on to something.

Oracle of Omaha Warren Buffett once called bitcoin "rat poison squared." Jamie Dimon, chief at JPMorgan Chase, noted that "it's got no intrinsic value," adding, "I remember when Beanie Babies were selling for \$2,000 a pop."

Beanie Babies. Back in the 1990s, crowds pushed their way into toy stores to get in on Beanie Babies. TV hucksters would claim that a \$1,500 investment in a Beanie Baby today could be worth \$75,000 in 10 years.

What were Beanie Babies? They were cute animal dolls, basically pieces of fabric stuffed with plastic pellets. Most anyone with a sewing machine could make a Beanie Baby replicant. To protect against copies, creator Ty Warner had heart-shaped Ty tags attached to each. (Though tags were counterfeited as well.)

To drive up the prices of a \$5 toy, Warner worked the psychology of scarcity through limited supplies and selective distributions. Bitcoin promoters likewise argue that the limited supply of the cryptocurrency maintains the investment's value.

Bitcoin's price is fueled by the Greater Fool Theory — that the fool who buys it needs only find a bigger fool to pay more for it than he did. That's how Beanie Baby mania worked.

Who broke up the conglomerates that fix wages and prices?

Not the USDA. Not the FTC. Not the Justice Department. The public wants to drain the swamp but the Biden administration just swatted mosquitoes.

Sure, they meant to get around to it, but didn't. Tom Vilsack must have thought Merrick Garland was already on the case. They said they would. You want to believe them because they are decent, restrained people.

When Biden warns that a power structure is "taking shape" you know he is out to lunch or not being square with you. Has he not heard of *Citizens United*, the Supreme Court ruling 15 years ago that allowed unlimited dark money to pour into politics? Did he do a damn thing about it?

Things were supposed to be different. Biden had the opportunity to take on the power structure. He should have known how, as an old bull of the Senate. He couldn't control his own caucus, namely Sen. Joe Manchin of West Virginia. Biden could not recast the safety net that Ronald Reagan ripped up. Bill Clinton and Barack Obama never really tried.

They let rural America drift away. Nothing happened west of Interstate 35 in Iowa as the result of Joe Biden being presi-

"Is Trump's bitcoin embrace the biggest 'pump-and-dump' ever?" Economists Jeffrey Funk and Gary Smith, writing for MarketWatch, ask that question. Could Trump be pushing up crypto's value to unheard-of levels with the intention of dumping it at a high price and leave the greater fools holding the bag? And my question, could some billionaire pals be in on it?

Trump has been scamming the little guys for decades. In 1995, he got his fans to bail out his collapsing Atlantic City empire by selling them \$140 million in Trump casino stock. (He had convinced them that he was a financial genius.) The investors were cleaned out.

Trump's army of lawyers are protecting him against a possible crash in the value of \$TRUMP meme coins. The contract's small print strictly limits class action suits — and states that the coins are "NOT INTENDED TO BE ... AN INVESTMENT OPPORTUNITY, INVESTMENT CONTRACT, OR SECURITY OF ANY TYPE."

But to muddy that idea for the rubes, the Trump memes website notes they are "freely tradeable on the blockchain." Buyers can thus pretend to be crypto bros, as the ads show, lounging at the pool, as perfect female bodies sun in the background.

People who bought Trump Bibles or

fact that he was a senator from Delaware, where all reputable corporate oligarchies are domiciled.

Elon Musk is so obvious that the departing trust-buster wannabe couldn't ignore him. Biden and Chuck Schumer have been running with the money crowd, too. Biden can claim credit for leading the USA out of the pandemic. It actually was Nancy Pelosi who came up with the Payroll Protection Program that saved the economy during the worst of times. Trump went along. After that, Biden had his great opportunity to take on the monied few, and he blew it.

Biden is left to issue stern cautions in his coda. We are left with Trump, and a state that has been completely captured by the oligarchs, from the court system to the state universities. That happened a long time ago, while the senator from Delaware voted aye.

Biden's hand-picked successor Kamala Harris, who fared even worse than Biden in the caucuses, could not beat an opponent with 34 felony convictions.

That's how it looks from Iowa.

Who runs this state? First, it was the railroads. Nowadays, it's the consolidated chemical and food companies. They're working the legislature right now for protections against cancer litigation in our state courts. They will get it, and the Supreme Court in Des Moines is stacked to ratify those protections.

Oligarchs? What oligarchs?

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Any politically-induced stumble in any of those markets will carry deep and costly consequences across rural America.

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](http://farmandfoodfile.com)

## Rural America Has Enough Problems; Why Create New Ones?

By ALAN GUEBERT

On Jan. 7, the day after Congress certified Donald J. Trump's election as the next president of the United States, the U.S. "Border Patrol conducted unannounced raids throughout Bakersfield [CA] ... descending on businesses where day laborers and field workers gather..."

The impact of the raids was immediate. "We're in the middle of our citrus harvesting. This sent shockwaves through the entire community," said Casey Creamer, president of the industry group California Citrus Mutual, on Thursday," reported the non-profit, non-partisan news website CalMatters.

If this is the "new normal, this is absolute economic devastation," said Richard S. Gearhart, an associate professor of economics at Cal State-Bakersfield."

If these raids are the new normal, the resulting "panic and confusion, for both immigrants and local businesses that rely on their labor, foreshadow what awaits communities across California" — and the entire ag sector nationwide — "if Trump follows through on his promise to conduct mass de-

portations."

Rural America has a slew of problems in need of attention by Congress and the incoming administration. Creating new, widespread, and unsolvable ones like massive labor shortages in the citrus, vegetable, meatpacking and dairy sectors is a reckless, ag recession-inducing act.

Still, don't expect either branch of the federal government to focus on these immediate needs because most, like the still undone Farm Bill, require coordinated, sustained efforts by now-in-charge Republicans. Almost all of that majority muscle is already ticketed for the White House's two biggest wants, tax cuts and immigration reform.

Besides, Congressional Republicans are already creating more problems for any Farm Bill to pass either chamber in 2025. The reason is the ageless GOP effort to slice food assistance programs like SNAP, the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program. The now-dead 2024 bill included deep cuts.

In fact, those House-proposed cuts were the key reason last year's bill, after clearing the chamber's Ag Committee, was never presented to the entire House for a vote: it would not have passed because House GOP conservatives thought the cuts too small and House Dems thought them too big.

That joint left/right opposition guaranteed the 2024 committee bill could not pass the House and that failure would have

handed the majority GOP another embarrassing legislative failure.

But rather than admit that SNAP is an almost bulletproof Farm Bill element, GOP House ag members blamed Senate Dems for not passing the 2024 bill when, in fact, the GOP itself couldn't even get it out of the House.

But here they come again. "House Republicans are passing around a list of potential cuts they could use to offset President-elect Donald Trump's top priorities ..." reported *Politico* Jan. 13. "One option on the table? Cutting the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program..."

Insisting on these cuts when both right-wing Repubs and almost all Dems are loath to vote for them just creates more needless delays for all Americans, rural and urban alike. Besides, no American voted for more hungry fellow citizens last November.

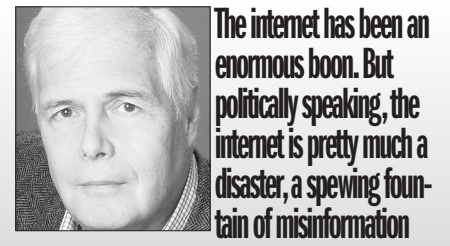
But creating political issues where none exist is something of a parlor game for the incoming administration, especially when it comes to the two largest ag trading partners and continental neighbors, Canada and Mexico. Each is a \$29-billion-a-year U.S. ag export market and each has been singled out during the presidential transition as likely tariff targets.

Also singled out is America's third largest ag export market last year, China, that imported nearly \$28 billion worth of American farm production.

Together the three nations bought almost 40% of all U.S. ag exports last year.



GENE LYONS



The internet has been an enormous boon. But politically speaking, the internet is pretty much a disaster, a spewing fountain of misinformation

The Misinformation Superhighway

(EDITOR'S NOTE: This column originally ran on Aug. 3, 2022.)

Notice how you never hear anybody talk about "the information superhighway" anymore? The creation of the internet marked a big advance in human ingenuity, yes. As a lifelong reader who feels claustrophobic in libraries, it's been an enormous boon to my existence. I spend hours online every day.

The convenience of, say, being able to sit in Arkansas reading the *Boston Globe's* coverage of the Red Sox over my morning coffee – What? They traded Christian Vazquez for two minor league pitchers? What were they thinking? – makes my days more rewarding. Last night, I looked up an old friend who's still teaching at Wake Forest University – and getting rapturous student evaluations.

Much of the rest of my time online, however, I spend reading about politics. And politically speaking, the internet is pretty much a disaster, a spewing fountain of misinformation and delusion. Novelist Scott Turow may have put it best: "The internet has bred defiant communities of lunatics who once huddled in shamed isolation with their unsettling obsessions."

There have always been conspiracy theorists in the United States, typically right-wing, paranoid and racist. From the Know-Nothing Party of the 1850s to the Cold War-era John Birch Society, they've mostly been a product of loneliness, ignorance and fear of the other. The Birchers, for example, described President Dwight Eisenhower as "a dedicated, conscious agent" of the communist conspiracy. Only a traitor, you see, would have dispatched the 101st Airborne to bring about the "forced integration" of Little Rock Central High School.

It wasn't until California gubernatorial candidate Ronald Reagan characterized the Birchers as a "lunatic fringe" in the mid-'60s that the organization faded from view.

But even the Birch Society was relatively sane compared to the mad imaginings of QAnon, their online spiritual descendants. According to National Public Radio, "a December poll by NPR and Ipsos found that 17% of Americans believed that the core falsehood of QAnon – that 'a group of Satan-worshipping elites who run a child sex ring are trying to control our politics and media' – was true."

Even more alarmingly, another "37% said they didn't know whether the baseless allegation was true or not."

People, that's a bare majority. Alas, there

aren't enough psychiatric wards in the country to hold them all. So I'm hoping the second number is more a reflection of polling inadequacies and ignorance of QAnon than genuine confusion. Because otherwise, we'd all be doomed.

Let's put on our thinking caps: Is it reasonable to think that Hillary Clinton participates in satanic sex rituals, murders kidnapped toddlers and drinks their blood? Or is that the delusional product of a twisted mind?

Gee, I can't decide.

Make that many twisted minds, actually, torqued by social media. Writing in *The Atlantic*, social psychologist Jonathan Haidt points out that in the Q&A portion of the manifesto he published (where else?) online, the Buffalo supermarket shooter asked himself:

"Where did you get your current beliefs?"

"Mostly from the internet. There was little to no influence on my personal beliefs by people I met in person."

The killer, Haidt points out, "could not have found such an extreme ... group in his small town 200 miles from Buffalo. But thanks to social media, he found an international fellowship of extreme racists who jointly worshipped past mass murderers and from whom he copied sections of his manifesto."

Of course, the anecdote cuts both ways. In real life, as opposed to Online Fantasyland, the Buffalo shooter found no kindred spirits. Then too, maybe I lead a sheltered life, but I don't know a single person who would admit to believing that Hillary Clinton is a Satan-worshipping cannibal.

Of course, I don't go around asking.

Haidt also suspects that unhinged, unregulated social media are partly responsible for a retreat from democratic values – more tribalism, more violent rhetoric and less respect for law – pretty much around the world.

Thanks to the growth of social media, he adds, "[p]eople could spread rumors and half-truths more quickly, and they could more readily sort themselves into homogenous tribes. Even more important ... was that social-media platforms such as Twitter and Facebook could now be used more easily by anyone to attack anyone."

Tell me about it. Back in 2016, I got threatening emails from Russian operatives claiming to have visited a defunct greasy spoon with the same ZIP code as mine to gather intelligence to hunt me down. Not Vladimir Putin's A-team, I figured.

Maybe just as dangerous to our collective well-being as QAnon, however, is the phenomenon I've seen described as "The University of Facebook School of Medicine."

Frightened by the COVID-19 pandemic, many who barely passed 10th grade biology began doing what they called "research" online – Googling loaded topics like the perils of vaccines, the miracle drug ivermectin, etc. Disdaining "elitists" – that is, doctors, epidemiologists and public health experts – there's no telling how many gullible souls they pushed into an early grave.

*Gene Lyons of Little Rock, Ark., is co-author of "The Hunting of the President" [St. Martin's Press, 2000] and he received the National Magazine Award.*  
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Trump Wants to Cut Taxes on the Rich. States Can Choose Differently.

We won progressive taxes in our state by showing people just how unjust our tax code was. Other states can follow.

By ELI TAYLOR GOSS and TREASURE MACKY

As President Trump took office, one of his first agenda items is to slash taxes on corporations and the rich. The results will be more inequality and less revenue for the programs Americans rely on.

The good news? States can make their own tax codes more equitable. And everyday people can help.

In our state, Washington, people voted overwhelmingly this past November to protect our state capital gains tax on the ultra-wealthy. This was a hard-fought victory by a movement of people who believe we need a better tax code.

Let's back up.

Despite our "blue state" status, Washington's tax code has long been one of the most inequitable in the country because it over-relies on regressive measures like sales taxes and property taxes. That forces low- and middle-income earners to pay the biggest portion of their income in taxes to fund the programs and services we all rely on.

In 2010, an initiative to enact a tax on high earners in our state failed miserably. Although many people – including lawmakers – proclaimed the death of progressive taxes in Washington, advocates came together with a long-term goal of building public support for progressive revenue.

Our organizations were two of many that did this work. From interfaith organizations to affordable housing advocates to union leaders, we created coalitions to hold lawmakers accountable to build an equitable tax system.

In addition to organizing and legislative strategies, our coalitions prioritized shifting the public narrative.

With the help of public opinion, strategic communications, and messaging research firms, we spent over a decade talking to people in Washington to better understand their deeply held beliefs about taxes.

We learned that most Washingtonians felt the impacts of our upside-down tax code but didn't realize just how much it favored the rich. And in focus groups and community meetings, we heard people vocally support taxes when they understood the services they provide.

In media interviews, legislative testimonies, community events, and town halls, we showed how creating a budget that funds our communities requires the wealthy to pay what they owe. We tied taxes to critical programs and services like child care, education, parks, and safety net programs.

We also highlighted how our tax code – which was designed to favor white, land-owning men over everyone else – is harmful to communities of color and low-income people.

Buoyed by grassroots organizing and legislative efforts, national momentum for taxing the rich, and some wealthy

spokespeople who said "we want to pay this," our coalitions helped our legislature pass a capital gains tax in 2021. We also helped pass a Working Families Tax Credit that year, a cash boost for people with low incomes. Together, these policies started to holistically fix our tax code.

Our state capital gains tax is an excise tax on the sale of high-end stocks and bonds. Many extremely wealthy people are able to hoard wealth from selling these stocks.

In its first two years, our modest capital gains tax on the richest 0.2% of Washingtonians brought in \$1.3 billion to increase access to affordable child care and support school construction projects. But as soon as it passed, a handful of uber-wealthy individuals filed a lawsuit to repeal the tax.

Ultimately, the state Supreme Court upheld it. The last test was on the ballot in November. We soundly defeated Initiative 2109, a last-ditch effort to repeal the tax. Over 64% of voters – including majorities in right-leaning counties – supported keeping the capital gains tax in place to fund schools and child care.

Our win – which many thought impossible a decade ago – was a bright spot nationally this fall. We still have a long way to go towards a just tax code, but it's possible to flip the script and build public support for progressive revenue. Wherever you live, we hope your community is the next to make that happen.

*Eli Taylor Goss is the executive director of the Washington State Budget and Policy Center, a research and policy organization that works to advance economic justice. Treasure Mackley is the executive director of Invest in Washington Now, an organization working to remake our tax code so it works for everyone. This op-ed was distributed by OtherWords.org.*

Suffering Amid Disaster? Enter the Scorn Chasers

By JOHN YOUNG

In recent weeks we've seen a new breed of first responders when disaster hits. Not the fire department. Not the EMTs. Not the cops.

No, even faster are politicians misrepresenting facts and placing blame on whomever they can finger; facts be damned.

Hence, while we see the very best of humanity in the public servants risking their lives and in neighbors helping others, from brazen partisans who live to misinform, we see the very worst. Call them scorn chasers.

Extreme contrasts amid devastation:

Los Angeles resident Jimmy Kimmel tears up on-air amid the horrific fires: "Once again we see our fellow men and women coming together to support each other."

Meanwhile, Republican Congressman Warren Davidson of Ohio suggests California

should not get emergency aid "without changing the policies that are making the problem worse."

You mean science-denying policies that push the planet into atmospheric convulsions?

Then there's the King of the Trolls, this week taking his social media trigger finger back to the Oval Office.

Yes, back to that jumbo TV screen – set on a single news channel – to take his policy and staffing cues from Fox Spews.

Then he can make sophomoric pronouncements amid tragedy like calling the governor of California "Newscom" while fires rage.

Or telling victims of Hurricane Helene that disaster aid wasn't coming, that FEMA had exhausted its funds to support illegal aliens – a bald-faced, harmful lie that should disqualify a person from higher office.

Ironically, it was he who confiscated disaster aid dollars for the phony disaster declaration he used to finance a border wall.

For GOP scorn chasers in their rapid responses to the L.A. fires, "leadership" means ridiculous claims, like training ire at fire de-

partments for somehow being crippled by diversity programs. That's a racist crock, but it's a Fox-ified GOP standard in these times.

Ah, but what about insufficient water in L.A. because of fruitly Democratic policies? Not surprisingly, it's a Fox-generated lie as well based on isolated instances where water hydrants and storage tanks were overwhelmed.

J.D. Vance waxed tutorially about a "serious lack of competent government in California," sounding suspiciously like he knew what he was talking about.

Beware. Do not buy "good governance" from ideologues whose sworn mission is to eviscerate public services and to put profiteers in charge at every turn through privatization.

Republicans continue to live by the motto of Republican anti-tax crusader Grover Norquist, who famously said the party's mission was to shrink government to the size by which one could "drown it in the bathtub."

Glub. Glub. We saw the wages of said philosophy in Hurricane Katrina, where the federal response was a horror unto itself. Key to the disaster was a refusal to invest in dikes

protecting New Orleans. You know – dreaded "government spending."

Following through on another right-wing reflex: As Naomi Klein describes in her book "Shock Doctrine," after Katrina's devastation, Republicans sought to privatize every public function rent asunder by the storm – a classic case of capitalistic opportunism at the expense of public service.

Joe Biden would never, ever have even pondered taking a cheap shot at officials dealing with tragedy and disaster. But then, unlike his crass and calculating successor, Biden abided by his pledge to serve all.

The Troll King is about serving his petty interests and spawning conflict.

Fortunately, in California, amid surface differences that brazen partisans exploit, caring souls are helping one another and modeling amid the ashes what "community" means.

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## Cover Story...

Continued from page one

in climate technology. Texas has received \$69 billion in clean investments since the law passed, second only to California.

Not all of the money has been spent yet. And several provisions are vulnerable to rollbacks, among them tax credits for home energy improvements and certain alternative fueling sites. Billions hang in the balance, including, to Robertson's chagrin, more than \$100 million for disadvantaged communities, like Sulphur, to combat pollution and better weather the effects of climate change.

An ordained elder in the Presbyterian Church, Robertson, 66, wears her wavy white hair short, cusses freely and greets by name the homeless of Sulphur, a city of some 20,000 people. Miss Cindy, as she's known in her neighborhood, named her nonprofit organization, Micah 6:8 Mission, after an Old Testament verse about caring for the poor.

Last summer, she and other community leaders worked around the clock to submit the grant proposal seven weeks in advance of a fall deadline. Among her partners is Build Change, which specializes in creating housing that can withstand natural disasters in the developing world. The organizations have sought more than \$19 million for their local improvement plan, which includes shoring up roofs, remediating mold and mildew, providing homes with solar-powered air conditioning and building a community center where residents can find refuge during emergencies.

But in mid-December, an email from the Environmental Protection Agency explained it didn't have enough time to make a decision on her application before the inauguration.

It will be up to the Trump EPA to determine whether Sulphur and some 2,000 other communities get the grants they applied for.

Now, Robertson said, all she can do is pray that Republicans will see that the investment is in everyone's best interest, including their own.

As her small staff gathered for a weekly meeting in December, she bowed her head. "Dear Lord," she said, "if it's your will, may we get this damn grant, please."

## A Storm-Battered Community

Sulphur is near the beating heart of the extremely profitable petrochemical industry. Huge multinational corporations — including Westlake Chemicals, Citgo Petroleum, LyondellBasell and ConocoPhillips — have plants just a few miles from Robertson's home and the office of her environmental nonprofit. But Portie Town, the crisscross of streets lined with low-slung homes on the north side of Sulphur where she lives, seems to have gained little for its proximity to these engines of wealth.

Named for a widow who moved to the area with her eight children in the early 1900s, Portie Town (pronounced Por-shay) remains a place of struggle. Median annual income is around \$40,000 and life expectancy is 69, nine years short of the national average. Climate change has added another layer of challenge. The hurricane risk in Calcasieu, the parish where it is located, is in the top 3% in the country, according to the Federal Emergency

Management Agency, which rates the expected annual loss from storms in the area as high and the resiliency as low.

With its shore on the Gulf of Mexico, Louisiana has always been vulnerable to storms, but the threat has unquestionably worsened in recent years. Climate change has raised temperatures, causing the air and water to warm. Storms intensify as they travel across the warmed oceans, pulling in more water vapor and heat, which makes hurricanes stronger and more intense.

When Hurricane Laura hit in August 2020 — its eye passing directly over Sulphur — it was the strongest hurricane to make landfall in the state's history, killing at least 30 people and knocking out the power in Portie Town for weeks. Many residents couldn't afford generators or the fuel to run them and went without air conditioners and refrigerators even as the temperature soared above 90 degrees. Shortly after the power was restored, it was knocked out again by Hurricane Delta, which was followed by a deep freeze caused by Winter Storm Uri. The next year, Hurricane Ida tied Laura's record for the strongest winds measured in Louisiana.

"The storms have been getting closer and closer together, more and more active," said Jessica McGee, who lives with her adult son in a small, cream-colored house a few blocks from Robertson in Portie Town. The McGees haven't had gas since Hurricane Laura; they have used electric space heaters and cooked their meals in a microwave oven for the past three years. Boards nailed over their windows before the 2020 storm remain there.

McGee, who lives on disability benefits, said she has neither the strength nor the money to repair the hurricane damage. "It's my water, it's the pipes, it's the floor..." she said. "The next one, our roof is going to be gone."

If Robertson's nonprofit is awarded the grant it is seeking, McGee's house may also benefit. She brightens at the thought that government funding could bring her home back from the brink of inhabitability, but remains skeptical of politics.

"I don't vote," McGee said, shrugging. "It's not for me."

## A Political Lightning Rod

The sprawling Inflation Reduction Act had many goals, including funding the Internal Revenue Service and lowering health care costs, but its main aim was to reduce emissions of the greenhouse gases that drive climate change through tax credits, customer incentives and grants. Despite its purpose, its authors conspicuously omitted the word "climate" from its name in an effort to get bipartisan support for it.

The benefits of the law were felt widely, spurring clean energy projects in almost 40% of the country's congressional districts; 19 of the 20 that got the most funding were led by Republicans.

In August, as he was standing on a corn and bean farm next to the deputy administrator of the Biden EPA, Jim Pillen enthused about his state's grant. Pillen, the Republican governor of Nebraska, called the agency's \$307 million IRA grant "a once-in-a-lifetime, extraordinary opportunity." In Pocatello, Idaho — a town in a red county that is still recovering from the 2012 Charlotte Fire — "folks are pretty excited" about the planned greenway path that will decrease wildfire risks and allow residents

to bike by the river, Hannah Sanger, the city's science and environment administrator, told me. And in Alaska, where Trump also won handily, the recipients of a grant of more than \$47 million to electrify two ports described themselves as "ecstatic" about the money.

Still the law remains a political lightning rod. Republicans in Congress have tried to repeal parts of it dozens of times, and Trump railed against it on the campaign trail. "My plan will terminate the Green New Deal," Trump told a group assembled at the Economic Club of New York in September. "It actually sets us back, as opposed to moves us forward. And [I will] rescind all unspent funds under the misnamed Inflation Reduction Act."

Clay Higgins, the Republican who represents Sulphur in Congress, voted against the IRA, which he attacked as a "monstrosity of a bill" that "wastes hundreds of billions of dollars on Green New Deal subsidies." Higgins, who receives campaign funds from the oil and gas industry, notes on his website that "fossil fuels are the lifeblood of our modern society." He did not respond to questions about Robertson's hope to use IRA money to shore up the houses in his district.

In November, Republicans on the House Energy and Commerce Committee issued a report that attacked the EPA's IRA grants as a "green group giveaway" and characterized some of the recipients as "extremist organizations." The lawmakers criticized funding groups that educate the public about climate change, or "environmental activist organizations that work to influence public and elected officials to adopt their often-extreme views, such as completely eliminating the use of fossil fuels."

Despite the fiery rhetoric, a full repeal of the law seems unlikely, in part because it would require a majority of the House and Senate to agree on it. In August, 18 House Republicans wrote to Speaker Mike Johnson urging him to preserve the IRA's energy tax credits, which are already funding projects. And it will be extremely difficult for the new administration to claw back grant money that has already been awarded.

Even if he fails to get the congressional support necessary to repeal the law, Trump could reverse the executive order that grants the authority to implement it. He could also cut short its longer term provisions, some of which were supposed to extend through 2029 and beyond. He can interfere with the funding that now flows through more than 12 federal agencies. And he can put a halt to the two dozen proposed rules that would carry out the law's goals, according to the Brookings Institution. Congress could also severely undermine the law by targeting the rules that have been issued since Aug. 1 — and can thus be overturned through the Congressional Review Act.

## A Looming Decision

Soon after the IRA was signed into law in 2022, Robertson began looking for ways it could benefit Portie Town.

Her charity had already been distributing food, clothing and "hurricane buckets" filled with mosquito repellent, canned ham, batteries and other supplies to locals when it and several other organizations together received \$407,000 in IRA funds in 2023. The grant pays for the groups to dis-

tribute "evidence-based materials" about pollution, climate change and public health, according to its application. It also paid for two air monitors, which regularly document dangerously elevated levels of particulate matter in the air, pollution that is associated with premature death and breathing problems.

The IRA's Community Change Grants, designed to provide approximately \$2 billion for climate-related projects in disadvantaged communities, offered more direct help.

Robertson despaired on the December day when she learned that the Trump administration, not Biden's, would be deciding whether Portie Town will get the grant.

"This community needs this so badly," she said through tears. "Damn it."

Just that morning, she had visited with Janet Broussard, 82, who lives by herself a few blocks away. The two had stood outside Broussard's trailer imagining how the grant might improve it. Broussard's roof had come off more than four years ago during Hurricane Delta. It was replaced, but, within two years, the new one was damaged by a tornado. She had no insurance that would pay to repair the damage and catches the rain in a bucket that she empties after storms.

But Robertson said that if the grant came through, Micah 6:8 Mission would be able to help fix the roof. "We'll also be able to take the siding off, insulate, put new siding on, take the windows out, put in double-paned insulating windows," Robertson had said.

Zealan Hoover, a senior adviser to the EPA administrator who oversaw the IRA grant programs, said the agency made a herculean effort and managed to distribute more than 95% of the money. But agency officials didn't have time to give the proposals that were submitted in the final weeks of the application period the careful reads they deserved, he said, and so they decided to reserve some funds so the next administration can finish the process. "We are going to give those 2,000 applicants who came in at the very end, you know, some hope and chance of being selected," said Hoover, who pointed out that, under any administration, "the agency's mission is to protect human health and the environment."

What it decides will matter to Tony Rodriguez, who hung the "F\*\*\* BIDEN" banner outside his home in the fall. A slight man with a graying beard who goes by Burnout, Rodriguez said he hung the banner to raise awareness about "all the bad stuff" Biden did. He had heard on the news — he can't remember the exact source — that the president was to blame for children being sex trafficked, repeating a false conspiracy theory, and had sold out our country.

Still, he said he would be grateful if Miss Cindy would use some of the money she is hoping to get from the law championed by the outgoing president to stop the rain from coming into his bedroom.

"At least then he'd have done something good," he said.

Sharon Lerner covers health and the environment for ProPublica. Previously, as an investigative reporter at The Intercept, she focused on failures of the environmental regulatory process as well as biosafety and pandemic profiteering. Follow @fastlerner Email sharon.lerner@propublica.org.





# Loosening the GOP’s Grip on Rural America

*Democrats need a new organizing strategy, not just better messaging*

By LARRY COHEN / Barn Raiser

As Donald Trump was inaugurated as the 47th President of the United States, an election is underway for leadership of the national Democratic Party. These two events are not unrelated. Trump is president today because the Democratic Party has failed to build a broad enough base to win the presidency or a majority in the U.S. Senate. For those of us focused on environmental justice, workers’ rights, reproductive rights, economic opportunity and income inequality, or anything else that requires federal legislation, rural voters are essential if we are ever again to have a governing majority.

During its winter meeting from Jan. 30 to Feb. 1, the Democratic National Committee, the governing body of the Democratic Party, was to meet in National Harbor, Maryland, to choose its next chair and other officers. That chair—along with the next president of the Association of State Democratic Committees (ASDC), who was to be chosen on Feb. 2—will be in a unique position to shift the party to a county-based reform agenda.

Some see the contest for party leadership as primarily about better messaging. But it also presents an opportunity for real change, starting with a focus on the 57 state and territory parties and organizing in each of our nation’s 3,244 counties and county equivalents.

It is not enough to say that the Democratic Party must be focused on the working class. The sad fact is that most of the nation’s counties, primarily rural, have little or no party organization or structure. We cannot, therefore, expect business-as-usual Democratic Party building in rural counties to produce significant results. With few exceptions,

Republicans have been winning up and down the ballot in rural counties. The 2024 election once again showed that the loss of rural voters has been fatal to the Democratic Party as well as the hopes of uniting Black, Brown and White voters around a popular, multiracial working-class political program that many of us dream of.

In 2016 and 2020, when I was campaigning for Bernie Sanders in the Iowa caucuses, unaffiliated and even some Republican voters told me that if they went to the Democratic Caucus they would be with Bernie. Today it is even clearer that building such a broad coalition in rural counties is essential—one that must also include family farmers, small business owners and others who support issues like public education, rural and women’s health care, living wages and a clean environment.

There are signs this is already possible. In the 2024 election, such issues passed in referendum voting in rural states including Kansas, Nebraska, Missouri and South Dakota. In fact, one exit poll from November’s presidential election showed that self-identified independents accounted for a larger share of voters than Democrats and were tied with Republicans. Currently, enough unaffiliated independent voters side with Republicans to swing most elections in rural areas, despite the fact that unaffiliated voters generally support popular progressive referendum issues. But what if Democrats actively pursued party building, and worked with unaffiliated voters around campaigns based on these same issues?

Imagine Democrats endorsing independent, unaffiliated voters as candidates. Sanders in Vermont and Angus King in Maine have chosen a similar path at the U.S. Senate level. Both King and Sanders have perennially ran as Independents but sought the Democrats’ endorsement to avoid a three-way general election, and then caucused with the Senate Ds, often providing key votes in committees and on legislation.

Endorsement by the state party, and acceptance of that endorsement by the unaffiliated candidate, are key elements in creating a hybrid alliance that can win. That was not the case last year in Nebraska when independent candidate for U.S. Senate Dan Osborn ran against Deb Fischer, the Republican incumbent. Osborn refused the Democratic endorsement after it was too late for Democrats to nominate a party candi-

date, believing that he would appeal to more voters as an independent and benefit from the absence of a Democrat on the ticket. Fischer won 53% to 47%, despite polls indicating a much closer outcome. Yet Osborn well outpaced Vice President Kamala Harris’s 39% in the state. Even if true in his case, in the future, Nebraska Democrats and those in other states should require an acceptance of their party’s endorsement, as well as other commitments before the deadline to nominate their own candidate has passed.

The Osborn campaign indicates the potential for electoral alliances between unaffiliated and Democratic Party voters. This kind of alliance could provide state Democratic Parties with an explicit county-by-county organizing strategy to counter the right-wing, especially in rural counties where no Democratic Party structure currently exists.

The basis of organizing should be the issues winning in referendum voting, from women’s health to popular economic issues minimum wage and paid family leave. Benchmarking party registration and voter turnout are starting points. But in most rural counties, the organizing should be much broader than registering Democrats, and instead mount campaigns that bring together broader coalitions based on issues like rural health care, public education or clean water.

Just as state Democratic Parties in Vermont and Maine endorse independents for the U.S. Senate, new coalition party building can include county-based organizations with new names like “X” county farmer labor party, or “X” county independent coalition. Currently state parties in Minnesota and North Dakota have unique names dating back to mid 20th century mergers with independent political organizations. The Minnesota Democratic-Farmer-Labor Party and the North Dakota Democratic Non-Partisan League both emerged at a time when it was in the interests of both the independent parties in those states as well as the state Democratic Parties to merge and with a unique name.

Experiments are needed. Issue-based political coalitions, mobilizing voters—whether Democratic or not—to support candidates, even if unaffiliated, and building the Democratic Party base is clearly complicated. But it just might work.

In November, voters in Alaska, Missouri and Nebraska adopted paid sick leave pro-

posals. Similarly In Alaska and Missouri minimum wage increases were approved. Alaska also banned captive audience meetings when workers are organizing. Missouri, Colorado, Montana and Nevada all adopted referenda supporting abortion rights. There must be some potential in these and other rural states to continue organizing around those issues, county by county, and build electoral as well as legislate power.

Nearly 60% of Alaska voters are either independent or unaffiliated, the largest proportionally in the nation, while only 12% are Democrats. In Iowa, unaffiliated voters (36%) outnumber Democrats (29%) and Republicans (32%). Missouri, the state that passed the most progressive referenda in 2024, counts Democrats at 36%, Republicans at 42% and unaffiliated at 20%. Similar counts prevail across many rural states, and given the issue referenda results in 2024, we need to pick a few states, and counties within those states, where we can test the possibility of building a rural popular movement with unaffiliated, independent and Democratic voters joining together with issue-based campaigns.

This is not a project aimed at flipping U.S. Senate seats in 2026. Organizing means starting from the ground up and recruiting new leaders, county by county and tracking the results. We might have a clean water county-based party organization on the ground in Iowa, parties for fair pay in a few counties in Missouri or Alaska, or workers’ rights parties in industrial towns across the Rust Belt.

We can’t depend on national messaging that invests huge amounts in television advertising to build a new rural base. Just as with workplace organizing, we need to work from the inside out, and in different ways in different places.

This may not excite much of the donor class, or most political operatives whose careers are devoted to carving out a slice of campaign media budgets. But at a time when progressives need new organizing and new answers, this might be one part of it.

*Larry Cohen is Board Chair of Our Revolution, past president of the Communications Workers of America, and, since 2005, a member of the Democratic National Committee. This story was originally published by Barn Raiser (Barn-RaisingMedia.com), your independent source for rural and small town news.*

# Welcome to the Grifters Ball

By JOE CONASON

Legalized bribery is still bribery — and there is no other way to describe the celebration that marks the second presidential inauguration of Donald Trump.

With the menacing manner of a mob boss, Trump has extorted million-dollar contributions from dozens of corporations that fear federal retribution against their shareholders or management (as in the case of Meta boss Mark Zuckerberg, who coughed up his million after Trump literally threatened him with “life in prison” not so long ago).

No doubt many of the corporate and billionaire donors are keen to prove their loyalty to a new administration that promises to uphold their interests. They know better than to worry about Republican proclamations that their party now represents “working class” Americans. Nobody who has glanced at Project 2025 or read Elon Musk’s posts could harbor any such illusions — and surely the inaugural donors from outfits such as General Motors, the pharmaceutical lobby, Pratt Industries, Uber, Amazon and Microsoft do not.

Many of the corporations currently greasing Trump withheld donations from his 2016 festivities, apparently repelled by the racism, misogyny and propensity for violence he had flaunted during the campaign. Some combination of fear and greed has overcome any such scruples this year.

Ralph Nader’s Public Citizen, a non-profit that monitors corporate influence, is tracking the payments of tribute, and even its jaded staffers are shocked by the Trump

inaugural’s brazen style. Said Craig Holman, a government ethics expert at the Nader group: “The record-breaking cesspool of special interest financing for the Trump-Vance Inaugural Committee raises serious concerns about the ability of corporations and wealthy special interests to purchase influence over public policy or lucrative government contracts.”

Estimates of the amount that the presidential inauguration committee collected from both eager and reluctant donors range up to \$200 million, a record sum certain to prompt boasting from Trump and his minions. Impressive though it is, the inaugural hoard only represents a down payment on what portends to be four years of unprecedented and gluttonous corruption.

If you wonder why Trump needs \$200 million for this little event, so does everyone who ever ran a prior inauguration. Due to frigid weather in Washington, the 47th president took the oath of office indoors at a ceremony paid for by the taxpayers. Then the Trump-Vance committee hosted only three inaugural balls — a tiny schedule compared with the number of balls held by his predecessors — plus a few events at his Trump National Golf Club, miles from the capital.

In other words, they’re spending almost none of that big haul.

Yet while the actual expense of parties and fireworks will be nominal, the opportunities for gift are vast. As in so many instances during Trump’s first presidency, those golf club events are siphoning big money from the inaugural fund into his business accounts.

The Trumps ran the same kind of scam eight years ago, when the 2016 inaugural committee inked massively overpriced contracts for rooms and services purchased from the Trump hotel in Washington. That

pattern continued during his administration, with big profits booked from taxpayers footing hotel and resort bills for Secret Service agents protecting Trump and his family.

Where will all the money go? In 2017, the Trump inaugural raised \$107 million, a total far in excess of what the committee spent on its events. The committee — whose top staff included notorious crooks Rick Gates and Elliot Broidy —never presented any accounting of its expenditures, let alone an audit. Tens of millions of dollars simply disappeared.

The official story is that funds not spent on this inaugural will be transferred to the newly formed Donald J. Trump Presidential Library Fund Inc. — with the supposed purpose of establishing a repository and museum memorializing his presidency.

Maybe that will happen someday. But the sordid history of the Trump Foundation, ordered to shut down after the New York state attorney general proved its myriad

abuses, showed that the Trumps are familiar with every trick for stealing from a non-profit. The likelihood is that most or all of the tainted inaugural lucre will wind up in their pockets.

Day One didn’t see a peace agreement between Ukraine and Russia, a drop in grocery prices, or anything else that Trump promised during his campaign. The customary gifting will resume promptly, however. In fact, it has already begun.

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# THE BIG PICTURE/*Glynn Wilson*

## Whiplash 2.0: A Split-Personality, Now the Most Powerful Man in the World

SOMEWHERE IN DIXIELAND — Six inches of snow covers Audubon Park in New Orleans, something no one alive has ever seen. The Santa Ana winds are still whipping up the uncontrollable wildfires around Los Angeles, and it's not even fire season. In Washington, D.C., the worst storm to ever hit our nation's proud capital was blow-hardening inside the Capitol Rotunda, guaranteed to blast the world over the 2.7 degree global temperature tipping point when planet warming will cause catastrophic climate change beyond any human capacity to slow or reverse it.

Welcome to Trump 2.0, or a new "American carnage 2," as one writer described it. Donald Trump included his idiotic and doomed promise to annex Greenland in his dark inaugural rant, clearly not knowing that reversing the Biden administration's efforts to combat climate change will inevitably result in the melting of Greenland's ice sheet. Maybe that's what he intends, drill, baby, drill. Although that's not what he said.

But every scientific report on global warming back to the 1980s has predicted that when the glaciers melt, sea level will rise and flood coastal communities around the world, including his new home state of Florida. And of course he vowed to tear up the Paris climate accords again, removing the United States from even participating in talks to reverse global warming and combat climate change. We are as doomed as any Biblical prophesy every predicted.

Right after he was sworn in, idiot-savant Elon Musk hung on his elbow like a toy soldier in a Neo-Nazi parade, complete with a heil-Trump salute, a picture that went viral

on social media within seconds and immediately got translated as a salute to the commander-in-cheat as the new Fuehrer over a Christo-fascist regime.

These people are no longer even trying to be subtle. Apparently they have been listening to the amateur historian of the anti-woke brigade, Curtis Yarvin, a 51-year-old computer engineer who has written online about his so-called political "theory" arguing for installing an "American Caesar." He blogs on Substack that Americans should "get over our dictator-phobia" and that "American democracy is a sham, beyond fixing, and having a monarch-style (CEO) leader is the way to go." (That's no monarchy, by the way. The economic term he is searching for is oligopoly).

At least we finally get one of them telling us what they really intend to do with our country. If only the American people could have found out in time to stop it.

Then in what the *New York Times* editorial board called Trump's "opening act of contempt," he kept his word to mass pardon or grant clemency to 1,500 people who were convicted or charged with crimes for their role in the insurrection on Jan. 6, 2021, including the leaders of the Proud Boys and the Oath Keepers, who were convicted of engaging in a conspiracy to overthrow the U.S. government. And they lost on appeal, even before Trump's radical, right-wing justices on the Supreme Court. This makes a mockery of a justice system that has been the cornerstone of American democracy and the rule of law for nearly 250 years.

It was not clear on Day One that anyone picked up on the most schizophrenic of his

ideas, like a split personality promising peace and war in the same breath. "We will measure our success not only by the battles we win," he said, "but also by the wars that we end. And, perhaps most importantly, the wars we never get into."

Whiplash. He promised wars and no wars. You can't have it both ways, unless you are Trump's damaged brain.

The *Times* claims, "Trump's dense fog of misinformation" can't change what really happened on that horrific day. But in this new world order where science, facts, history and accurate journalism no longer seem to matter, where any alt-fact can be perpetrated on the vox populi and implanted in peoples' brains through every social media platform — including TikTok, which Trump tried to bring back with an executive order, even as his Supreme Court just declared it an enemy of the people by allowing it to be banned in the U.S. — it appears you can change reality by warping it. All it takes is enough people addicted to the propaganda kool-aid.

That lie that traveled around the world before the truth could lace up its boots in Mark Twain's 19th and 20th centuries now trumps all. The truth can longer even get up off its death bed.

In dredging up an old, discredited phrase from America's earliest days, he vowed to "pursue our manifest destiny" and "plant the Stars and Stripes on the planet Mars," even though Musk's latest rocket experiment blew up on the way into space last month, calling into question whether a private company — even with billions in federal funding — can even make it back to the Moon as a government agency, NASA, accomplished more than half a century ago in 1969.

Trump "painted the darkest possible picture of the state of the nation and the character of his opponents," according to one columnist. "And he set himself up as a kind of messiah figure, the man saved by God for the sake of national greatness. If you want to lay the groundwork for authoritarianism, that's exactly how to do it."

"It was very telling that the tech oligarchs had front-row seats, in front of the cabinet," another columnist wrote. "The age of algorithmic feudalism has begun."

And of course he included his promise to "tariff and tax foreign countries to enrich our citizens," still not understanding what a tariff is or how it works, or simply lying about it to fool enough of the people some of the time, embarrassing even Abraham Lincoln.

He promised to end inflation, even though it was the tariffs and trade war he started in his first term that led to the rise in prices in the first place, along with the federal government spending that bailed out Americans thrown out of work by the lockdowns during the COVID-19 pandemic. He pledged to bring back manufacturing in the U.S., even while advocating policies that will inevitably undermine our ability to sell goods abroad. And he vowed to reduce the size and cost of the federal government, even while promising to create at least two new federal government agencies.

Then, in another Schizoid thought, with my apologies to all who suffer from mental illness, he said: "Never again will the immense power of the state be weaponized to persecute political opponents," even as he pledged to use his Justice Department to prosecute his political opponents and anyone who disagrees with him. In this regard, there goes his promise to "bring back free speech to America," which actually means forcing social media companies to stop moderating content, his content, full of twisted lies designed to hurt.

Like millions of Americans who vowed on social media not to watch, I could not watch either, only read after the fact. But it still felt like a case of whiplash. Marvel and *Mad Magazine* should bring back that character. It could make for a daily joke — even though what is about to happen will not be at all funny.

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# GRASSROOTS/*Hank Kalet*

## Trump 2.0: The Vulnerable Are in the Crosshairs

Immigration groups have been warning us for months. Things were going to be different during a second Trump administration.

They painted a picture of a nation at war, one in which the military and police would be empowered to round up and remove anyone without legal authorization to be in the country. They described raids at work places and schools, families broken, and a highly militarized border.

Immigrant advocates in New Jersey described an atmosphere of impunity, of immigrant workers being abused by management that hold their power over these workers, and threats of sexual violence.

"We're already seeing that people are at fear of continuing to do normal things," Ana Paola Pazmino of Resistencia en Accion NJ told me in November. "They want to stay with the secure stuff, right?"

This is what Donald Trump promised as he stumped for a second term — a nation openly hostile to Black and Brown people, that treats difference as criminal, that narrowly defines what it means to be an American as mostly White, straight, and cisgender.

And this is what Trump is pushing ahead with, using the limited power of the executive order to remake American immigration policy in his image. Trump 2.0 begins as expected: with extreme, apocalyptic rhetoric and a slew of executive orders that put many of the nation's most vulnerable

in the crosshairs.

News reports pegged the number of orders signed by Donald Trump at about 100, with immigrants and the trans community as particular targets. An asylum scheduling app for mobile phones was shuttered, a national emergency declared at the border, and an unconstitutional order ending birthright citizenship. He also signed a sweeping order declaring there to be just two unchangeable sexes that will apply to all federal facilities.

This frontal assault on human rights is not normal, even if the American press has attempted to cover both the 2024 election and its aftermath as if it was no different than as in the past. His attempt essentially to end birthright citizenship, protected under the 14th Amendment, is not just norm-breaking but a broad attack on the constitutional order, a signal that Trump is likely to ignore legal and historical checks on power.

Many of the executive orders are "likely to face steep legal challenges and might be difficult or impossible to enforce," reports *The New York Times*. They send "an unmistakable message that Mr. Trump was serious about fulfilling his frequent campaign promises of clamping down on the border, and escalating an anti-immigration agenda that he has made the centerpiece of his political identity."

Trump's language during and after the inauguration was — like his campaign rhetoric — hyperbolic and full of lies. He said he will lead a "complete restoration of America" and a "revolution of common sense." His designation of national emergency on immigration and energy will allow him to bypass Congress and treat the nation as if it is on war footing.

Still the press — as the language used here by the *Times* indicates — sees this as relatively normal, as if Trump is functioning as just another president. The *Washington Post* offered an obsequious editorial critical of Trump but acknowledging his popularity and his promise that we are

about to enter a "golden age of America," a time when the country will "flourish and be respected again." He promised to make the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr.'s famous dream a "reality" and said he wanted to be "a peacemaker and a unifier."

The nation, the *Post* said, "can easily agree with such goals," and, if "Trump can help pull in this direction, he will have widespread support." This assumes a normality that does not exist. There is nothing normal about what Trump is proposing. American history has not been kind to immigrants, but what his first-day actions point to is something more extensive and brutal than anything we've seen.

"What the Trump administration is readying goes well beyond immigration policy," said Vanessa Cárdenas, executive director of America's Voice, a pro-immigration think tank, told the *Times*. "The push to gut 150 years of settled law and hard-won progress by attacking birthright citizenship, for example, seeks to reshape America's future by moving this nation backwards."

I'm not even sure "backwards" is the right word. That implies going somewhere we've been, and I'm not convinced that is the case. It is more like driving us somewhere new and ominous, someplace that looks familiar, but like in those mind-bending sci-fi films, is a place of extreme vulnerability and danger. I worry that the media — and much of the public — are not seeing this, that they think of Trump as just a blip, an anomalous presence and that normality will return or that the office will force normality on him.

That amounts to false optimism, I fear, and false optimism can be fatal.

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## Six Ways to Bring Manufacturing Back and Stop Them From Leaving the Country

By JOEL D. JOSEPH

During first term in office, President Trump lost U.S. manufacturing jobs. Outlined below is a roadmap to create jobs in the United States and stop them from leaving.

**1. Require Army and Navy PXs to Buy American**

This is the easiest way to create jobs in the United States. We the people own thousands of Army and Navy stores across the United States. Unfortunately, these stores buy and sell mostly imported products.

The President can require AAFES (Army & Air Force Exchange Service) and NEXCOM, (the Naval Exchange Service Command) to buy American. These stores now import billions of dollars-worth of clothing and other products. During President Trump's first term, I asked Peter Navarro, Trump's Made in the USA czar, to do this. Navarro's reply was that he was unable to do so. This is the easiest way for Trump to create more than 100,000 manufacturing

jobs in U.S.

Walmart creates thousands of manufacturing jobs by buying American-made products. For example, Walmart has worked with American Giant, a large T-shirt and sweatshirt manufacturer, to produce modestly-priced clothing for Walmart stores. If Walmart can do it, so can AAFES and NEXCOM.

The Navy Exchange Service Command reported annual sales of \$2.3 billion in 2023, with a profit of \$45 million. The Army & Air Force Exchange Service reported \$8.5 billion in revenue for the fiscal year 2022.

**2. Reduce Income Taxes for Domestic Manufacturers**

If a company manufactures 100% of its products in the USA, it should not have to pay a federal income tax. Very few companies do this, as most products contain some foreign content. We can implement a sliding scale for USA manufacturers, depending on how much of their products are made in the United States. If a company produces one half of its goods in the United States, it would pay income tax at half the rate of other corporations. This would encourage companies to increase the domestic content of their products.

**3. Modify the WARN Act to Require Closing Factories to Offer the Factory for Sale**  
*Continued on next page*



# MARY SANCHEZ



Within minutes of Trump taking the oath of office, his administration canceled 1,400 appointments for migrants to make their case for legal immigration.

## Day 1 for the Trump Administration – Chaos Before Lunch

The pettiness has been unleashed. President Donald Trump is back. He has been emboldened by what he’s misreading as a mandate to commit constitutionally reckless, irrational, and simply cruel actions concerning immigration. The impact of one Trump decision began playing out at the Southern border, as the president was being served his first diet cola during an inaugural luncheon. The nondescript CBP One app, a service offered by the U.S. Customs and Border Protection, was canceled. The app began under the Biden administration for use on mobile devices. It allowed migrants outside of the country to request an appointment with U.S. immigra-

tion authorities at one of eight ports of entry along the U.S.-Mexico border. If approved, migrants could enter temporarily the U.S. as they await further hearings and decisions before an immigration judge. Within minutes of Trump taking the oath of office, his administration promptly canceled these appointments. Families at the border, ready for their long-awaited appointments, reportedly were confused and despondent. Some of them had spent months crossing dangerous lands. Some had been robbed by gangs and suffered violence just to see their chance of even speaking with an immigration official crumble. The app wasn’t a perfect solution, despite its use to schedule about 1,400 appointments a day. There are backlogs in the immigration courts, and a lack of officers at the border to hear preliminary cases. But the app did help to organize people. It was part of an effort to create a process for migrants to follow. Many U.S. voters often remark that they would be fine with legal immigration as long as newcomers followed the legal procedures. When pressed further, they tend to think that means asking migrants to wait their turn, fill out forms, undergo vetting, and pay fees. Inherent in such comments is an assumption that we have a fluidly functional immigration system – and that anyone who gets branded as “undocumented” must be a conniving criminal seeking to evade this nonexistent well-oiled system.

## The Next Financial Crisis: Insurance

*Increasing damage from fires, hurricanes, and floods will destabilize a lightly regulated industry—and spill over into broader financial markets.*

By ROBERT KUTTNER

The next casualty of the epic Los Angeles fires, appropriately, will be the casualty industry. What has gotten immediate press attention is the impact of the fires on local homeowners and on the California state insurer of last resort, the FAIR Plan, which only has about \$700 million in cash. The Pacific Palisades alone has nearly \$6 billion in insurance exposure, and the total L.A. losses are projected at \$20 billion to over \$50 billion counting spillover losses to economic activity. In addition, insurance companies have been raising rates, canceling or non-renewing policies, or pulling out of the state entirely. There will be massive pressure on the state to make up for these gaps one way or another, both for homeowners who have suffered uninsured losses and for others whose insurance is becoming unavailable or unaffordable. But that is only the beginning of the story. Basically, there is a massive disconnect between what is financially prudent and what is politically possible. Paradoxically, insurers haven’t been raising rates enough to cover risks. The ideal solution, from the perspective of prudence and loss limitation, as our colleague Harold Meyerson has suggested, would be to prohibit rebuilding in areas that are almost certain to burn again. But no California politician is going to do that. More broadly, insurance commissioners in climate disaster-prone states such as California and Florida, whether Democratic or Republican, have favored overly lenient regulation of insurers in terms of the adequacy of their loss reserves, in order to encourage them to keep providing insurance at all. The result is a serious disconnect between risks and rates. Measured against home values, insurance costs are cheaper in Pacific Palisades than in 97% of U.S. ZIP codes, according to a Reuters analysis of a national database. Homeowners in Pacific Palisades, Reuters reported, paid a median insurance premium in 2023 of \$5,450—less than residents paid in Glencoe, Illinois, an upscale Chicago suburb where homes are two-thirds cheaper and the risk of wildfire is minimal. The broader risk to the financial system operates through several channels. One, as David Dayen recounts in a companion article, is through mortgage foreclosures on uninsured and lost homes, with resulting damage to bank balance sheets, as well as reduced mortgage lending generally. A more insidious trend is the rise of insurers that are not regulated at all. As regulated insurers have been quitting high-risk areas, a new kind of sketchy enterprise is filling the gap. According to former Federal Reserve governor Sarah Bloom Raskin, now at Duke University, where her research specialty is the impact of climate on finance, these are thinly capitalized companies that don’t meet normal regulatory standards. Detailed research in this Harvard Business School paper on “climate losses and fragile insurers” reports that the market share of homeowner insurance in Florida provided by these lightly regulated insurers grew to 50% by 2018. A new, nontraditional rating agency called Demotech gives these companies high ratings. Despite the fact that these companies were nominally regulated by the Florida insurance commissioner, presumably for capital adequacy, during the period of the HBS study, at least 15 of these Demotech-approved insurers became insolvent, according to professor Ishita Sen, one of the authors, “The fact that 20% of the Demotech insurers become insolvent,” she told me, “while none of the insurers rated by [mainstream rating agencies] AM Best or S&P did, shows that regulation has been inadequate.” Why would banks, which require homeowner insurance, accept this subprime (!) form of insurance? Because banks and other mortgage lenders seldom hold onto the mortgage paper. They stick someone else with the risk of loss. If this sounds like an echo of the subprime mortgage crisis and the 2008 financial collapse, the parallels are exact. The Harvard Business School paper also warns of the risk of the government-sponsored and guaranteed secondary mortgage market institutions Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac getting stuck with this bad mortgage paper. That could require a taxpayer bailout, as happened in the 2008 collapse. And why do state insurance commissioners turn a blind eye to the balance sheets of these sketchy companies? Because in the near term everyone gains. Homeowners get their affordable insurance, even if the undercapitalized companies lack adequate loss reserves. Banks get to keep on making mortgages. The political pressure on the commissioners and the legitimate part of the insurance industry subsidies. By the time the companies go belly-up, at the expense of policyholders and investors, their founders have made out well. In the run-up to the 2008 crisis, there was a cynical slogan among Wall Street innovators and traders: IBGYBG. When the whole financial house of cards collapses, I’ll Be Gone, You’ll Be Gone. We will have made our bundle and the ensuing mess will be someone else’s problem. The current insurance crisis, and the multiple flawed responses to it, are the next crash and bailout waiting to happen. “The short-term insurance problem,” says Raskin, “is making homeowners whole. The longer-term insurance problem, which can collapse quickly into the shorter-term one, is the risk to the entire financial system.” Fittingly, an insurance crisis worsened by the climate crisis is unfolding on the watch of the great climate denier, Donald Trump. He may also inherit a financial crisis.

Federal immigration agents already remove hundreds of thousands of immigrants annually, often after they’ve served time in prison for violent offenses. Most voters don’t know that, however. So Trump likely will brag that this standard practice is of his own doing, and that it’s brand new. Countries with which the U.S. has fractured diplomatic relations, like Venezuela, make this difficult. The U.S. can’t send migrants to countries where those international flights won’t be allowed to land. That’s just one factor that people need to know. Media, civic leaders, politicians, and influential people must continue building facts around the utterances and actions of Trump. They should address real world outcomes and complications without adding to the trauma that many immigrant communities are feeling. The cancellation of the CBP One app is a small change. But be clear about the intention: Trump and many of his handpicked staffers don’t want legal migration – they want zero migration. Chaos and cruelty, along with the hope that foreigners will simply give up and never come or leave, is the point.

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## Joseph... Continued from previous page

**to Domestic Entities** The WARN Act (Worker Adjustment and Retraining Notification Act of 1988) currently requires companies that plan to close factories to give notice. This federal law should be modified to require factories that plan to close to offer the factory for sale to its hometown or to its employees. The law should also provide funding for saving factories. Many factories close in this country without giving their workers and their hometowns the chance to keep the factory in business.

**4. Require All Advertising to Include Country of Origin Information** If all advertising, on the Internet, on television and radio and newspapers, required country of origin information, more concerned American consumers would make informed decisions to buy more American-made products. The Made in the USA Foundation hired the Harris Poll to determine if Americans preferred to buy American products. By a large margin, the survey showed that Americans are willing to pay more for a “Made in the USA” label. For example, an ad for the Ford Mustang Mach-E electric would have to disclose that the vehicle is made in Mexico. Most Americans now think that this electric Mustang is American. Similarly, Harbor Freight would have to disclose that its Pittsburgh, Chicago and Dayton tools are imported.

**5. Require Product Displays at Stores to Include Prominent Country of Origin Labeling** While shopping for appliances recently, I noticed that refrigerators, stoves and other household appliances hide their country of origin. This is unfair and deceptive. Products displays should include prominent country of origin markings. Ikea, for example, fails to disclose where its products are made. This is already illegal because the country of origin is required to be placed on all imported products. Nearly all Ikea products are imported. The federal government fails to enforce this law. The new Trump administration should strictly enforce this law.

**6. Enforce Product Labeling Laws on the Internet** The Internet is the wild west when it comes to country-of-origin labeling. Wayfair and Amazon, two of the largest Internet retailers, fail to disclose country of origin on their products and websites. I have filed complaints with the Federal Trade Commission about these violations of law. The

FTC is supposed to enforce Made in the USA labeling laws but does not. President Trump should appoint FTC Commissioners, as well as U.S. Customs officials, who are dedicated to enforcing strict Made in the USA and imported product labeling. These changes would demonstrate that the administration is leading the way and is serious about bringing jobs back to the USA. It would also give consumers the tools to make decisions about buying American products easier. And finally, it would incentivize manufacturers to bring jobs back while lowering their tax rate.

*Joel D. Joseph is a lawyer, an economist and author of 15 books, including “Inequality in America: 10 Causes and 10 Cures.” He is founder and chairman of the Made in the USA Foundation, a non-profit organization dedicated to promoting American-made products.*



# Presidential Payola: The Evolution of Political Bribery

*How \$TRUMP coins create a cash funnel for influence and foreign meddling.*

By THOM HARTMANN

Both Spiro Agnew and Richard Nixon took cash bribes while in the White House and before. Agnew's dated back to shakedown he did as Maryland governor, while Nixon helped Jimmy Hoffa get out of a prosecution and allegedly ran interference for a group of milk producers.

Since then, bribing politicians has gotten a lot easier thanks to five Republicans on the US Supreme Court. Their Citizens United decision, decided 15 years ago this week, legalized political bribery so long as it is done through campaign, PAC, or Super-PAC funds.

But for some people there's just never enough money.

Donald Trump had been running small-time hustles to make money for decades, selling sneakers, bibles, steaks, vodka, water, etc., and he expanded these schemes when he became president in 2016 to let his followers give him money in exchange for what they thought were collectable assets.

Remember, back in 2000, when he was first seriously considering running for president (on the Reform Party ticket), he said:

"It's very possible that I could be the first presidential candidate to run and make money on it."

After his son-in-law got \$2 billion from Saudi Arabia, though, and his companies made an estimated \$2.4 billion during his last presidency, it appears that Trump decided the small stuff was for pikers. So he's going to crank the door wide open to serious tens-of-billions-of-dollars money.

First, he and his son-in-law are working with several foreign governments, including Bulgaria and Vietnam, to build Trump properties that will fatten Trump's wallet. This, in itself, is a blatant example of how foreign governments can buy influence with his administration.

But then he kicked the door to corruption even wider.

A "fungible crypto asset" like the new \$TRUMP coin (and the \$MELANIA coin) is essentially a digital picture that's limited in its issue to a certain number of items. Each individual "coin" is separately kept and can be traded on the Solana blockchain, guaranteeing there won't be counterfeits.

So, what people are buying when they pick up \$TRUMP coins are essentially tiny digital pictures of his face with the words "fight, fight, fight!" They have no intrinsic or underlying value, and are not backed by any asset, crypto or otherwise. Their "collector value" — which is how they're being hawked on his website — is equally sketchy, particularly if there will be a billion of them in circulation.

Bottom line: it appears that \$TRUMP coins are simply a way "friends of Trump" can funnel cash to him and he can verify their transfer so he could, if he chose, help them out.

Trump initially issued 200 million of the coins, and they're currently trading at \$33.69 each (down from \$75.35 earlier in the week), meaning the market value or capitalization of \$TRUMP is currently \$7.59 billion, exceeding even the more generous estimates of Trump's previous net worth.

When he releases another 800 million over the next three years it appears he'll make tens of billions more, so long as people or governments keep buying/trading them.

Thus, anybody who wants to give Trump a large amount of money, presumably in exchange for his good will or even a specific change in policy or position, now no longer has to visit the White House with a briefcase full of cash, like Jimmy Hoffa and the milk guys did.

All they have to do is drop a few million or billion on \$TRUMP and, because the

Solana blockchain is public, Trump can immediately see who's giving him cash. The rest of us can't though: the blockchain only identifies the purchaser's wallet, which is typically an obscure set of numbers. But if that purchaser has told Trump which wallet is theirs, he can track down who spiffed him and who didn't.

The Founders of our republic were very concerned about this type of scenario. Alexander Hamilton wrote, in Federalist 22:

"Evils of this description ought not to be regarded as imaginary. One of the weak sides of republics, among their numerous advantages, is that they afford too easy an inlet to foreign corruption. ...

"In republics, persons elevated from the mass of the community, by the suffrages of their fellow-citizens, to stations of great pre-eminence and power, may find compensations for betraying their trust... Hence it is that history furnishes us with so many mortifying examples of the prevalence of foreign corruption in republican governments. How much this contributed to the ruin of the ancient commonwealths has been already delineated."

This led to the Constitution containing the Foreign Emoluments Clause, Article I, Section 9, Clause 8, that explicitly says:

"[N]o Person holding any Office of Profit or Trust under them, shall, without the Consent of the Congress, accept of any present, Emolument, Office, or Title, of any kind whatever, from any King, Prince, or foreign State."

Interestingly, Hamilton believed the clause didn't apply to the president or vice president; when he was Secretary of the Treasury, the Senate asked him to clarify by submitting a list of office holders who were subject to the clause's provisions. His list only included political appointees.

The Supreme Court has never issued a decision on the Emoluments Clause, either, adding to the ambiguity of the state of the law.

To solve the problem of this uncertainty, in 1966 Congress passed The Foreign Gifts and Decorations Act which specifically identified the president and vice president as "employees" of the US govern-

ment who may not, under penalty of prosecution, accept any gift with more than minimal value without congressional approval.

Enforcing that law, though, would require Trump's Attorney General to investigate his cash flow and then prosecute him, something that's unlikely given how he will apparently (based on how Pam Bondi avoided answering direct questions) only appoint people to that position who promise loyalty to him above the Constitution or the good of our nation.

And any sort of congressional investigation of Trump taking what may appear to be bribes is equally unlikely; he's made it clear that he and Elon Musk will destroy any elected Republican in their next primary who tries to hold him accountable.

On top of all that, the \$TRUMP coin is just a small part of a much larger and rather sprawling collection of internet- and blockchain-based crypto operations Trump and his family are involved with that could make them billions. Wendy Siegelman does a deep dive into them over at her brilliant Substack newsletter.

With the \$TRUMP coin vehicle that enables foreign governments, princes, and even domestic billionaires or companies to shovel millions or even billions directly into Trump's pockets, it appears that he's decided to leave his working class MAGA followers in the dust and redirect his efforts toward the truly morbidly rich.

After all, he can't run for election again (and will be 82) in 2028 (unless he pulls a Vladimir Putin and runs for VP); he no longer needs his MAGA followers, at least as a revenue source, for the moment.

In his inaugural speech, Trump referred to his second presidency as the start of a "golden age" for America. Most likely, though, it'll just be a golden pile of cash filling the money bin of the most corrupt president in American history...

*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.*

# Hegseth's Thin Line Between Lethality and Legality

By SABRINA HAAKE

The US Department of Defense is the largest government agency in the country. A sprawling and massive bureaucracy, the DOD houses the world's largest military power, employs nearly 3 million people- greater than the population of many states- and has direct control over the armed forces of the U.S. Army, Navy, Marine Corps, Air Force, and Space Command.

The Secretary of Defense manages an annual budget exceeding \$800 billion, with 1.3 million servicemembers on active duty, 825,000 Reserve and National Guard members, and another 600,000 civilian employees. Frank Carlucci, Secretary of Defense under Ronald Reagan, described the position as "one of the more difficult jobs anywhere in the world. He has to be a mini-Secretary of State, a procurement expert, a congressional relations expert. He has to understand the budget process. And he should have operational knowledge."

Given the life-and-death gravity of a role affecting millions of servicemembers and hundreds of millions of civilians worldwide, Defense Secretaries are typically well-seasoned military experts with decades of high-ranking strategic and military operations under their belts. For a quick comparison, Lloyd Austin, the current secretary, served in the military for 41 years, Mark Esper for 21 years, and James Mattis for 40 years, and all three had distinguished combat service, high rank, and impeccable service records.

Enter Donald Trump's nominee for Secretary of Defense, Pete Hegseth. Hegseth served in the Minnesota National Guard, was forced out of two veteran's not-

for-profits due to public drunkenness and misconduct, then became a Fox News host.

## Trump Spits on the Armed Services. Again.

Hegseth lacks senior military command experience, operations management, and national security experience. Hegseth is so profoundly lacking in relevant strategic or military experience that even Fox News reported it, if fleetingly, back in November. Deviating briefly from pro-Trump propaganda, Fox reported that Hegseth's nomination likely depended more on loyalty to Trump than any military qualifications.

The Pentagon's top policy official under the Bush administration, Eric Edelman, said that the main criteria Trump used to select Hegseth and other cabinet nominees was how good they looked on TV, and "how well they could defend Donald Trump" in the media.

Paul Rieckhoff, founder of Independent Veterans of America, posted on X that, Hegseth is "undoubtedly the least qualified nominee for Secretary of Defense in American history, and the most overtly political. Brace yourself, America," he added, Hegseth will be a "ferocious media, culture and political warrior for MAGA."

## Hegseth Champions More "Lethality"

During his confirmation hearing, when Senators asked direct questions about a litany of public drunkenness and sexual abuse allegations, Hegseth punted, calling every accusation an "anonymous smear." His preferred narratives seem to be that "wokeness" is ruining the military, and our troops need more "lethality."

His embrace of lethality doesn't stop where the law says it should. Supporting Trump's 2019 pardons, Hegseth advocated

leniency for war crimes that were opposed by active duty military personnel who saw the misconduct first hand. Pressed on this during his confirmation hearing, Hegseth testified that he had "thought very deeply about the balance between legality and lethality," and that when it comes to "destroying the enemy," i.e., killing people, the law "should not be getting in the way."

Hegseth also rejected the possibility that Trump would ever issue an illegal order, ignoring recent history. In 2020, Trump asked that the 82nd Airborne be deployed against civilians in Washington, D.C., who were protesting the murder of George Floyd. Mark Esper, secretary of defense at the time, talked Trump out of it. On questioning, Hegseth refused to say that

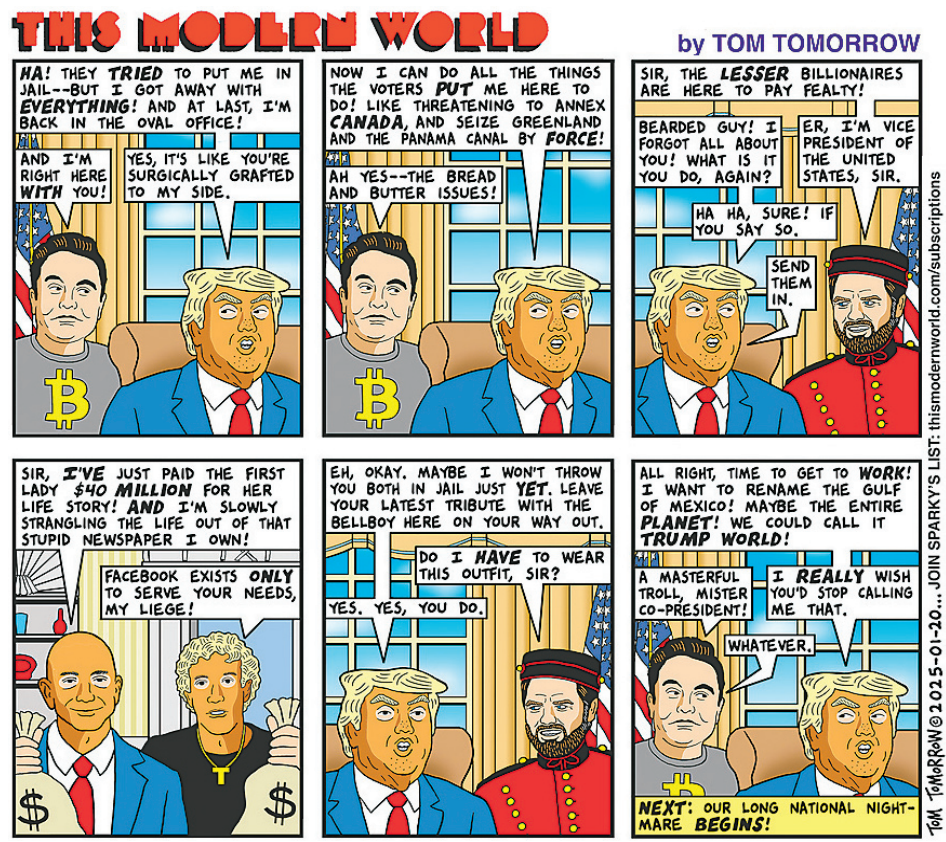
he'd follow Esper's example, calling the very real situation a "hypothetical."

Hegseth clearly envisions a more violent American military with domestic "enemies" in its cross hairs.

## Hegseth's Aversion to Women in the Military Shows a Lack of Experience

Hegseth has consistently spoken against women in the military, saying recently that, "we should not have women in combat roles. It hasn't made us more effective. Hasn't made us more lethal. Has made fighting more com-

*Continued on page 16*





# ‘Anything We Can Do to Help’: This Texas County Is Poised to Play a Key Role in Deportations

*Impoverished Starr County might be the site of a new federal deportation center.*

By DAVID MONTGOMERY / Stateline

The letter to then-President-elect Donald Trump, sent to his Mar-a-Lago Club estate in Florida just two weeks after his resounding victory in the Nov. 5 election, came straight to the point.

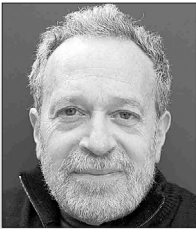
“Subject: Texas offering 1,400 acres of land adjacent to the Texas-Mexico Border for construction of deportation facilities,” read the opening line of Texas Land Commissioner Dr. Dawn Buckingham’s eye-grabbing missive to the incoming president.

As Trump moved closer to reclaiming residency at the White House on Jan. 20, the vast Texas acreage at the edge of the Rio Grande promises to become a centerpiece of the get-tough immigration policies he plans to unfurl under recently named “border czar” Tom Homan.

Republican governors from across the country have expressed their eagerness to help Trump’s deportation efforts. In a joint statement issued in December by the Republican Governors Association, 26 of the 27 members (all except Vermont Gov. Phil Scott) declared that they “stand ready to utilize every tool at our disposal — whether through state law enforcement or the National Guard — to support President Trump in this vital mission.”

But Texas, the only Republican-controlled state on the U.S.-Mexico border, is poised to play a particularly vital role. In the past several years, the state has dispatched thousands of Texas National Guard troops to the border; enacted a law (which is on hold pending legal challenges) authorizing police officers to engage in immigration enforcement; and set up a string of floating buoys to block migrants from crossing the Rio Grande.

## ROBERT REICH



Trump hoodwinked working Americans into believing he’s on their side. But Trump’s hoax will not work for long, given the oligarchy’s takeover.

## Why I Remain Hopeful About America

So many people I know — including, I suspect, many of you — are despairing over Donald Trump’s second regime, which started Jan. 20.

I share your fears about what’s to come. Yet I remain hopeful about the future of America. Here’s why.

Trump hoodwinked average working Americans into believing he’s on their side and convinced enough voters that Kamala Harris and Democrats were on the side of cultural elites (the “deep state,” “woke”ism, “coastal elites,” and so on).

But Trump’s hoax will not work for long, given the oligarchy’s conspicuous takeover of America under Trump II.

Even before Trump’s regime begins, it was already exposing a reality that has been hidden from most Americans for decades: the oligarchy’s obscene wealth and its use of that wealth to gain power over America.

Seated prominently where Trump gave his inaugural address Jan. 20 were the three richest people in America — Elon Musk, Jeff Bezos, and Mark Zuckerberg — each of whom owns powerful media that have either boosted Trump’s lies or refrained from

The Biden administration has fought those efforts in court, but the incoming Trump administration is expected to stand down.

Now it appears likely that a well-secured federal deportation center will be taking root in impoverished Starr County, on a huge patch of level farmland that now yields onions, grain sorghum, corn and soybeans.

Buckingham, a physician and former state senator whose agency oversees 13 million acres of state land, said she learned of the availability of the border tract from another state agency. She approached the owner and secured the land for \$3.82 million at the height of the election season. The purchase also cleared the way for construction of a 1.5-mile border wall that was blocked by the previous landowner, Buckingham said.

“We acquired that ranch kind of right at the beginning of early voting,” she told Stateline. “And then when Trump won, we figured they just may need some help with all the violent criminals for their processing, to get them off our soil.”

Next came her letters to Trump and Homan offering federal access to the land “to allow a facility to be built for the processing, detention, and coordination of the largest deportation of violent criminals in the nation’s history.”

Buckingham has named the effort after Jocelyn Nungaray, a 12-year-old girl who was found dead in a Houston creek in June. Two Venezuelan migrants who were in the country illegally have been charged in Nungaray’s sexual assault and murder.

The ACLU of Texas has slammed the planned deportation center.

“Our state and country already waste billions on failed and inhumane border policies,” ACLU of Texas staff attorney Savannah Kumar said in a statement. “Now, Texas officials are offering to turn our culturally rich borderlands into sites for the mass caging of our community members.”

In Rio Grande City, City Manager Gilberto Millan Jr. said many of the roughly 15,000 residents are still learning about the planned deportation center. But at least some believe it will deliver an economic boost to Starr County, where nearly 29% of the people live in poverty, compared with

telling the truth about him.

Musk sank a quarter of a billion dollars into getting Trump elected, in return for which Trump has authorized him, along with billionaire Vivek Ramaswamy, to target for elimination programs Americans depend on — thereby making way for another giant tax cut for the wealthy.

The oligarchy’s conflicts of interest will be just as conspicuous.

Musk’s SpaceX is a major federal contractor through its rocket launches and its internet service, Starlink. Bezos’ Amazon is a major federal contractor through its cloud computing business. Zuckerberg is pouring billions into artificial intelligence, as is Musk, in hopes of huge federal contracts.

Ramaswamy, whose biotech company is valued at nearly \$600 million, wants the Food and Drug Administration to speed up drug approvals. His investment firm has an oil and gas fund. His new Bitcoin business would benefit if the federal government kept its hands off crypto.

Trump himself has already begun to cash in on his second presidency even more blatantly than he did the first time. He just began selling a cryptocurrency token featuring an image of himself — even though cryptocurrency is regulated by the Securities and Exchange Commission, to which Trump has already said he’ll name a crypto advocate as chair.

Not to mention the billionaires Trump is putting in charge of key departments to decide on taxes and expenditures, tariffs and trade, even what young Americans learn — all of whom have brazen conflicts of interest.

They were all on display Jan. 20 with Trump. Then, many took their private jets to Davos, Switzerland, for the annual confab of the world’s most powerful CEOs and billionaires.

Not since the Gilded Age of the late 19th century has such vast wealth turned itself into such conspicuous displays of political power. Unapologetically, unashamedly, defiantly.

11% nationally. Property in La Casita-Garciasville, Texas, is being offered by the state for a migrant deportation center. (Brandon Bell/Getty Images)

In November, Starr County supported Trump over Democratic candidate Kamala Harris by 55.6% to 40.2%, the first time since 1892 the county has voted Republican in a presidential election.

“I know that if they build that facility, that’ll bring a lot of jobs to the community,” Millan said. Even before the announced deportation center, Starr County was seeing an uptick in construction, retail and restaurants, he said.

Although the potential deportation site is outside the city limits, it sits just a few miles from downtown Rio Grande City on FM 1430, a farm-to-market state road. Starr County residents now in their 60s and 70s recall how they used to pick fruits and vegetables on the irrigated land, working with their parents as youngsters.

“I worked that field since I was 8 or 9 years old,” said Eloy Garza, 75, a Starr County commissioner who left his post last month after being defeated in a Democratic primary in March.

Garza, whose county office was located just across from the property, also shared the view that the deportation center could be a job magnet.

“I’m for it — 100 percent,” he said. “I don’t know who wouldn’t like it.”

Bernardo Garcia, an 89-year-old retired criminal investigator, has watched the border wall rising in the distance from the modest frame house he shares with his 87-year-old wife on FM 1430. Although they haven’t been touched by crime, he believes the wall would be a “good thing” by serving as a barricade against those who “might be inclined to do some criminal acts.”

Despite the one-time surge of attention when Buckingham held a November news conference at the site to kick off border wall construction, at least some residents seemed largely oblivious to the project in December as construction crews worked at a distance from the highway to build the wall.

Meanwhile, immigration advocates contend that pouring resources into deportation efforts will consume dollars that could be better spent on needed infrastructure and

This flagrancy makes me hopeful. Why? Because Americans don’t abide aristocracy. We were founded in revolt against unaccountable power and wealth. We will not tolerate this barefaced takeover.

The backlash will be stunning.

I cannot tell you precisely how or when it will occur, but it will start in our communities when we protect the most vulnerable from the cruelties of the Trump regime, ensure that hardworking families aren’t torn apart, protect transgender and LGBTQ+ people, and help guard the safety of Trump’s political enemies.

We will see the backlash in the 2026 midterms and the 2028 presidential election, when Americans elect true leaders who care about working people and the common good.

And just as we did at the end of the first Gilded Age of the late 19th century when the oligarchy revealed its hubris and grandiosity, Americans will demand fundamental reforms: getting big money out of politics, taxing huge wealth, busting up or regulating giant corporations, making huge social media platforms accountable to the public rather than to a handful of multibil-

social programs.

“This is very, very harmful,” said Joaquin Garcia, director of community organizing for La Union del Pueblo Entero, or LUPE, which serves immigrants in three Rio Grande Valley counties, including Starr: Garcia said the money should be spent on roads and housing, rather than “militarization” of the border.

“The last thing that Starr County needs is a detention center,” he said. “That is not something people want.”

A mass deportation effort targeting the estimated 11 million to 13 million immigrants who are in the country illegally would cost at least \$315 billion, according to a study released in October by the American Immigration Council, a nonprofit research and advocacy group that favors immigration.

Proposals from what the council describes as “leading immigration hawks,” including Homan, range from a one-time mass roundup of all immigrants now in the country illegally to a starting “baseline” of 1 million deportations a year, the study said. Modern-day deportations have never exceeded more than a half-million immigrants per year, said the study, and many of those were people trying to enter the United States, not those settled here.

Immigration and Customs Enforcement already operates at least 20 detention centers in Texas, and Buckingham says she is standing by to provide still more resources from her immense reservoir of state-owned land, including a potential site in the El Paso region. Some Texas sheriffs, she said, also may have an interest in acquiring state property in urban centers to “decongest a lot of the local jails” being strained by immigrant detentions, including alleged lawbreakers.

“Everything we’re doing is just to try and get those violent criminals off our soil,” she told Stateline. “We have actually hundreds of thousands of acres on or adjacent to the border. So we’re just going to continue to be here and be a good partner, and anything we can do to help, we want to help.”

*David Montgomery is a Stateline correspondent based in Austin, Texas, where he covers state government and politics. This article first appeared at Stateline.org.*

lionaires.

Friends, we could not remain on the path we were on. The sludge had been thickening even under Democratic administrations. Systematic flaws have remained unaddressed. Inequalities have continued to widen. Corruption and bribery have worsened.

It’s tragic that America had to come to this point. A few years of another Trump regime, even worse than the first, will be hard on many people.

But as the oligarchy is conspicuously exposed, Americans will see as clearly as we did at the end of the first Gilded Age that we have no option but to take back power.

Only then can we continue the essential work of America: the pursuit of equality and prosperity for the many, not the few. The preservation and strengthening of a government of, by, and for the people.

*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.*





# Dr. King’s Dream Still Offers a Great Agenda

By CLARENCE PAGE

As we marked the Martin Luther King Jr. holiday, ironically on the same day as Donald Trump’s second presidential inauguration, I was reminded of a famous quote from another King:

“Can we all get along?”

Yes, that plea came not from MLK but from Rodney King, no relation to the great civil rights leader, in May 1992 as riots erupted in Los Angeles after a mostly White jury acquitted four Los Angeles police officers of assault charges for his videotaped beating.

We can be thankful that race relations have made some notable progress since then, including the election of Barack Obama as this nation’s first Black president in 2008.

Yet assessments of whether we can all get along are colored by how much the nation’s great race debate has shifted.

Let us not forget, amid the Jan. 20 proclamations of praise and commemorations for MLK as a great humanitarian leader, that his own approval ratings in his last year were strikingly low.

A Harris Poll earlier in 1968 found his public disapproval rating to be almost 75%, a startling contrast with how King generally is viewed today.

But, public opinion can be fickle for leaders and candidates on both political sides. A year after Donald Trump beat Hillary Clinton, Gallup pollsters found his approval rating had fallen to 35%, lower than any previous president at that point in his presidency, and he left office with an average approval rating of 41%, the lowest in more than seven decades of polling.

And yet he was re-elected anyway — partly, his MAGA supporters tell me, thanks to the persecution their hero suffered in various federal and state investigations of his alleged crimes.

At the polls in 2024, Trump ended up with more support than his previous polling and controversies over immigration, among other ethnically sensitive issues, would have led many of us to expect.

Democrats lost ground with voters under 30 in most swing states, including

former Blue Wall states in the industrial Midwest, which are still struggling with regional and industrial job loss, as well as immigration-related demographic changes.

Democrats also appear to have taken some Black and Latino voters for granted, most dramatically in areas where they underestimated the Trump appeal.

In other words, race and politics still refuse to be as simple as black and white.

I can see that in the degree to which conservatives have gained mileage by demonizing “identity politics,” whatever they consider that to be. In my view, politics have become so closely intertwined with the way people see themselves that separating the two can sound like a fool’s errand.

Still, identity issues of various sorts — not just race or ethnicity — may well begin to explain why Democrats lost ground with voters under 30 in nearly every swing state.

There also was a seismic shift with Latino voters, whose support for Democrats declined gradually in recent elections.

Yes, Americans have made a lot of useful progress since Dr. King’s death, but a lot more work remains to be done to bring his dream to reality.

In one of his final speeches, which I read again every year on his birthday, he

ends with an agenda for his audience that still remains very relevant today. He said:

“And so I conclude by saying today that we have a task, and let us go out with a divine dissatisfaction.

“Let us be dissatisfied until America will no longer have a high blood pressure of creeds and an anemia of deeds.

“Let us be dissatisfied until the tragic walls that separate the outer city of wealth and comfort from the inner city of poverty and despair shall be crushed by the battering rams of the forces of justice.

“Let us be dissatisfied, and men will recognize that out of one blood God made all men to dwell upon the face of the earth. ...

“Let us be dissatisfied until that day when nobody will shout, ‘White Power!’ when nobody will shout, ‘Black Power!’ but everybody will talk about God’s power and human power.”

That would be ideal — and MLK was, if anything, an idealist, a dreamer.

It’s still up to the rest of us to try to turn his dream into a new reality. It’s worth the effort.

Clarence Page is a columnist at the *Chicago Tribune*. Email [page@chicagotribune.com](mailto:page@chicagotribune.com).

## Anti-Immigrant Legislation Doesn’t Serve Anyone But Prison Contractors

*The Laken Riley Act is an assault on due process, undermining all of our rights to make for-profit prison CEOs richer.*

By SULMA ARIAS

You’re reading the words of a formerly undocumented immigrant.

When I fled El Salvador four decades ago, I was 12 years old and alone. I was escaping the country’s civil war, where U.S.-backed death squads had made murders and rape our daily reality.

I reunited with my sisters, my only surviving family, in Wichita, Kansas. Once there, I helped open churches, started businesses, and raised three daughters. There were times I wasn’t sure we’d make it to the

end of the month, but I was grateful for the sense of peace and security we were able to create here.

That’s why I’m so alarmed that the new Republican-led Congress has chosen to open with a bill, H.R. 29, that strikes fear in the hearts of immigrant families all across the country. This bill would strip judges of discretion and require immigrants to be detained and subject to deportation if they’re accused — not even convicted — of even minor offenses like shoplifting.

This major assault on due process won’t keep anyone safer. It would terrorize all immigrants in this country, who studies show are much less likely to commit crimes of any kind than native-born Americans.

So who benefits from H.R. 29? Private prison corporations like CoreCivic and GEO Group, who made a fortune during the last Trump administration by running private prisons for Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE).

CoreCivic and GEO kept immigrants and asylum seekers in inhumane and toxic conditions with poor hygiene and exposed women and children to sexual predators. Under this new law, cynical executives will siphon off more public dollars, and wealthy investors will reap more rewards, from abusing and demonizing people seeking

refuge from violence or poverty.

When Trump won, private prison stocks soared. Why? Because investors anticipated making a fortune detaining immigrants. More than 90% of migrants detained by ICE end up in for-profit facilities.

GEO Group, which maxed out its campaign contributions to Trump, told its investors they could make almost \$400 million per year supporting “future needs for ICE and the federal government” in a second Trump term. Their stock price nearly doubled in November.

Whether those detained are guilty or not, CoreCivic and GEO get paid. That’s what H.R. 29 is for: advancing corporate greed, not protecting Americans.

We all have a stake in stopping private prison corporations from becoming more powerful, regardless of our language, race, gender, or community. In addition to jailing immigrants, for-profit prison companies also look for ways to put citizens in prison more often — and for longer — so they can make more money.

Whenever we allow fundamental rights to be taken away, we erode our shared humanity and diminish all of our rights and freedoms.

The people behind H.R. 29 want us to

be afraid of each other so we won’t stand together. They want to be able to barge into our homes, schools, and churches to take our neighbors and loved ones away. They want workers to be too scared to stand up to their bosses’ abuse. All so their donors in the private prison industry can make more money.

Democrats will need to find their way in this new Congress. Falling in line behind nativist fear-mongers who take millions in campaign contributions from the private-prison industry is not the right way to do it.

Americans demand better. We want true leadership with an affirmative vision for the future of this country and dignity for all people, including immigrants.

H.R. 29 targets whole communities because of the language we speak and the color of our skin. Instead, our elected leaders, regardless of party, must work to address people’s needs through building an economy that works for all of us, not just the wealthy few.

Sulma Arias is executive director of *People’s Action*, the nation’s largest network of grassroots power-building groups, with more than a million members in 30 states. This op-ed was distributed by *OtherWords.org*.

## Trump Plans a Supersized Tax Giveaway for Corporations and the Wealthy

*Trump campaigned on lowering prices for Americans. Instead, his first priority is to cut taxes for billionaires — and then services for the rest of us.*

By LINDSAY OWENS

As President Donald Trump takes office, his Republican allies in Congress are already hard at work readying his legislative agenda.

Trump campaigned on a promise to lower costs for Americans. But so far, the GOP hasn’t proposed a single plan to do that. Instead, Republicans are laser-focused on passing another round of massive tax breaks for the ultra-wealthy and corporations.

It’s shaping up to be 2017 all over again.

Trump made a lot of promises on the campaign trail in 2016 too — and quickly broke most of them. But he did fulfill one: His 2017 Tax Cuts and Jobs Act, his only signature legislative accomplishment, was a

field day for the oligarchs and CEOs who helped elect him.

That law delivered a tax cut for the richest 0.1% of Americans that was 277 times larger than the one teachers and firefighters got, nearly doubling billionaire wealth in this country and spiking inequality.

Meanwhile, corporations got a 40% discount on their taxes, which they used to send record stock buybacks to their wealthy shareholders and pad their profits while they overcharged consumers on everything from gas to groceries.

The bill never delivered the wage gains or economic growth Trump promised. But it did add \$1.9 trillion to the deficit.

Key provisions of this tax scam expire next year. That would be welcome news for the vast majority of Americans, who are sick and tired of tax cuts for the wealthy. But Trump and his Republican colleagues are readying a supersized set of high-end tax breaks that would make his 2017 legislation look like child’s play.

Republicans plan to give the richest Americans a fresh round of individual tax breaks, slash the corporate tax rate yet again, and cut taxes on capital gains and dividends, which would let their Wall Street friends keep even more of their winnings when they sell a stock or are showered with dividends.

Then they’ll move to step two: draconian budget cuts for the programs Americans rely on.

GOP leaders will point to falling rev-

enues from their own tax cuts as evidence for the need to cut spending on life-saving programs that families rely on, like Medicaid and the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), which helps more than 42 million families afford their groceries.

In fact, Trump is putting unelected and unaccountable billionaires — Elon Musk and Vivek Ramaswamy — in charge of the “Department of Government Efficiency” (DOGE) to decide the painful cuts we’ll have to face. And surprise, surprise: They’re almost exclusively targeting programs that help working people, veterans, students, families, and other non-billionaires.

If Trump and the GOP get their way, we know exactly what to expect: income inequality will worsen, crucial government programs will be starved, and corporations and the ultra-wealthy will amass even more outsized power over our economy and democracy.

But we can learn something else from our experience in 2017. Democrats united in their opposition to Trump’s tax cuts for the wealthy, pushing Trump’s approval rating to the lowest point in his presidency and ousting supporters of his corporate tax cuts in the next year’s midterms.

Tax giveaways for the wealthy and corporations were deeply unpopular with voters in 2018 — and that’s only intensified after this recent wave of corporate price gouging that has squeezed American families. Lawmakers must make it as difficult as possible to enact this next tax giveaway.

This year, we need to make sure every single member of Congress understands that supporting Trump’s tax plans means turning their backs on working Americans.

Lindsay Owens is the Executive Director of *Groundwork Action*. This op-ed was distributed by *OtherWords.org*.



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HEALTH CARE/*Joan Retsinas*

Manifest Destiny Revisited: Greenlanders Should Scream ‘No’

In his zeal to wrest Greenland from Denmark, President Trump has resurrected Manifest Destiny. Ages ago we grew our footprint, seizing Texas from Texas, much of the Southwest from Mexico, as well as Oregon and surrounding areas from Britain. Later we took control over Hawaii and Alaska (a.k.a. Seward’s folly). Post World War II, we won Guam, Wake Island, the Marshall and Mariana Islands, etc. At one point we briefly annexed the Philippines. Victory in the Spanish-American War gave us Puerto Rico. In 1917 we bought the Danish West Indies (now the US Virgin Islands) from Denmark. We have an expansionist history.

But let the Greenlanders beware. Whatever incentives Uncle Sam offer the Greenlanders, they will get not only our largesse, but our health system. On the one hand, life expectancy (77.4 years in the United States, 71.5 in Greenland) looks better; but the data mask vast differences. In one part of Chicago, life expectancy is 90; on the Southside, it is 60. The United States has the highest rate of drug overdose deaths: 31.3 per thou-

sand in 2021, compared to 13.9 in Greenland. Our crime rate dwarfs theirs. Greenland is not Eden. They suffer from the same diseases as we: obesity, diabetes, and cardiovascular disease. Half the adults smoke. And we have treatments that are more sophisticated, technology more accurate, surgical expertise more advanced. People flock from all over the globe to Johns Hopkins, the Mayo Clinic, Mass Eye and Ear, et al. Yet we Americans must jump over an expensive complex insurance hurdle to get that superb treatment — indeed, to get any treatment. Even today, with the Affordable Care Act, with Medicaid expansion, with Medicare, with private insurance, 8% of Americans have no health insurance. In Texas the rate is 18%. In the United States, adults ages 19 to 64 are the most likely to have no insurance. Overall the rates of the uninsured have dropped, thanks to the expansion of Medicaid and to the Affordable Care Act’s subsidies. But everybody is not eligible for the ACA. Incomes can range from \$15,000 to 60,000 (a single person), and \$31,000 to \$125,000 for a family of four. Premiums can be as low as \$10 a month, depending on income. To cite the IRS: “the employee contribution for the lowest cost health benefit option offered by the employer must be no greater than 9.02% (for plan years beginning in 2025) of the full-time employee’s household income.” The ACA itself has four tiers: bronze, silver, gold, and platinum. The self-insured face a higher hurdle: In 2024, the average monthly premiums for individual coverage was \$484; for families, \$1,230. That doesn’t count the \$4,394

average annual deductible for an individual. Of course, people poor enough (states’ limits vary) can enroll in Medicaid. Over age 65, we all can enroll in Medicare, with premiums pegged to income, and subsidies below a set income. Part B premiums are \$174.70 per month for people who make \$103,000. But Medicare has considerable co-pays and deductibles, which compel many enrollees to add a “Medigap policy.” You can go online to shop. Then there are the Medicare Advantage plans — much cheaper, but maybe not so comprehensive, with limited formularies, limited networks of physicians and hospitals. If you switch from an Advantage plan to original Medicare, you may encounter “pre-existing condition” limitations. On to Greenland. Health care is free. That includes general practitioners, public hospitals, prescription medicine, some dental care, preventive care, vaccinations, and transport to the nearest health care facility. All free for citizens and residents. No co-pays. No deductibles. No pre-existing condition limitations. No caps. No “tiered” pricing. No in and out networks. In rural Greenland, hospitals and clinics cannot give the same services as the Mass General, or even a community hospital in the United States. But If we plant the American flag on Nuuk, Greenland’s capital, Johns Hopkins is not likely to open a satellite there. Greenlanders will go to the same hospitals, see the same physicians as before, yet pay for the care they once got for free.

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

It’s Getting a Little Dark at the Washington Post

By SAM URETSKY

“is a cartoonist a newspaperman?” “is a barnacle a ship?” A snippet of dialogue, perhaps attributable to Walt Kelly, creator of Pogo

There have been many political cartoonists — the political cartoonist was as much a staple of newspapers as the crossword puzzle. Thomas Nast is considered the “Father of the American Cartoon,” Nast’s powerful imagery helped bring down Boss Tweed and his corrupt Democratic political machine run out of Tammany Hall in New York City. Incidentally, the Pogo cast includes a character named Tammany Tiger. Nast is also credited with popularizing the modern image of Santa Claus. Herblock (Herbert Lawrence Block) of the Washington Post was a giant in the field of political cartooning. He was highly influential, and his cartoons had a profound impact on American political discourse, known for its sharp wit and incisive commentary on social and political issues. Beyond that, he had a remarkably long career.

He got his first job as a cartoonist in 1929. He won his first Pulitzer Prize in 1942, then spent two years in the Army doing cartoons and press releases. After his discharge Block became chief editorial cartoonist for *The Washington Post*, where he worked until his death 55 years later. He won three Pulitzer Prizes and shared a fourth. There were many brilliant political cartoonists — there’s a display at the Library of Congress (<https://www.loc.gov/exhibits/cartoonamerica/cartoon-political.html>) that includes Nast, Herblock, and many others who may be less familiar. And then there is Ann Telnaes, another Pulitzer Prize winner. She is the first woman to receive both the Pulitzer Prize for Editorial Cartooning and the Reuben Award, named after Rube Goldberg, an award for editorial cartooning. The Outstanding Cartoonist of the Year is chosen by a secret ballot of the members of the National Cartoonists Society. Ms. Telnaes, who resigned from the *Washington Post*, wrote an explanation of her decision: “I’ve worked for the *Washington Post* since 2008 as an editorial cartoonist. I have had editorial feedback and productive conversations—and some differences—about cartoons I have submitted for publication, but in all that time I’ve never had a cartoon killed because of who or what I chose to aim my pen at. Until now.” The cartoon that was killed criticizes the billionaire tech and media chief execu-

tives who have been doing their best to curry favor with incoming President-elect Trump. There have been multiple articles recently about these men with lucrative government contracts and an interest in eliminating regulations making their way to Mar-a-Lago. The group in the cartoon included Mark Zuckerberg/Facebook & Meta founder and CEO, Sam Altman/AI CEO, Patrick Soon-Shiong/*LA Times* publisher, the Walt Disney Company/ABC News, and Jeff Bezos/*Washington Post* owner. David Shipley, the Post’s opinion editor, issued a statement. “Not every editorial judgment is a reflection of a malign force,” Shipley said in the statement. “My decision was guided by the fact that we had just published a column on the same topic as the cartoon and had already scheduled another column — this one a satire — for publication. The only bias was against repetition.” H.L. Mencken once wrote, “Freedom of the press is limited to those who own one.” The owner of a newspaper is entitled to chose the editors who reflect their opinions — for example, The *Wall Street Journal* is owned by Dow Jones & Company, which in turn is a subsidiary of News Corp. The media conglomerate is controlled by Rupert Murdoch’s family. We do not expect the Murdochs to endorse politicians whose policies oppose their own, but we also don’t expect Christopher Ruddy, who is the CEO and majority owner of Newsmax Media to rely on Democrats for his income. Shipley

obviously was expressing his own opinion, but his own opinion seems to be that Bezos can only take so much. The *Washington Post* lost about 250,000 subscribers after Mr. Bezos decided that the paper would not endorse Vice-President Harris for president. Some went back because Alexandra Petri, a humor columnist (and a very good one) wrote “It has fallen to me, the humor columnist, to endorse Harris for president.” Dana Milbank, an excellent writer, wrote: “But boycotting the *Post* will hurt my colleagues and me. ... The more cancellations there are, the more jobs will be lost, and the less good journalism there will be.” But he added that if the non-endorsement was “the beginning of a crackdown on our journalistic integrity ... my colleagues and I will be leading the calls for Post readers to cancel their subscriptions, and we’ll be resigning en masse.” Telnaes’ resignation won’t get that much of a protest — but it should be noted. “Democracy,” we used to believe, “dies in darkness.” Sam Uretsky is a writer and pharmacist living in Louisville, Ky. Email sam.uretsky@gmail.com

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BOOK REVIEW/*Ken Winkes*

Piketty’s ‘Nature, Culture and Inequality’ Follows Up on ‘Capital in the Twenty-First Century’

Thomas Piketty’s “Nature, Culture and Inequality,” weighing in at a slim 82 pages, packs quite a wallop for its size. Originally presented as a series of lectures, this “comparative and historical and perspective” (the book’s subtitle) is the perfect introduction to Piketty’s pioneering work. Piketty came to international notice a decade ago with his much heftier “Capital in the Twenty-First Century,” which tapped centuries of economic data to show how the uneven distributions of returns on capital have greatly aggravated wealth inequality. “Nature, Culture, and Inequality” reprises, in part, some of the same argument but offers even more thoughts on a wider range of equity issues that face us in the present. In addition to income and wealth, Piketty comments as well on

gender and political inequality, summarizing where we are, the trends that brought us to our present, and what we might expect in the future. Piketty first dispenses with the common conservative claim that economic inequality is simply a law of nature. In fact, different eras and different countries have not dealt with economic inequality in the same way. Piketty offers Sweden as an example. When Sweden’s Social Democrats came to power in 1932 and held until the 1990s, Sweden reversed the favoritism it had previously shown capital and property ownership, and through tax policy and legislation moved the country toward a more equitable and socially responsible state. As Piketty puts it, Sweden has shown “that a country is never inegalitarian or egalitarian by nature.” It’s a choice. That, of course, is precisely the lesson wealthy conservatives would rather not learn. Piketty also makes a trenchant observation about national debt that I hadn’t thought about. As often as we worry over our national debt, I had never understood many of the ways governments can retire their debt. I knew debtors like inflation because paying back debt in devalued currency “costs” less, but as we have just seen, even a little inflation has its problems, too. Piketty points to Germany’s experience with rampant inflation following WWI and contrasts that period with how it acted after the Second World War. When its colonial empire collapsed in 1945, the value of Germany’s property assets collapsed as well, skyrocketing its debt far beyond what it had incurred waging Hitler’s war. What did Germany do? It divided the value of its debt by 100 (a neat trick governments can perform), assessed the nation’s largest fortunes at 50% of their asset value to compensate holders of smaller

assets and continued that high assessment into the 1980s. In short, Germany acted to share the responsibility for its debt among its citizens equitably and effectively. “Nature, Culture, and Inequality” is chock full of morsels like these. Other short chapters on “Gender Inequality,” “An Uneven March Toward Equality in Europe” and “The Rise of the Welfare State” have their own. What most struck me, though, were charts like the ones on education spending over time in France, the distribution of income and wealth around the world, and on colonial assets held by countries, including the United States, prior to WWII, and how those massive assets suddenly disappeared at the war’s end. The world is still dealing with the economic and social fallout from that tectonic shift that occurred only 80 years ago. Nor content with the past, Piketty has his eye on the future too. His last chapter, “Nature and Inequality” looks at climate change’s effect on the struggle towards economic and political equality. We all know the causes and consequences of climate change are not equally shared, and it is here again Piketty says clearly that unequal treatments are the only way to achieve equitable results. Following the logic of progressive income and estate taxes, he suggests a progressive carbon assessment that would levy a higher “tax” on the more industrialized nations. That may seem a dream, but as Piketty proves in this short book, and as our own experience tells us, it is also a choice. “Nature, Culture, and Inequality” by Thomas Piketty (translated by Willard Wood) [Other Press. 2023, 82 pages] Ken Winkes is a retired teacher and high school principal living in Conway, Wash.



# WAYNE O'LEARY

## Billionaires' Ball

Were he around today, the great 20th century journalist H.L. Mencken (1880-1956) would have a field day puncturing the pomposities of the incoming Trump administration. The Sage of Baltimore had no use for cant, hypocrisy or abject money grubbing, and his nonpartisan rapier happily sliced and diced offending politicians regardless of political persuasion.

Here's Mencken describing Republican President Calvin Coolidge at the height of the Roaring Twenties (From the *Baltimore Evening Sun*, Feb. 9, 1925):

"He respects money in each and every one of its beautiful forms. ... He venerates those who have it. He believes they have wisdom. He craves the loan and use of that wisdom. He invites them to breakfast, and listens to them. The things they revere, he reveres. The things they long for, he longs to give them."

Now, substitute the name Donald J. Trump for that of Coolidge, and you have a pretty good idea of the values this country will be governed by over the next four years.

Despite all the attention being given to Trump's courting of the working class, it's already clear that, beyond his own personal well-being, which is paramount, the concerns of the wealthy, particularly the billionaire class, are closest to Donald's heart. As Mencken said of Coolidge, he thinks they're wise and worthy of veneration. After all, he's a billionaire himself, and so his admiration for them is a form of self-love.

Look who Trump picked for his White House transition team: billionaires Elon

Musk of Tesla and Space X, Larry Ellison of Oracle, Marc Andreessen of venture-capital firm Andreessen Horowitz, and Howard Lutnick of financial-services giant Cantor Fitzgerald, along with a slew of Silicon Valley tech tycoons.

The monied class loves Donald Trump almost as much as he loves them, despite the fact that they did quite well, thank you, under the Democrats. This bromance with Trump is transactional and derives in part from the implied quid pro quo that accompanied their donations to the president's campaign.

Billionaire Andreessen, for example, delivered \$4.5 million to the pro-Trump super PAC Right for America. He now reportedly expects the antitrust crackdown on Big Tech initiated by the Biden Federal Trade Commission (FTC), which affected his tech-sector investments, to be suspended; it almost certainly will.

According to a *New York Times* report (11/17/24), other Trumpian billionaire donors want federal regulations on artificial intelligence ("AI") and the funny-money cryptocurrency scam eased or eliminated, more Defense Department money spent on military drones produced by "defense-tech" corporations, and the federal government's housing-finance companies, Freddie Mac and Fannie Mae, fully privatized. The last-named gift to investors is said to be on the Trump administration's agenda.

But what Trump's billionaire contributors want from him above all is a commitment of no additional federal moves to tax their wealth as Democrats attempted, plus a renewal of the sunsetted and expiring (post-2025) provisions of the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act of 2017. They needn't worry on either score.

The president-elect has pledged to extend all tax features important to the billionaires, including individual top-rate reductions, the lucrative "pass-through" busi-

ness deduction, and the doubled estate-tax exemption for inheritances; he also promises to further cut the corporate tax rate, previously reduced from 35% to 21%, to a plutocrat-friendly 15%.

The people who will most benefit from the anticipated tax-cut renewal, of course, don't need it and shouldn't get it. In 2023, close to a fifth (around 17%) of America's gross domestic product (GDP) consisted of billionaire wealth, as measured by *The Economist* (5/6/23). At that time, the country had 735 billionaires, who acquired most of their riches in the U.S. tech industry, where 60% of global tech-billionaire wealth originates. America's 20 biggest tech companies took in half of all the industry's sales in 2017, notes *The Economist*, making tech our most concentrated sector.

It should come as no surprise that the biggest of the Trump billionaire donors standing with their hands out is one Elon Musk, reputed co-president and self-described "first buddy." Elon is at once typical and atypical of his class. There's no doubt that, by order of magnitude, he's the most important of the bunch; he's currently the richest man in the world, according to *Forbes*, worth an estimated \$425 billion as of January 2025.

Those are largely untaxed assets, such as appreciating company shares or outside investments. Studies done in 2021, using IRS data, indicated billionaires like Musk paid effective taxes on their real incomes of next to nothing. In Elon's case, his outsized donations to the Trump campaign last year (upwards of \$200 million) should ensure that billionaire tax receipts won't increase any time soon.

Regardless of Musk's future role in the Trump administration, he's already established himself as the symbolic face of America's blossoming 21st-century Gilded Age. And, like the plutocrats of the original Gilded Age, whose obscene wealth was made pos-

sible through preferential treatment by a corrupted federal government (See: "American Oligarchs," 7/1-15/22 *TPP*), he has not done it alone.

Sen. Elizabeth Warren (D-Mass.) reported in December that CEO Musk had received \$60 million in public contracts for his companies Tesla and Space X, \$42 million of it for nonunion Tesla, of which he owns 21%, to provide electric vehicles and services to the government. *The Economist* (11/23/24) placed his total Space X contracts at roughly \$18 million (a fifth of its business), mostly with NASA and the U.S. military for satellite launches and related projects.

By any measure, Musk is what *Economist* editors call a crony capitalist, defined as an entrepreneur whose profits are derived from "chummy dealings with the state." Indeed, an estimated 10% of his personal fortune is a direct result of contracts and subsidies from the U.S. government, and another 15% from his cozy relationship with the Chinese government, which has permitted him to outsource over half of his Tesla production to the People's Republic; Musk will shortly open a second battery factory in Shanghai — nonunion, we can assume.

Donald Trump and Elon Musk are a perfect duo for the Second Gilded Age: the throwback corrupt politico and the new age robber baron. Trump gets the benefit of Musk's financial backing and a social-media platform (X, formerly Twitter) for his sleazy commentary; Musk gets an unjustified say in government and, because of the presidential relationship, inflated market valuations for his businesses.

Together, they'll really make America "great" again.

*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.*

## Hello, Baby

*Here is what I need to tell you about the world.*

By ALEXANDRA PETRI

Your tiny not-quite-foot is prodding me in the side as I type this. I am so excited to meet you. I am trying to think what to tell you about the world.

This is important: We exist in time. Whenever someone is born, it opens a window into time, a glimpse of the universe that stretches from the moment your eyes first blink open until they finally shut. This is about to be your window.

For the most part, I like existing in time. I like that today is cold, so cold that my breath makes a little cloud when I exhale. I like that every day on an identical walk there is still something new to see — an interesting truck or a bright-leafed tree or a too-optimistic sign about not peeing somewhere, addressed to a dog. (If the dog is literate and choosing to pee, you have larger problems!)

I like the little changes that smuggle autumn into summer and spring into winter. I like seeing the first skeleton pop up in a neighbor's window, and the first Christmas tree. I like hearing one song again and again and again all summer long, everywhere, until it becomes steeped inextricably in that specific year's season. I like that something terrible is always being done to the widths and heights of pants so that they will not fit me, specifically. What a treat to see the world made over and over again!

So I feel apologetic, now, for the feeling I have that things used to be better. That is no way to feel when I am trying to introduce you around.

It is not always like this here, I want to say. (I am trying to think of a way to explain this fact that doesn't feel like a lie.) I hate that I am old enough to remember a time when things were better, both big things and little things. I remember when you could query a search engine and get back the result you were seeking. You used to be able to buy a movie and own the movie and watch the movie and every time you watched the movie it would be the same, and nobody would have gone through it unexpectedly and added the word

"Maclunkey!" at a crucial juncture. I remember when *Roe v. Wade* was the law of the land.

The notion that things used to be better in the past had always felt false to me, one of our oldest and most beloved myths; now I know what they have done to our search engines and our Supreme Court.

It is grim to know for sure that things can be better, because they were better and now they aren't. It could make you hopeful, or the opposite, and I want you to be hopeful. I want you to be so many things. Right now, we exist in a state where every possibility is superposed on every other possibility, all fluttering together in wonderful contradictions that will resolve into the miraculous stillness of your actual existence. You will be revealed in time. And I hope, too, that you will use your time to help pull back the curtain on the world I know is still there.

I watch your sister walk and talk and tell me about the world. There she is, planted in time, decades after me but still close enough that we will share the view from our windows for a long time. It is with her that I, myself, feel most like a window. Through me, everyone I've ever known and

loved and lost is peeking out to greet her, in little fragments of song and familiar turns of phrase and the way I fiddle with my chin when I get nervous. I wish I could tell them about you.

But we exist in time. The ice in my coffee has melted as I typed this. Your foot prods me in the side again. I am running late for lunch. Everything has to happen sometime. This is the slice of time we have.

What a miracle to get to look at each other and say, I'm here. I'm here. Here we are together.

Somewhere soon, we will be opening a window. It will be your window, and I hope you mostly like what you see when you look out of it. The rest we can work on; I hope you believe me when I tell you what I can still see. I am so excited to share the view with you, for however long we have.

If you're reading this, I am on parental leave! Take care, everyone, and see you in a few months!

*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)."*

## Haake...

*Continued from page 12*

plicated." During a November interview on the Sean Ryan Show, he said, "The (military) standards have been lowered. I'm straight up just saying we should not have women in combat roles."

The Department of Defense officially opened combat roles to women in 2016, even though women have fought in combat for many years. In 2022, the Army lowered specific parts of the annual physical fitness exam for women and older troops, female and male. The Army Combat Fitness Test still includes dead lift, power throw, push-ups, plank, run, and sprint-drag-carry regular fitness tests. Qualifying for demanding combat positions or specialties such as Army Ranger or Green Beret still requires everyone, regardless of age or gender, to pass the same fitness tests and standards. In fact, all branches of the military

still require women to pass the same strict fitness tests as men for physically challenging specialty jobs.

More than 300,000 US women were deployed to Iraq and Afghanistan even though, at the time of the US-led invasion of Iraq, women were still officially banned from ground combat. As *The Guardian* describes the transition, "...insurgent attacks meant that female troops quickly found themselves under enemy fire — and they began firing back. Twenty years on, what started on that chaotic battlefield in Iraq ended up changing the US armed forces forever."

Sen. Tammy Duckworth, D-Illinois, who flew combat missions in Iraq, commented that, "(Hegseth's) idea that you can exclude women from combat is one that really shows his lack of experience. Let's be real, in modern warfare there is no forward line of troops like you had, where you could keep women."

## Hegseth Confirmed Despite Abysmal Performance.

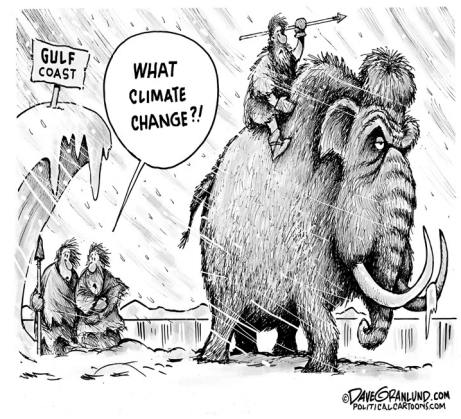
Due to his obvious and dangerous lack of credentials, Hegseth was considered unlikely to pass Senate confirmation until MAGA operatives organized a campaign to threaten any Republican who expressed reservations about him. Mike Davis, who worked the hill to get Brett Kavanaugh confirmed, smirked, "We gave the Senate an attitude adjustment."

Hegseth was confirmed 51-50, despite his abysmal and substandard confirmation performance, with Vice President J.D. Vance casting the tie-breaking vote Jan. 24.

Throughout his hearing, Hegseth punted on all meaningful questions, and repeated that the military had lowered its standards to accommodate women. Expecting confirmation as the least qualified Secretary of Defense in US history, not only is Hegseth

blind to military law, he is blind to irony.

*Sabrina Haake is a left-of-center policy wonk and trial lawyer in Chicago specializing in 1st and 14th Amendment defense. She writes at SabrinaHaake.substack.com.*





# Trump’s Envoy Witkoff on Gaza Deal: ‘Now We Have to Implement it’

By JUAN COLE

ANN ARBOR — President Trump’s Special Envoy to the Middle East, Steve Witkoff, gave an interview with Fox Cable News. Below I will quote him and present a little commentary with further information and context.

Witkoff was asked about a statement by Hamas reported in *The New York Times*: “We’re prepared for a dialogue with America and achieving understandings on everything.”

The Special Envoy replied:

“It’s good if it’s accurate. We were able to demonstrate that President Trump’s policies of peace through strength work. Everybody listens. Getting those three people [Israeli hostages in Gaza] out was a big deal. Four more are coming out, I believe, this weekend. This is a testament to how the world perceives President Trump’s presidency.”

Juan Cole: Although the question was set up regarding Hamas, and the answer implied that Hamas was cowed into finally agreeing to the deal because of the prospect that Trump would be harsh toward it, in actuality Hamas appears to have agreed to Joe Biden’s May 27 Protocol, on which it was based, last summer. It was Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, far-right extremist and Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich, and far, far right extremist and former Minister of National Security Itamar Ben-Gvir who repeatedly thwarted a deal, according to Haaretz. Smotrich even boasted of blocking previous hostage deals, waving around a copy of a letter he said was from Netanyahu promising that the war would not end.

So, Trump strong-arming may have helped the deal happen, but the strong arm was applied to Netanyahu, Ben-Gvir and Smotrich. We know this because Ben-Gvir, the leader of the goose-stepping “Jewish Power” bloc, resigned in a huff when Netanyahu accepted Witkoff’s pressure, and Smotrich, who wants to make Israel into a Jewish version of the Islamic Republic of Iran, said he was only staying on to keep the Right wing in power, despite his rejection of the negotiations.

Witkoff, asked about his interactions on behalf of Trump with leaders in Israel and Doha, Qatar (where indirect negotiations were conducted with Hamas through Qatar and Egypt), replied,

“I said, ‘You’ve got to look at the tweet, look at the truth, look at what he said.’ The words speak for themselves. He

expects a hostage release.

“Remember, we were working on this — though we had nothing to do with the mathematics behind the prisoner release and hostage release. That was set probably 11 or 12 months ago under the so-called May 27th protocol. This was agreed to by Hamas, by the Israelis, and monitored by the United States under the Biden administration.

“That protocol established the mathematics of how many Palestinians in Israeli jails would be released for each hostage coming out. Our job was to speed up the process, which felt like it had bogged down. We were able to get it done, and it doesn’t happen without the President.”

Juan Cole: So Witkoff is saying that Trump’s intervention “speeded the process” at the end. This is plausible. Biden and Antony Blinken let Ben-Gvir and Smotrich play them for fools for an entire year, so it likely was the prospect of Trump’s ire that finally pushed Netanyahu to agree to the May 27 Protocol.

Fox played a clip of Trump saying, “It’s not our war; it’s their war. I’m not confident. I think they are very weakened on the other side. Gaza is like a massive demolition site. That place really has to be rebuilt in a different way.”

Juan Cole: Actually, it was “our war.” The US paid for it, provided the weapons and ammunition in real time, and likely deployed electronic surveillance on behalf of Israel. It was an American war.

Witkoff was then asked whether the ceasefire would hold.

He replied,

“I don’t disagree with the President. The implementation is probably more difficult than the execution of the deal. The execution was a big step — that was the condition precedent. We had to get it done, and we did, thank God. Now, we have to implement it.

“I’ll be going to Israel to be part of an inspection team in the Philadelphia Corridor. Our job is to ensure that people entering the area are not armed and don’t have bad motivations. Implementation is key. If it goes well, we’ll move into Phase Two and get more people out. That’s the President’s directive, and it’s what we are focused on.”

Juan Cole: The issue of the Philadelphi Corridor (not “Philadelphia”) has to do with Egyptian-Israeli relations. It is a narrow strip south of Gaza given to Egypt by the 1979 Camp David Treaty. Netanyahu occupied it last summer and accused Egypt of letting Hamas smuggle arms underneath it through tunnels. No such tunnels, however, have been discovered. Egypt has loudly denounced the seizure and has even darkly hinted that it could mean the end of the Camp David peace accords. It is apparently a mere power play by Netanyahu and his accusations that “people with bad motivations” moved beneath it are baseless.

Asked about the possibility of the Saudis joining the

Abraham Accords and recognizing Israel, Witkoff said,

“It’s been widely reported that there’s talk of a normalization deal. I believe normalization presents an incredible opportunity for the region. It’s the beginning of the end of war and opens the region for investment and growth. Banks won’t have to worry about missiles from groups like the Houthis, Hezbollah, or Hamas targeting infrastructure.

“Normalization is significant for Israel and the region. A condition precedent to normalization was a ceasefire. People needed hope and to believe again. I’d like to think we’ve achieved that, and we’ll build on it. We need to show that violence can stop and that dialogue is possible. If we can do this, everyone will start believing ...

“I think you could get engaged in the region involved. Qatar was enormously helpful in this process. Sheikh Mohammed’s communication with Hamas was indispensable. The UAE is already a part of it. Egypt was also very helpful. We have the opportunity to bring everyone into a better future for the region—more opportunity, more hope. I think we’ve reached an inflection point.”

Juan Cole: The original Abraham Accords conducted by Jared Kushner were deeply flawed because they left out the Palestinians. Indeed, they may have been part of Hamas’s motivations for its attack on Israel of Oct. 7, 2023, since the Hamas leadership was worried about being permanently marginalized and sentenced to eternity in an open-air prison.

Saudi Arabia has repeatedly said publicly that it will not recognize Israel unless there is a concrete and immediate pathway to a Palestinian state. The “condition precedent” for such a thing is therefore not merely a ceasefire in Gaza. It is a Palestinian state.

The same prerequisite would apply to Qatar, which wants the Palestine Authority to take back over Gaza. Because of Qatar’s support for the Syrian rebels, Doha may want an Israeli withdrawal from Syria, as well.

It is, by the way, good news that Witkoff recognizes Qatar’s positive role in the negotiations. The cease-fire wouldn’t have occurred without Doha’s good offices.

Benjamin Netanyahu has spent his political life making sure that the 5.2 million occupied Palestinians remain stateless, and there isn’t any prospect of the sort of Palestinian state of which the Saudis speak as long as he remains prime minister.

Trump has a lot more arm-twisting to do.

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

## Beyond the 1.5°C Threshold: Deepening The Climate Crisis

By N. GUNASEKARAN

The global temperature datasets from the Copernicus Climate Change Service (C3S), NASA and the Met Office have revealed a shocking fact that the global average temperature exceeded 1.5° Celsius above pre-industrial levels for the first time in 2024. It may be recalled that the Paris Agreement, adopted at the Paris summit 2015, pledged to limit global warming below 1.5°C (2.7 Fahrenheit) above pre-industrial levels. This target was established to curb the increasing trend of global warming and to mitigate severe environmental impacts. Exceeding the 1.5°C threshold poses many risks, including the further concentration of greenhouse gases with their associated consequences. The prolonged surpassing of the critical threshold of 1.5°C must be prevented. At this juncture, sustained efforts to reduce greenhouse gas emissions are crucial to avoid further environmental and societal repercussions.

The current climate crisis should be addressed collectively as a common concern of humanity. However, given the global scenario, marked by persistent inequality between nations, advanced countries have a greater responsibility to reduce carbon dioxide emissions. The Group of Seven (G7), comprising the United States, Canada, Japan, Germany, France, the United Kingdom, and Italy were historically the largest emitters of carbon dioxide. They achieved early industrialization and continue to engage in high levels of economic activity. They possess the necessary resources and technologies to reduce emissions and transition to cleaner energy sources.

In contrast, the Global South that includes the countries in Africa, Asia, and Latin America is currently undergoing rapid urbanization and industrialization and their car-

bon dioxide emissions are increasing. But they have fewer resources and limited access to advanced technologies for mitigating their emissions.

Despite the historical reality that climate change is not the creation of developing countries, many of these nations have committed to reducing emissions in exchange for technology transfer and financial assistance. In all negotiations over climate treaties, the G7 countries held an advantageous position consistently. They have defined the agenda, rules, and procedures for implementation. Moreover, the approach to addressing climate change has often focused on the symptoms rather than the root causes. G7 countries have been taking advantage of this flawed approach. In fact, the rich and elite group of countries have largely absolved themselves of significant responsibility for climate change. Moreover, the promise of providing financial support for developing countries by 2035 was a distant and uncertain prospect.

The developed countries who shirked the responsibility for addressing climate change are mainly former colonial powers. Through their historical global dominance and policies of colonial plunder, they have overused the common atmospheric resources in a disproportionate manner. Justice demands that they bear a greater obligation in efforts to reduce carbon dioxide emissions and mitigate the destructive consequences of climate change. However, it should be recognized that the developing and least developed countries share some responsibility in reducing the emissions in spite of their economic underdevelopment, challenges of sustainable development, eradication of poverty and overcoming centuries-old backwardness.

Rapid industrialization by advanced countries contributed to three-quarters of global emissions and the consumption of natural resources. Significant differences exist between G7 countries and the Global South in terms of industrialization and urbanization patterns, as well as their natural resources. The Global South, including the

poorer countries in Asia, represents four-fifths of the global population and accounts for half the GDP. The G7 countries, representing one-fifth of the global population consumed three-quarters of world’s resources in the 1950s, with the US alone consuming 40% of the total. Still, they remain in an advantageous position to exploit the natural resources. According to a report by the Council on Energy, Environment and Water, developed countries might be emitting an additional 3.7 gigatons of CO2 by 2030, representing 38% increase over their reduction targets. This would further aggravate the global climate crisis.

Particularly, Asian countries are more vulnerable to the effects of climate change. People across Asia are already experiencing an increase in disasters, such as more frequent and severe heat waves, rising sea levels and floods. More than 63 million people in East and South Asia have already faced significant losses. Coastal populations in Asia are at greater risk without adequate coastal protection measures.

The only way to reduce global warming is by providing financial support to developing countries to offset their losses due to emission reduction efforts. Climate justice demands that developed countries, as the historically main contributors to the current climate crisis and the largest emitters of greenhouse gases, should take responsibility by supporting developing countries fi-

nancially.

The urgency of the moment requires immediate, large-scale emission reductions. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) has already warned that the 1.5°C warming threshold could become unattainable within this decade without such large-scale reductions. Now, the main concern of the people across the globe is about the fossil-fuel-centric policies of Donald Trump and his ways of prioritizing short-term economic gains. By implementing Trump’s policies, the US would increase its emissions by a billion tons. In such a situation, the target of 1.5°C warming threshold is impossible to achieve.

The developing countries should coordinate their efforts to fructify effective, global climate action. Recently, the BRICS (an intergovernmental organization that includes Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa) countries played a very constructive role in advancing global climate diplomacy, and for sustainable development. The developing countries and least developed countries should unite themselves in BRICS-like formations to exert pressure on the advanced, rich countries. Meanwhile, working people in both developing and developed countries must come together to champion for the urgent cause of saving our planet.

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# Tragic Irony in the Rotunda

By JAMIE STIEHM

Donald Trump won the whole Monopoly game. He never went directly to jail and always passed go. Timid Merrick Garland, the attorney general, was no match, and didn't even buy a railroad.

The Big Tech money boys were literally behind Trump, in obsequious unity as he was sworn in as president Jan. 20 at high noon in the Capitol rotunda.

The leaders of X, Facebook, Amazon, Google and Apple — Elon Musk, Mark Zuckerberg, Jeff Bezos, Sergey Brin and Tim Cook — crammed into the grand sacred space under the dome of the U.S. Capitol. Statues and murals of truly great presidents, heroes of history, were staring from all around.

It would be absurd if it weren't so serious. These five men, billionaires who run the platforms that Americans rely upon for their everyday everything, are telling Trump

he can count on them to be loyal courtiers. Dissent is not an option anymore.

The tragic irony was lost on few. The Capitol rotunda, the inner temple of democracy, was attacked by an armed mob Trump sent four years ago. He schemed to overthrow the 2020 election, which he lost to Joe Biden.

As noted, Trump's victory is complete. The events of Jan. 6, 2021, in which Congress fled the Capitol and 140 police officers were injured, faded from the popular mind and "social" media. So much for the peaceful transfer of power.

John Roberts, U.S. Supreme Court chief justice, administered the oath of office to Trump. He, other members of the Supreme Court and congressional Republicans were all smiles at this disrupter and disturber of the peace taking power again. The hypocrisy is rank.

On his first day in the Oval Office, Trump granted clemency to 1,500 Jan. 6 offenders with a stroke of his Sharpie pen and his scary signature. That includes leaders of the Proud Boys and the Oath Keepers, each convicted of seditious conspiracy and sentenced to 22 and 18 years, respectively. Now these extremist leaders are freed.

A dark thought escapes me: Is Trump expecting them to help him hold onto

power in 2028?

The tragic irony of Trump, a convicted felon (thanks to a New York state judge and jury), erasing years of trials near the Capitol hits home for me. I was in the House of Representatives chamber when we heard the mob coming closer, breaking glass on marble floors, with a list of who they wanted.

Nancy Pelosi and Mike Pence were lucky to get out alive that day.

With a Sharpie stroke, Trump also tried to open the Alaskan Arctic National Wildlife Refuge to oil drilling and withdraw from the Paris Agreement on climate change. I know climate experts who have spent years on both projects.

Trump's cruel idea of abolishing birthright citizenship flies in the face of a country of immigrants. But you'd be wrong to think he doesn't mean any of these "day one" executive orders designed to destroy Joe Biden's legacy.

Wait — it gets worse for all of us who believe in decorum, grace and dignity on Inauguration Day. Never in American history has an incoming president acted so ungraciously to the outgoing president.

Biden, a sporting sort, had to take Trump's wild distortions of the state of the nation, which is actually in pretty good

shape as he turns over the keys. Trump exaggerated the results and message of the election, as is his wont.

But did he have to say "horrible betrayal" to characterize Biden's presidency? Yes, he did.

Now we come to Biden's tragic irony. Like Trump's "I alone" chorus, Biden's defiant ego led him to state that *only he* could defeat Trump. In 2020, he won under extraordinary circumstance. The pandemic prevented him from campaigning. People tired of Trump's haphazard rule.

Biden's pride and refusal to keep his promise to be a bridge to the bench of Democratic talent fell down like a house of bricks on the party, when he showed signs of dementia in the June 27 debate.

Kamala Harris was a default candidate, not battle tested. Summertime was too little, too late for the party to recover from Biden's blow.

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

## Sen. Mullin's Greatest Hits

By BARRY FRIEDMAN

Last month, during the Senate confirmation hearing for Pete Hegseth, the junior Republican senator from Oklahoma, Markwayne Mullin, chastised members of Congress who might have abused women, while forgiving Hegseth, who settled a lawsuit from a woman who claimed he actually had.

For Mullin, it was a Twerp De Force.

"How many Senators have showed up drunk to vote at night?" He asked. "Give me a joke ... Any number of senators here have cheated on their wives, have been forceful with women, have taken drugs."

And here was his dismount:

"We've all made mistakes. I've made mistakes. The only reason why I'm here and not in prison is because my wife loved me, too. I have changed, but I'm not perfect — but I found somebody who thought I was perfect. But just like our Lord and Savior forgave me, my wife's had to forgive me more than once, too."

Give me a joke — really?

OK.

The new secretary of defense, thrice-married Pete Hegseth, was abusing his mistress when he said, "Suck it up, buttercup, Jesus already forgives me."

Too soon?

Like his political lodestar, Tom Coburn, who also promised to spend only three terms in the House — he was not going to be a career politician, though he then spent 10

years in the Senate (apparently that time in government didn't count) — Mullin, too, promised to leave after three terms as representative for Oklahoma's 2nd Congressional District — and then didn't.

"I'm not hiding from that because we did say we're going to serve six years," he said, before adding, "I don't think there's one person that's never changed their mind six years apart from each other or how they would approach things."

Such an orator.

He wasn't hiding from the fact he gave his word, you understand, he just wasn't going to be bound by it, which is really the whole point of giving your word.

Mullin, a plumber by trade, could have said — and I would have been sympathetic — that he wanted to stay in Congress because it's a much better gig representing constituents of the 2nd District than it is cleaning out their pee traps, but then he couldn't have hid behind Jesus, his family, and the then — and now current — president.

Through the years, the musings of Markwayne Mullin could have been a drinking game.

In 2013, after President Obama was re-elected, Mullin told a supporter to grow-up, while simultaneously pouting about having to.

"I believe what you're saying and I don't support this president whatsoever, but ma'am, we lost that. Who would've thought we would ever actually be questioning if we had a natural-born president being president?"

Who? Well, you, actually.

He once reminded Americans in all 56 states about the majesty of our system of governance.

"This country isn't ran by just one indi-

vidual it's ran by four branches, but three branches that are in control of this. As long as those three branches control it, then we all have to figure out how to negotiate."

He has opined on the inherent duplicity in people in workout gear.

So ... I'm buying my groceries ... and I noticed everybody was giving that card. They had these huge baskets, and I realized it was the first of the month. But then I'm looking over, and there's a couple beside me. This guy was built like a brick house. I mean he had muscles all over him. He was in a little tank top and pair of shorts and really nice Nike shoes. And she was standing there, and she was all in shape and she looked like she had just come from a fitness program ... and they go up in front of me and they pay with that card. Fraud. Absolute, 100 percent, all it is fraud ... it's all over the place.

Mullin also doesn't want to be beholden to his constituents, telling them he doesn't need their stinking money.

"You say you pay for me to do this? That's bullshit. I pay for myself. I paid enough taxes before I got here and continue to through my company to pay my own salary. This is a service. No one here pays me to go. This is a service for me, not a career," he said. "I thank God this is not how I make my living."

Speaking of God — and when doesn't he? — he thinks the "separation" in the separation of church and state shouldn't be applicable to the state.

"If we want to put prayer back in our schools, our communities have to stand up; the churches have to stand up; the parents have to stand up. They have got to say, 'No, we want it in our schools.' We're going to do what we want to do because it's our schools.

"There's only one President and that's me."

"Eminent Domain," Susie says, standing before Trump and grinning.

"Em what?" says Trump, shaking his head.

"Eminent Domain. You know, the 5th Amendment—about government taking over private property if it needs it to shore up national security?"

Trump nods slowly, sighing.

"The 5th Amendment," Susie continues. "The one between the 4th and the 6th?"

"Oh, uh, sure," Trump says, "but where are you going with this?"

"This is how it works," Susie says. "The government can seize private property, provided the owner receives 'just compensation.'"

"You mean we could seize all his property, but would have to pay him for what we take?"

"Well, yes, but if you have a good attorney you could probably pay him pennies on the dollar. According to what I've read, he's worth about \$417 billion. What percentage do you think would be just?"

"Nothing!"

"You can't do that. You have to come up with something. Your attorney, Blanchard, can help, but it will be a pittance, I'm sure. Of course, it's up to you, but 1% seems more than generous for everything.

"We can condemn all his property and say we need it for oil drilling, more Air Force bases, more prisons, especially on the border. Of course, he will complain."

"He can sue all he wants," sneers Trump, "but my Supreme Court will cover the skin on my back."

When Trump tells Musk what he plans to do, Musk explodes in an Asperger's ketamine-fueled rage. "You can't do this!"

"Watch me!" hollers Trump. "You need to go back to your sh\*t hole South Africa. You've already sucked enough wealth out of my country."

Musk flees to Moscow and sobs to Putin, "I worshipped him. I gave him billions to make him President and now he does this?"

"Stop Crybaby Elon, мой маленький кумкват," says Putin, patting him on the back.

"No skin off nose. He pays. Matter of time."

*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." See RosieSorenson.com*



# What Donald Trump Has Revealed About Our Country

The rise of Donald Trump from a widely publicized, if failed, business boss to a two-term President has taught us a great deal about our society. He will teach us even more as his dictatorial regime, starting Jan. 20, 2025, further unravels what is left of the civilized norms, our democratic institutions, and the purported rule of law.

Democracy and the rule of law rest for their proper functioning on countervailing checks and balances and institutions that further a just society. Look at how these bulwarks of democracy have enfeebled themselves to permit the ascension of Trump and Trumpism operating above the law and securing a hard autocracy that is slouching toward fascism.

1. The utter failure of Congress to safeguard and use its exclusive constitutional authorities vis-à-vis the executive branch is shameful. These include the declare war clause, the appropriations power, confirmation, information duties, critical oversight of the executive and judicial branches and the responsibility to provide wide access to the citizenry from whom it receives its delegated power by “We the People.”

The decline of Congress into a rubber stamp has reached a disgraceful depth where it will not enforce its subpoenas (over 125 Congressional subpoenas during Trump’s first term were defied with impunity) and will do nothing to curb rampant violations of statutes, the Constitution and treaties by administrations of both Parties. However, Trump’s defiance of Congress and his usurpation of Congressional authority have been more overt, brazen and daily than his predecessors, including active

and regular obstruction of justice by his White House.

2. The crumbling of the Democratic Party, the sole opposition to Trump’s GOP in an enforced two-party duopoly, has had a decades-long history of decay. For over 50 years, the Democratic Party has allowed campaign money to increasingly erode its fealty to working families, distancing itself ever more from the working class – the base of FDR’s repeated electoral victories. This has debased the recruitment of Party leaders to levels below mediocrity.

These “leaders” managed to turn a national party into a regional party abandoning half the country (the red states) including six mountain and prairie states that used to have Democratic Senators. It is hard to win national elections for the Presidency and workable majorities in Congress with such a decisive handicap.

This ditch that the Party dug for itself has led to scapegoating its losses onto the tiny Green Party, while telling its doubting voters that they have nowhere to go. “Don’t you know how bad the Republicans are?” goes the immolating refrain.

3. The labor unions – weakened by job-exporting corporate globalization, automation, and weak, entrenched leadership have tied unconditionally its fortunes to the corporate Democratic Party which gives workers little or nothing in return. No labor law reform to facilitate organization, no real push for a livable wage, no rigorous regulation of workplace health and safety and little protection against corporate theft of private pensions. Lately, the AFL-CIO unions have been further inhibited by more

of their members becoming Republican voters. Labor leaders have not developed a counter strategy.

4. The legal profession, its bar associations and law schools – ideally the first responders against lawlessness – have been compromised by lucrative corporate clientele and the prospects of such riches. We have tested these institutions with repeated challenges to step up against government illegalities, to no avail. To say they are AWOL is to engage in impermissible understatement.

5. The organized church has traditionally been the custodians of the norms and standards that bind members of society together. The “Golden Rule” is one of the greatest precepts ever dedicated to guide human and institutional interactions. The Ten Commandments have served a similar secular purpose to the extent they are observed. Trump as the worst destroyer of norms in American history has chronically violated these principles in his personal, business and political careers.

When I asked the National Council of Churches why they don’t take the kinds of stands they took during the civil rights period in the 1960s, their reply was that they were deterred from such positions by the sizable minority of evangelical churches within their membership. Compare this to the approach of the Courageous Baptist Jimmy Carter!

6. The citizenry, as the ultimate savior of a just, practicing democracy, has been neglected and exploited by corporate power and indifference. There is a toll exacted on people who were never given a civic education and civic experience in elementary and secondary school. The citizenry pays the price of powerlessness when up against abusive treatment from corporate employers and corporate lobbyists. These same corporations envelop people in consuming spectator sports, mass corporate entertainment on their screens and now fingertip addictions to various forms of gambling – not exactly the pre-

conditions for a thriving town hall turnout or a smart voting citizenry doing their pre-election homework.

Couple these dulling interfaces with the desperate daily effort of many people to pay their bills, the constant indebtedness, so many chronic illnesses and the drain of home health care in the only Western country without universal health insurance and one sees how little discretionary time or self-regard is left to perform civic duties.

What local and national citizen advocacy groups there are in the fields of action are impeded by being largely ignored by the mass media and excluded by elected and appointed officials (See The Incommunicados report at incommunicadoswatch.org).

Now is the time for assessing the assets of the citizenry and putting them to work. We still have the sovereign power, still outnumber the opponents of democracy by a wide margin, still can rise to control those 535 members of Congress who can be summoned to citizen-shaped town meetings, still can see one percent of really active citizenry representing majority opinion, often liberal and conservative coalitions, turning tide after tide in Congress and much more.

For operating details, strategies and success stories, I can only refer you to three of my books: “Unstoppable: The Emerging Left-Right Alliance to Dismantle the Corporate State,” “Breaking Through Power: It’s Easier Than We Think,” and “Let’s Start the Revolution: Tools for Displacing the Corporate State and Building a Country that Works for the People.” (In addition, also see the unprecedented 2016 Constitution Hall proceedings at BreakingThroughPower.org).

Yes, friends, like other worthwhile endeavors, an operating democracy takes work, but when it works its blessings are very impressive.

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# TED RALL

## Trump Grabs at a Presidency of Intentionality

There are two kinds of leaders: managers and revolutionists.

Most American presidents are managers. Managers have small ambitions, often so small as to be immeasurable. They may or not think that the organization that they’re taking over requires a few nips or tucks, but they believe that the fundamentals are sound. The main ambition of these incrementalists is to attain their position. The moment their buttocks sink into the big chair behind the big desk, they have fulfilled their biggest goal.

It is easy to identify a managerial president during a time of crisis. No matter how bad things get and how angry voters become, managers are loathe to change much. They govern as though continuity were a given.

Jimmy Carter and Barack Obama, both consummate technocrats, assumed the nation’s highest office during periods of economic upheaval. Yet they did not follow the example of Franklin D. Roosevelt, a revolutionist, by introducing major plans or anti-poverty bills to try to alleviate inflation or high unemployment. George H.W. Bush, whose decades in Washington inclined him to even less ambition than outsiders like Carter and Obama, had no discernible plans for the country before moving into the White House in 1989 beyond, like Peter Sellers, just being there. We were mired in recession throughout his term and he did nothing.

Whatever you think about him or his politics, give this to Donald Trump: he has launched his second term with the biggest intentionality of any president since Ronald Reagan. Clearly having learned from his ex-

perience following his first surprise win that political capital ebbs away after inauguration as quickly as a new car loses value, and possibly inspired by the historical benchmark of FDR’s first 100 days, Trump is coming out of the gate with grandiose gestures intended to signal great ambitions that deliver on his long list of dramatic campaign promises.

The crisis at the U.S.-Mexico border became a top issue for Trump in 2024. And so, within hours of his restoration, he declared an emergency that allowed him to send in military troops, shut down the app used by asylum applicants, declared drug cartels terrorists, tried to end birthright citizenship and, for good measure, demanded that the Gulf of Mexico be renamed. Much of these moves are objectively stupid – birthright citizenship is guaranteed by the Constitution, drug runners aren’t terrorists, the number of unauthorized border crossings fell precipitously after Joe Biden basically closed it last summer and let’s not even think about the “Gulf of America” – but you can’t say they’re the small-bore triangulation crap Bill Clinton picked up from Dick Morris, like lower prescription drug prices for seniors, lower student loan interest rates and kneecapping Sister Souljah. And mass deportations are still on the way. If you voted for Trump due to the border crisis, you’re happy.

Why do we have more managerial than revolutionary presidents? Revolution is hard.

We are barely weeks into Trump 2.0 yet the challenges are already starting to become apparent. The president’s attempt to McKinsey-ize the federal government into fiscal austerity, the non-actual-departmental Department of Government Efficiency, lost one of its touted pair of pet billionaires less than seven hours after the inauguration when Vivek Ramaswamy pulled out, supposedly to explore a quixotic run for Ohio governor.

Trump can’t help the fact that personnel are unpredictable. But he is responsible for a major oversight in whatever vision he may be pursuing: he has yet to articulate a unified theme for the sweeping

changes he presumably intends. FDR did this with characteristic effectiveness in his 1933 inaugural address. Confronting high unemployment at the nadir of the Depression, he said: “Our greatest primary task is to put people to work.”

“This is no unsolvable problem if we face it wisely and courageously,” Roosevelt continued. “It can be accomplished in part by direct recruiting by the Government itself, treating the task as we would treat the emergency of a war, but at the same time, through this employment, accomplishing greatly needed projects to stimulate and reorganize the use of our national resources.” Much of what followed (the Civilian Conservation Corps, the Public Works Administration and the Tennessee Valley Authority) fell into the justification for direct job creation by the federal government and helped sell it to the public and Congress.

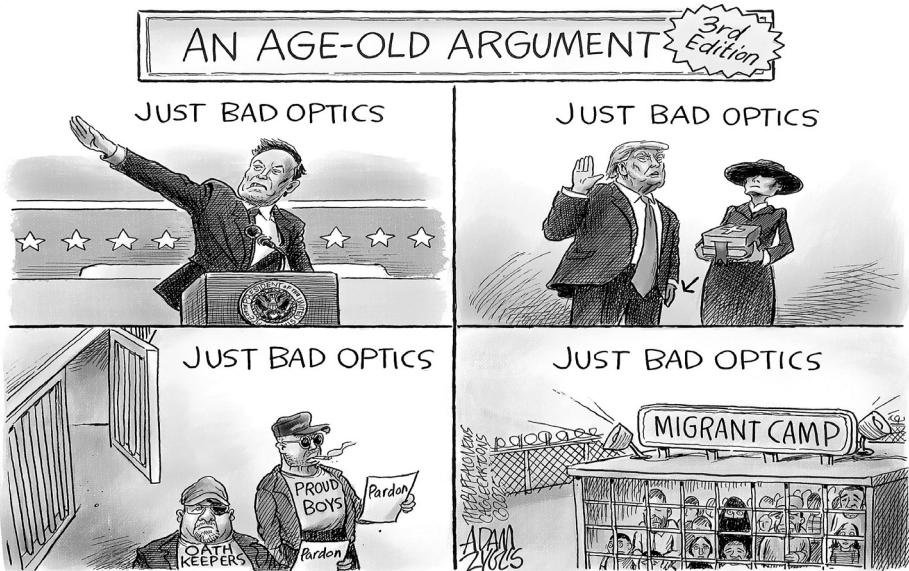
To the extent that Trumpism is similar to 20th century fascism, it’s that it’s an ideology devoid of internal consistency beyond its point of origin, Donald Trump’s mouth. Under Nazi Germany’s “Führer Principle,” Hitler not only enjoyed the full power of law by making an utterance, but was considered to have created a cogent ideology simply because whatever he believed and

ordered came from him. This was, of course, irrational to an extreme and internally inconsistent. For a time, under absolute totalitarian dictatorship, however, Hitler’s cult was sustainable.

Crippled and fake as our democracy is, Americans are still a harder sell than mid-century Germans. In the not so long run, whether Trump succeeds will depend on whether he is able to compose a credible and consistent narrative of what he’s attempting to achieve, as Ronald Reagan did when he downgraded the influence of liberalism within government and elevated the glories of individualism. Saying that everything you do puts America first simply because you said it, won’t cut it.

After decades of managerial presidents who refused to engage with how angry and miserable most of us ordinary citizens have been, it will be interesting, and not a little frightening, to watch this would-be revolutionist.

*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](http://rall.com)), Twitter @tedrall*





# Los Angeles is a Wake-Up Call for the West—Especially Durango

By DAVE MARSTON

After fierce winds whipped fire out of brush-covered hills on Jan. 7, entire Los Angeles neighborhoods burned down. Within a few days, over 12,000 homes and businesses had been destroyed as flames ringed the city. And it's not over yet.

The photos of smoldering neighborhoods and distraught residents are horrific and shocking. Could they also presage the kind of wildfire that might overtake Durango, a town of about 20,000 in southwestern Colorado?

It's a question worth asking. Local fire experts say Los Angeles and Durango are similar in topography. Durango doesn't experience the hurricane-force Santa Ana winds that pushed the LA fires, but it does often have sustained winds of 30 mph and gusts over 40 mph, which can vault burning embers great distances.

Perhaps more importantly, the big city and the town share the same pattern of development.

Angelenos have long coveted proximity to wooded canyons for their homes. Durango residents crave the same access to nature, pushing housing into canyons. In both places, million-dollar homes have been built among flammable trees.

Other similarities include lax regulations that fail to dissuade wildland builders. Then there's the question of storing enough water and having sufficient water pressure to fight blazes. Los Angeles ran out of water fast because attacks on simultaneous fires quickly drew down supplies.

Durango uses around four million gallons daily and has two weeks of storage in its Terminal Reservoir. But if the city ran a dozen or more high-flow hydrants, water pressure would plummet in days. Here's a suggestion: Prioritize building the \$11-million-dollar, 36-inch proposed water line from Lake Nighthorse, a nearby reservoir, to the city system, boosting raw water storage to four months.

Durango has a history of large wildfires. In 2002, the 73,000-acre Missionary Ridge Fire torched 46 structures. The town suffered another blow in 2018 when wildfire ringed the town, burning 54,130 acres.

Randy Black, Durango Fire Protection District Fire Chief, is quick to point out that not one structure was lost in 2018, thanks to a coordinated effort by local and state crews. "We got lucky," he said. "If the June 2018 fire happened later in the season, resources wouldn't have been available." Also key were carefully forged relationships among regional firefighting resources, Black said, along with extensive planning.

One hundred eighty employees and volunteers staff the Durango Fire District, which covers both the city and a 325-square-mile swath of the county. Black said they focus on what he calls the most important aspect of firefighting—mitigation meant to keep wildland fires from starting in the first place.

That means working to create fire breaks between wildlands and urban areas and removing fuels within the urban core. The town participates by thinning wooded areas on its perimeter, and federal agencies manage both thinning and controlled burns.

"If you don't do the fire mitigation, you run the risk of whole neighborhoods catching on fire," Black said.

Another similarity between Los Angeles and Durango is that both share difficulty in getting fire insurance. Some insurers have pulled out of California entirely, and when the

Durango Fire District built its new in-town firehouse last year, Black said, no one would insure the structure at first. Colorado insurance companies had just weathered 10 years of property losses to wildland fire, and they were loath to take chances.

Colorado's new, state-backed Fair Plan offers a last resort for home insurance, but it's bare-bones coverage of homes worth up to \$750,000. With building costs in Durango now estimated to be \$500 to \$700 per square foot, losing a 2,000-square-foot home to wildfire means rebuilding a much smaller house.

I've talked to many wildland fire experts about how towns can fight these multiple, destructive blazes. Their suggestions boil down to three basics:

First, make building requirements stringent for any home proposed in wildlands.

Second, get residents involved. The Durango Fire District offers homeowners free assessments of fire risk, and it also advises the creation of three zones around a house: Remove anything flammable within five feet, include a turnaround big enough for fire vehicles, and allow only widely spaced trees and mown grass out to 100 feet.

A third step is "hardening" existing structures with fire-proof building materials. Black, who built his own house, said he chose cement siding and a metal roof.

If homeowners take these steps, say insurers, they stand a better chance of keeping their insurance policies. At least 29 people have lost their lives in the Los Angeles fires as of January 27. Their deaths are a wakeup call to everyone living in the West—especially Durango.

*Dave Marston is the publisher of Writers on the Range, writer-sontherange.org, an independent nonprofit dedicated to lively discussion about the West. He lives in Durango, Colorado.*

## The Pleasures of Literate Police Mysteries (*Take 2*)

By ROB PATTERSON

A journalistic peer and fellow lover of mysteries took me to task when I posted a rave on Facebook about the TV series "Bosch" for not having read its source: Michael Connelly's novels about Los Angeles police detective Hieronymus "Harry" Bosch. I thank him for swatting me upside the head with a nerf bat. Or maybe it was a Zen master's brickbat ... No matter. It was the urgent revelation I needed.

My reading can be like a winding path through verdant woodlands during which, at times, I come across a loamy glade and comfortably linger with the works of a single author as my main focus for a while. With Connelly, it's really the first time I've dived into a substantive mystery series from book one. (I'm not counting a partial trip through Sue Grafton's lightweight but fun alphabetical series that petered out about halfway through.)

As I write this, I just finished the eighth

of Connelly's Bosch books. Also read the first two of his Lincoln Lawyer books about defense lawyer Mickey Haller.

Connelly joins the pantheon of mystery writers whose work is redolent with the pungent sense of place that is the often-devilish City of Angels. He channels Raymond Chandler's literacy, Joseph Wambaugh's police-procedural realism and Joseph Ellroy's dark and strange urban back alleys. And brings his own gifts to the muse's mix such as a journalistic attention to detail and a keen authorial voice plus a god-like magic for breathing full life into his characters.

Literarily, he has proven himself a master of the form that largely germinated in pulp magazines. The detective novel has since blossomed over the years into a major book publishing genre and, at its finest, a place of superb writing and storytelling. *Publisher's Weekly* says Connelly "comes as close as anyone to being today's Dostoyevsky of crime literature" amidst the reams of deserved praise as well as millions of books sold.

He's a former crime reporter for the *Los Angeles Times*, and his stories unfold like long-form investigative journalism. Bosch is relentless in his pursuit of truth wherever it may take him, be it the depraved criminal underworld, the lofty realms of LA's wealth-

iest, or the top offices of the LAPD. The author's gift for complex plots with stunning twists and surprises keeps the reader engaged if not addicted to his stories.

"Bosch" the television character and series and its "Bosch Legacy" sequel draw from yet are different from the fiction. I compare it in a way to the James Ellroy book and movie of "L.A. Confidential," which differ yet still deliver the parable through differing stories, albeit with shared elements and character. The TV Bosch, Titus Welliver, has etched himself so skillfully into the the character that I see him in the books even though Connelly — who is an executive producer of the shows — describes him differently. The show also amplifies Bosch's love of bebop jazz, a touch I enjoy.

Connelly's "Lincoln Lawyer" series has also been transformed to film and TV. First in an enjoyable 2011 movie starring Matthew McConaughey, then even more so as a series screening for two seasons on Netflix, with a third season on the way about attorney Mickey Haller.

The author also has a series following LAPD detective Renée Ballard, which further amplifies his gift for writing rich female characters. Bosch shows up in both the Ballard and Haller books, adding more interest for Connelly fans, which includes me and

my hope to read all his books.

It all adds up to Connelly being not just the mystery man of the moment but a multimedia juggernaut who offers mystery buffs as well as readers in general. Crack open the covers and dive in! Literary splendors await.

### *Populist Picks*

**BOOK:** "Charlie's Good Tonight" by Paul Sexton — Modesty, generosity and an appreciation for such fine things as Saville Row men's fashions, Arabian horses and classic cars mark the life of Rolling Stones drummer Charlie Watts, whose lifestyle and personal manner were far removed from the rebellious decadence that was his band's trademark. A superb bio of the jazz fanatic whose rock'n'roll backbeat set the standard for the genre's rhythms.

**BOOK:** "Face It" by Debbie Harry: The lead singer of the post-punk pop band Blondie traces the arc of her life at the cutting edge of bohemian outsider culture with eloquence, honesty, wise self understanding and irresistible charm.

*Rob Patterson is a music and entertainment writer in Austin, Texas. Email robpatterson054@gmail.com.*

## An Emerging Environmental Proletariat?

By SETH SANDRONSKY

Awareness of eco-social conditions in the United States is growing as the Los Angeles wildfires spread death and destruction. This disaster, for example, comes on the heels of Hurricane Helene that tore through southern Appalachia last September. The Earth System and people are in trouble.

Weather-related loss of lives and property is fast becoming the new normal. Just ask the home insurers fleeing the Golden State's wildfires. Profit is the motive for their move away.

Further, damaging weather events shape human consciousness. People experience and see the increasing pattern of torrential rains and raging wildfires. These disastrous changes in weather patterns are the toxic outcomes from the economics and politics of accumulating capital over every other consideration.

As wage repression the past 40 years worsens living and working conditions for the American public, a new study reveals what some call progressive views. I refer to policies and politics that favor building public health, a broad category, versus amassing wealth, the actions of monopoly corporations that dominate the economy, from Big Energy to Big Pharma and Big Tech (a partial list).

"The US electorate is open to policy agendas that reduce dependence on fossil fuels (e.g., through limits) while improving citizens' quality of life. Notable examples include universal health care as a human right, accessible to everyone, regardless of employment or socioeconomic status,

and reduced working hours as a tool for promoting well-being."

Here is the link to "Public support for degrowth policies and sufficiency behaviours in the United States: A discrete choice experiment": <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0921800924003434>

Human beings and their relationship to each other and the earth are fundamental. That runs counter to the logic of a global system that is cooking the planet in carbon emissions. President Donald J. Trump captures such a drive in his phrase "drill, baby, drill," more coarse than President Barack Obama bragging about his role in the growing excavation of fossil fuels stateside.

There's a nascent opponent to the profit motive driving petro-capitalism. In "The Dialectics of Ecology" (Monthly Review Press, 2024), John Bellamy Foster, an environmental sociologist, author and editor of *Monthly Review*, uses the following definition of who can transform the social order to improve the Earth System and people's lives. Meet the environmental proletariat, a "revolutionary humanity based in the working population," he writes.

Revolution is, of course, the normal operation for the system of global capitalism. It is constantly revolutionizing how people live and work. Look at how corporations grow our food, with toxic chemicals and pollutants, negatively impacting human health, a stark contrast to past farming practices.

On that note, the LA wildfires rage as the threat of a bird flu pandemic persists in and out of California. Georgia's Department of Agriculture just announced a suspension of all poultry exhibitions, shows, swaps, meets and sales due to the detection of a case of Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza at a commercial poultry producer. Agribusiness, eu-

phemistically called the industry, is placing the public at risk of death and illness via the politics of capturing the regulatory oversight process that is necessary to protect public health.

The system is designed to produce profits, not healthy humans. What could go wrong nationally under the second presidential term of Donald J. Trump?

Politics also happens between elections and judicial/legislative decisions. The frame of equating democracy with voting alone is past its due date. An alternative is movement politics, the enemy of the two major political parties.

Establishment politics generates an inactive citizenry. People demobilized lack political power to make progressive changes. Anti-social media under the control of Big Tech amplifies that process of depoliticization, the opposite of democratization, a progressive process. .

There are few things more difficult than working with other people towards a common purpose of equality and sustainability. Politically mobilizing and organizing tests people's abilities and capacities to keep, to borrow an apt phrase from the black freedom movement, their eyes on the prize. Recall that the existence of chattel slavery in the US was the normal of its time until it wasn't.

Chattel slavery ended because of people's actions. People, united, can win such major changes in the social order, once again.

As 2025 begins, the Earth System is weeping. The signs are many. Now is not the time to ignore that distress.

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# Euthanasia Takes a Holiday: Is There Room for ‘Room’ at Christmastime and Beyond?

Whereas in 1934 Paramount released “Death Takes a Holiday,” starring Frederic March and co-written by playwright Maxwell Anderson, 90 years later, smack dab in the holiday season Sony Pictures Classics has unleashed a movie about death in Los Angeles and New York. In Spanish director/co-writer Pedro Almodóvar’s “The Room Next Door,” former combat correspondent Martha (Tilda Swinton) is stricken by stage-three cervical cancer and undergoing an experimental treatment. A longtime friend Martha hasn’t seen for years, Ingrid (Julianne Moore), is an author, whose latest book tour has taken her back to Manhattan.

There, the onetime colleagues at the same magazine reconnect. You know how it is with old friends – soon, Ingrid and Martha pick up where they left off and it’s almost like years hadn’t gone by without them seeing one another. When it becomes clear to Martha that the innovative immunotherapy care she’s receiving is unsuccessful, the shutterbug who’d covered war for *The New York Times* and was an eyewitness to death countless times, decides to take matters into her own hands and stare the Grim Reaper right in the eyes (or eye sockets, as the case might be).

To do so, Martha – who is estranged from her own daughter (the preternaturally talented Swinton also plays her main character’s own daughter in some scenes) – lobbies Ingrid to become part of her elaborate death with dignity

plan, eventually convincing her to relocate to a rented house near Woodstock. At Upstate New York, Ingrid encounters Damian (John Turturro), a former lover and prominent climate crisis soothsayer who happens to have a nearby speaking engagement. Back in the day, Damian had also been a romantic partner of Martha’s. Will sparks fly again between Damian and Ingrid? Or will he bring Martha back to life with some sexual healing? Perhaps, if “The Room Next Door” was directed by a straight, Hollywood helmer, the movie, adapted from Sigrid Nunez’s 2020 novel “What Are You Going Through,” might have moved in a different direction.

Be that as it may (or may not), Damian’s dire, doom and gloom ruminations about global warming also express Almodóvar’s apparent preoccupation with death. Once the *enfant terrible* of Spanish cinema, with movies such as the eccentric ‘80s’ hits “Women on the Verge of a Nervous Breakdown” and “Tie Me Up! Tie Me Down!,” at 74, Almodóvar seems as if he is confronting his own mortality with “The Room Next Door’s” meditation on the final curtain.

Known, like George Cukor before him, as “a women’s director,” who featured sensuous actresses such as Penelope Cruz in films like 2006’s “Volver,” “The Room Next Door” has lots of dialogue, especially between Ingrid and Martha, as they contemplate you-know-what. Some may find all the palaver to be stagey, others may consider it to be insightful. In this sense “Room” recalls Almodóvar’s 2002 “Talk to Her,” with a philosophical tone and elegiac edge. Swinton, who starred in Almodóvar’s 2020 short “The Human Voice,” about abandonment, delivers a deeply etched portrait as a human facing the end (as must we all), and wrestling to do so on her own terms.

A prolific, protean British thespian, in 2008 Swinton struck Oscar gold in the Best Supporting Actress category for “Michael Clayton.” Moore likewise turns in a stellar, finely delivered performance in “Room” – she’s previously been nominated four times in that category and in 2015 won Best Actress for “Alice.” This may be among Turturro’s best roles in years, although he may not have had enough screen time in “The Room Next Door” to get an Academy Award nom, which also eluded his female co-stars this year.

Swinton did receive a Golden Globe Best Actress nomination for “Room,” as did her fellow Brit, Kate Winslet, for

portraying a real-life war photographer Lee Miller in “Lee.” (Since 2018’s “A Private War,” starring Rosamund Pike as the real-life Marie Colvin, there has been a mini-vogue of films featuring female combat photographers, including Kirsten Dunst and Cailee Spaeny as fictitious photojournalists in 2024’s action-packed “Civil War.”)

The 107-minute “The Room Next Door,” which is Almodóvar’s first English language feature, has a variety of other plot threads. There are flashbacks to a Vietnam War-related story; mother-daughter relationships are explored, as are the dark web and the issue of the law versus ethics (often the two are, at best, very distantly related, if at all). A blast from the past is a recurring theme – with the reappearance of Ingrid, Damian, etc., in this film that is, at least in part, about how our pasts haunt our present-day lives, shaping how we’ve lived them.

This is an excellently acted drama about a very serious subject – death, and how we face it. I fear I don’t confront others’ demises directly and well, just recently losing my brother-in-law and a friend of 46 years, painter Martin Charlot; I don’t think I acquitted myself with valor. However, although cinematographer Eduard Grau suffuses many scenes with paint from a brightly colored cinematic palette, to be candid the Christmas/Hanukkah/Kwanzaa season seemed like the least likely time of the year to open this movie about the final bow, such a downbeat topic.

I realize that the Dec. 20 release in L.A. and N.Y. of “The Room Next Door,” which won the Golden Lion at the Toronto International Film Festival, was so this film could be in Oscar contention, but still, that was the wrong time for a movie about you-know-what. Be that as it may, the movie was completely snubbed by the Academy anyway. However, it opened in select cities Jan. 10 and went nationwide Jan. 17; after the holidays the theme of mortality may have been more receptively received and there may have been more room for “Room,” as Almodóvar’s latest thought-provoking work richly deserves, even if it didn’t get any Oscar noms.

*Ed Rampell is a film historian and critic based in Los Angeles. Rampell is the author of “Progressive Hollywood, A People’s Film History of the United States” and he co-authored “The Hawaii Movie and Television Book,” now in its third edition. This first appeared at hollywoodprogressive.com.*

# Why Did the US Block a Canadian Professor From His Own Book Event?

*Nathan Kalman-Lamb was barred entry into the US. This is a harbinger of the dark political future that Trump is ushering in.*

Over the weekend before the inauguration of Donald Trump, creepy oligarchs, Proud Boys, Jan. 6 Capitol raiders, and other far-right detritus formed a revanchist ooze that engulfed Washington, D.C.

Friday evening, Jan. 17, was supposed to offer a political respite. I was set to interview two authors at the famed Politics & Prose bookstore in Washington, D.C., about a topic dear to readers of this column: the moral emptiness of the NCAA.

Nathan Kalman-Lamb and Derek Silva, both professors in Canada, have written a provocative book called “The End of College Football.” What a temporary relief it would be to talk about the courage of the people speaking out against the rank exploitation of young athletes.

There was one problem: The US denied Kalman-Lamb entry. Kalman-Lamb had woken up at 2:30 a.m. in Fredericton, the capital city of New Brunswick, to catch his flight to Montreal, where he planned to transfer to D.C. But in Montreal, he had no idea what was about to happen as he approached customs: “I experienced something I have never had happen nor witnessed before: An airport employee strode forward to intercept me before I could enter the line.”

They had been waiting for him.

The employee pulled Kalman-Lamb away and made him sit to the side. Kalman-Lamb’s questions as to why this was happening and concerns about missing his flight were ignored.

When the airport employee returned, the person was accompanied by an officer with the US Department of Homeland Security, who told Kalman-Lamb that not only was he barred from entering the United States, but if he ever wanted to get into the country in the future, he’d have to go to the US consulate for a formal interview to receive a visa. “Although I repeatedly asked him why I had been denied,” Nathan told me, “he claimed first that it wasn’t a good place to talk about it in public in front of people, and then when I said by all means we can do it somewhere else, he said he wasn’t authorized to tell me.”

Kalman-Lamb then approached US immigration for some clarity as to whether there was a misunderstanding about the nature of the trip. The Canadian Border Patrol, he said, then “began screaming at and berating me, calling over a Quebec police officer, and threatening me with arrest. I was marched back to the Air Canada desk and told if I came up to immigration again I would be arrested. They spoke very abusively towards me for an extended period, even though I continuously assured them I understood and would not try to talk further.”

Then Kalman-Lamb was told that Air Canada wouldn’t reimburse his ticket, and he would need to pay \$650 to return home. If he took any alternative means of transportation, he would again be at risk for arrest. This turned out to be an empty threat, and Kalman-Lamb eventually made it home by other means, spending most of the hours in transit trying to figure out what the hell had happened.

“I have some theories,” he explained. “My strongest guess is that it is because I have been reasonably outspoken in my critiques of the genocide being perpetrated in Gaza. As a consequence, I was listed by Canary Mission as an antisemite, a listing that is prominent when someone Googles my name. I also was the moderator of a keynote panel at the NASSS [North American Society for the Sociology of Sport] conference in Chicago in October about the relationship between the genocide and sport. My guess is that those facts, in conjunction with the proximity to the inauguration, caused me to be flagged.”

This certainly could have happened because of Canary Mission, which is a powerful, well-connected McCarthyite smear organization that brands people critical of the Israeli occupation as “anti-Jewish.” Its mission is to use fear of being labeled as antisemitic to silence critics. There could be new immigration restrictions aimed at anyone willing to call Is-

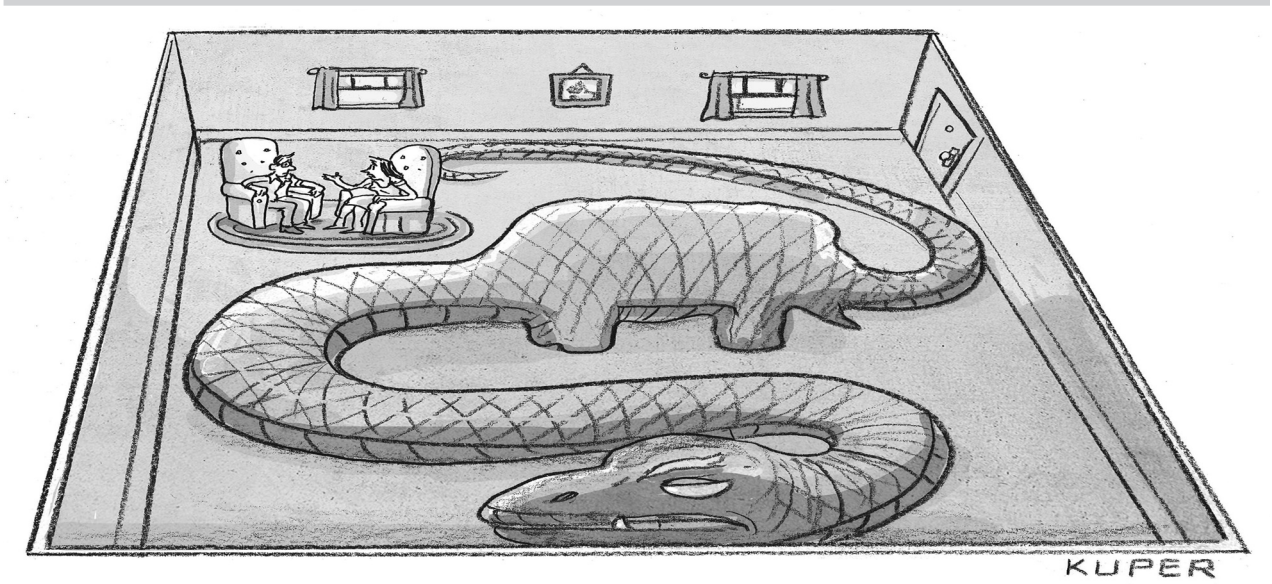
rael’s actions in Gaza genocidal, and the determination of who can enter the country could increasingly be left to groups like Canary Mission. Another possibility is that Kalman-Lamb was blocked from entering the US because of a new algorithmic enemies list aimed at “outside agitators.”

Personally, I’d like to think that moneyed boosters at Ohio State and Notre Dame, so threatened by Kalman-Lamb and Silva’s work (perhaps they read their piece in *The Nation* calling for the abolition of college football) that they made some sniveling calls to hurt our event. (Probably not, although these boosters have their hands on some powerful levers.)

But the root of the problem (and I believe that in this coming political era we need to explain the root causes of all that is hurtling toward us) is the borders themselves—these sites of social control and violence. Kalman-Lamb said to me, “Discriminatory migration laws, policies, and practices are also deployed to prevent those viewed as racially and/or politically undesirable from contaminating the purported purity of the nation. The bottom line is this: No one should ever be treated as illegal, and human beings all deserve the right to move freely across the world.”

As for the event itself, it was a smashing success, with terrific energy. Kalman-Lamb’s co-author, Derek Silva, made the many injustices that pervade college football real for the crowd. But Kalman-Lamb’s absence was a stark reminder that all the work we do going forward—whether it’s seeking justice for college athletes or union rights at a coffee shop—now exists in a dark political context that we are going to have to prepare for and navigate.

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“Can we still even refer to it as ‘the elephant in the room’?”



## AMY GOODMAN



The bigotry embedded in Trump's plans to 'Make America Great Again' is stark — purging people of color and LGBTQIA people from public life.

# Trump's Attack on Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Provokes a Grassroots Backlash

This year, the presidential inauguration took place on the federal holiday honoring Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. President Trump fully exploited the opportunity, hijacking King's memory to advance his agenda. In his inaugural address, Trump took immediate aim at diversity, equity and inclusion, or DEI. The bigotry embedded in Trump's plans to "Make America Great Again" is stark — purging people of color

and LGBTQIA people, not only from employment in the federal government, but from public life. But people have fought for too long, and too many have died, in the fight for equality.

"Diversity, Equity and Inclusion" refers to a system of policies and practices that promote fair treatment, full participation, and full access to employment and opportunities for all, especially for people from historically marginalized communities. Trump is, in effect, attempting with the stroke of a pen to undo over 60 years of hard-won progress in overcoming racism, sexism and other forms of bigotry.

"Today is Martin Luther King Day," Trump said in his inaugural speech in the Capitol Rotunda, one of the only factually accurate statements he made. He went on, "In his honor, we will strive together to make his dream a reality. We will make his dream come true."

Moments later, though, he pledged, "This week, I will also end the government policy of trying to socially engineer race and gender into every aspect of public and private life. We will forge a society that is colorblind and merit-based."

Following the speech, Trump issued a flurry of executive orders. Within hours, a form letter was emailed to federal departments, ordering the suspension, by end of day Wednesday, Jan. 22, of any staff working on DEI initiatives, and giving remaining staff 10 days to report any ongoing "disguised" DEI activity, ie, to rat out colleagues.

While Trump spoke at his inauguration, a different gathering was taking place just a few blocks from the White House. Hundreds packed into the historic Metropolitan

AME Church, the storied Black church that abolitionist Frederick Douglass attended, and where his funeral took place. In 2005, after Rosa Parks lay in state in the Capitol, her casket was moved to Metropolitan AME, for a memorial service.

Civil rights activist Rev. Al Sharpton was speaking at the same moment as Trump. Hearing that Trump had invoked King's name in his speech, Sharpton responded:

"Donald Trump just said that he is going to end DEI this week, he's gonna put out his executive orders. You have all these corporations that are saying they're gonna back off DEI. Why do we have DEI? We have DEI because you denied us diversity, you denied us equity, you denied us inclusion. DEI was a remedy to the racial institutional bigotry practiced in academia and in these corporations. Now you want to put us back in the back of the bus? We're going to do the Dr. King/Rosa Parks on you. We will call you out one by one, and we will shut you down."

Later on King Day, Trump held a rally where he signed the first stack of executive orders, including a blanket rescission of many of President Biden's executive orders, including at least 15 that advanced diversity, equity and inclusion. Later, Trump signed a much broader order calling for the termination of all "illegal DEI and 'diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility' (DEIA) mandates, policies, programs, preferences, and activities in the Federal Government," and to "terminate, to the maximum extent allowed by law, all DEI, DEIA, and 'environmental justice' offices and positions."

The "A" in DEIA stands for "accessible," thus extending Trump's war on fellow citi-

zens to include the disabled.

Sharpton and other speakers invoked not only Martin Luther King, Jr. and Rosa Parks, but the whole sweep of history, from the first arrival of enslaved Africans in 1619, to Frederick Douglass, to the role of freed slaves fighting in the Civil War, through the protests in 2020 following the police killing of George Floyd.

Marc Morial, President of the National Urban League, convened an emergency "Demand Diversity" roundtable in Washington D.C. on Jan. 22. While Trump was inaugurated on King Day, Morial pointed out that Trump is no king:

"These executive orders are unlawful, they are unconstitutional, and they seek to do what we always suspected. This is not a monarchy. You can't rule by decree or edict. This is a constitutional democracy...we have to remember this as we go into this very important battle."

Participants in the roundtable, representing over 20 national civil rights and human rights organizations, form the core of a coalition committed to fighting Trump's agenda. The coalition is guided and inspired by the memory and the lessons of Martin Luther King, Jr. Organize, boycott, resist. These are the struggles, ultimately, that history will remember as great.

*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."*

## Most Former Felons Don't Get the Second Chance That Trump Is Getting

By BONNIE JEAN FELDKAMP

Does America value second chances? Looking at presidential election results, you'd think yes. Donald Trump was convicted of 34 felony counts of falsifying business records in the first degree. Then, Judge Juan Merchan issued an "unconditional discharge" for it all, meaning Trump will not face any jail time or be subject to any fines. He not only gets a second chance, but he also doesn't have to pay his debt to society for his actions.

Like Trump, former Municipal Judge Patrick V. Kerrigan of Youngstown, Ohio, is a White man in his 70s with a felony record, but that's where the similarities stop. In 1998, Kerrigan was convicted and sentenced to two years in a federal prison, a \$6,000 fine and supervised programming upon his release. He also surrendered his law license. His crime? Eight counts of extortion, bribery, racketeering and obstruction of justice. Kerrigan did his time but, unlike Trump, Kerrigan was not offered a second chance. He had to forge his own path, which is why I wanted to talk to him.

Kerrigan's first job after his release from prison was as a part-time caterer's assistant at minimum wage. "Sometimes it was worse than prison," he said. The disappointment, the anxiety and the bitterness. His expertise was irrelevant due to his status as a for-

mer felon. But Kerrigan did not give up. He doubled down on his education. He already had a law degree, so he went back to school and earned an ABD (completed nearly all requirements for a Ph.D. — "all but dissertation") in criminal justice and public policy.

Prior to his conviction, Kerrigan was a highly rated adjunct professor. He had valuable professional and lived experience to offer college students.

Criminal justice should be a field that values second chances and models support for reentry programs. Kerrigan's experience proved otherwise. "I knew more about the criminal justice system than most people," Kerrigan said, "I was an active practitioner, I taught and then I went to prison." He's experienced it from every angle.

Kerrigan submitted his resume to dozens of universities with only one resulting in an interview, which he nailed. The dean recommended him for the position. But, in the end, he was disqualified because of his record. "That was my lowest point," he said.

Church was Kerrigan's saving grace: "They welcomed me back with open arms." They even made him the president of the Parish Council, though it came with some community pushback. Editorials were written protesting his position, but the church forgave him and believed he deserved a second chance.

Isn't that supposed to be how it works?

The U.S. Chamber of Commerce reports that without employment or alternative interventions, recidivism rates amongst prisoners rise, writing, "Individuals who secure employment after incarceration are more likely to achieve stability and less

likely to return to prison."

But first it takes an employer who is willing to hire a former felon, which is hard to come by. Kerrigan turned to the nonprofit sector, working with a Christian social action reentry program and helping establish the Mahoning County Land Bank.

It was in the reclaiming of properties with the land bank that Kerrigan and a friend decided to do something for the community.

"We didn't have a real clear mission," Kerrigan said. "We just were doing whatever we could to clean up the neighborhood." He knew that communities with high levels of poverty, population turnover and ethnic diversity are more likely to have higher crime rates. In criminal justice circles this is known as Social Disorganization Theory.

Kerrigan transformed an old icehouse building into a space for teaching community classes, as well as incubated nonprofits and small businesses. He established a maker space with 3D printers, a CNC router and a digital recording studio. What slowly became apparent was that all of these services pointed to the digital divide, which is the gap between those who have access to technology and those who do not. The digital divide is the difference between having the technology skills needed for careers and education or not.

Kerrigan formalized these efforts and established the Oak Hill Collaborative, and February marks their 11th year in operation. Along with the makerspace and classes, the nonprofit provides affordable laptops through their "Hardware for Homes" program.

Not everyone has the means to recreate themselves after prison, and Kerrigan is well aware of his privilege. "I have my health, a loving family and I've got my education," he said. "I can do good work and figure it out because (prison) wasn't going to be a permanent obstacle for me. I never, ever felt that way." Kerrigan is the exception, and the recidivism and unemployment rates among former felons prove it.

So, do we really care about second chances in this country? If we do, then we need to change the conversation about career viability for former felons. As of Jan. 20, we have a former felon as our president. Perhaps we can use this as an opportunity.

If you didn't vote for Trump, maybe decide to focus your conversations on the ever-present job-related reasons Trump is unfit for office instead of gasping at the fact that America has employed a former felon for president.

If you did vote for Trump and support his return to office, you can continue supporting job placement for former felons and do your part to reduce recidivism in your community.

If we do not genuinely help former felons find a better way to live their lives and support their return to the job force, the revolving prison doors will continue.

*Bonnie Jean Feldkamp is a wife, mother and former opinion editor at the Louisville Courier-Journal. She is an ambassador of the National Society of Newspaper Columnists. Find her on social media @WriterBonnie. Check out her weekly YouTube videos at <https://www.youtube.com/bonniejeanfeldkamp>.*

## Dispatches ...

Continued from page 5

The Trump administration has even employed the help of a right-wing celebrity talking head to boost public morale: Dr. Phil McGraw.

The talk show host tagged along with Homan on a raid in Chicago where he spoke with a handcuffed undocumented immigrant from Thailand.

"The first arrest in Chicago with @RealTomHoman was a convicted sex offender and internet predator from Thailand," McGraw wrote on X along with a video of the arrest.

And while Homan told McGraw that they aren't just "picking up anyone with a tan," at least 15 Native Americans across Arizona and New Mexico have reported being stopped, ques-

tioned, or detained by federal law enforcement.

According to CNN, one indigenous woman was in her workplace when it got raided. She and seven other Native Americans were lined up behind white vans where they were questioned for two hours without access to their phones or any way to contact their families.

"There's a lot of fear, and I know they're probably feeling frustrated knowing that they don't feel safe in the country where they were born or where their ancestors come from and there's a lot of frustration of them being stereotyped," Navajo Nation Council Speaker Crystalne Curley told CNN. "I think there's a confusion with other races, maybe just because having a brown skin, automatically being profiled or stereotyped to be in a certain group or race."

Undocumented immigrants who were detained by ICE officials also made headlines for the

demoralizing treatment from the US government.

The inhumane shipment of Colombian and Brazilian immigrants back to their home countries caused a massive reaction from Colombian President Gustavo Petro and Brazilian officials.

Photos showed undocumented immigrants handcuffed and lined up as they were hurried on to military aircrafts where they were reportedly denied food and water.

One Brazilian minister said the practice of handcuffing undocumented immigrants was "blatant disrespect" to their people.

"On the plane they didn't give us water, we were tied hands and feet, they wouldn't even let us go to the bathroom," Edgar Da Silva Moura, a Brazilian immigrant, told France 24. "It was very hot, some people fainted."

"Things have already changed [with

Trump], said Luis Antonio Rodrigues Santos, a 21-year-old who was deported. "Immigrants are treated as criminals."

**TRUMP BACK TO GOLFING AFTER DEMANDING FED WORKERS RETURN TO OFFICE.** Donald Trump is already playing hooky one week into his job as commander in chief, spending his Monday morning golfing at one of his golf properties in Florida, rather than working, Emily Singer noted at Daily Kos (1/27).

Trump was golfing even though he told reporters aboard Air Force One over the weekend that he didn't think he would have time to golf at his Doral course—where he was gifting off taxpayers to host a retreat for congressional Republicans to come up with a plan for how to pass his tax cuts for the rich.

*Continued on next page*



# The Trump Administration’s Days of Blunder

By DANA MILBANK

At a forum hosted by *Politico* the week before the inauguration, former top Trump strategist and current MAGA loudmouth Steve Bannon said insiders have a name for the first days of the incoming Trump administration. “We refer to it right now as ‘Days of Thunder,’” he said. “And I think these Days of Thunder starting next week are going to be incredibly, incredibly intense.”

Why would President-elect Donald Trump’s advisers compare their return to power with a 35-year-old movie about NASCAR? This can only mean they are expecting a series of car wrecks. And, in fact, the pileups have already begun - a familiar mix of incompetence, defiance of the law, infighting and tilting at windmills. (“Windmills are an economic and environmental disaster. I don’t want even one built during my administration,” Trump announced on Jan. 15.)

On the same day Bannon spoke about Days of Thunder, I was in a hearing room in the Dirksen Senate Office Building, watching the most extravagantly unqualified nominee I have ever seen. Pete Hegseth makes the closest runner-up, Harriet Miers, George W. Bush’s ill-fated Supreme Court nominee, look like Oliver Wendell Holmes. Hegseth has faced widespread and credible allegations of drunkenness on the job, financial mismanagement at the two small charities he ran, and sexual harassment and assault. (He paid a woman who accused him of assault while denying the accusation.) A weekend host for Fox News, Hegseth never ran a large organization and held a junior rank in the military, and he has said women shouldn’t serve in combat and disparaged the Geneva Conventions, which govern the laws of war. He also appears to have no idea what he’s doing.

At Hegseth’s confirmation hearing on Jan. 14, Sen. Tammy Duckworth (D-Illinois)

sprung a pop quiz on him, asking the defense secretary-designate how many nations are in ASEAN, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations. “I couldn’t tell you the exact amount of nations, but I know we have allies in South Korea and Japan and in AUKUS with Australia,” Hegseth ventured.

“None of those three countries that you’ve mentioned are in ASEAN,” Duckworth informed him.

President Joe Biden’s defense secretary, Lloyd Austin, has met annually with his counterparts in ASEAN, as did Trump defense secretaries Jim Mattis and Mark T. Esper before him. This is because ASEAN is crucial to the United States in its geopolitical struggle against China — and Hegseth doesn’t even know what it is.

The next day brought the confirmation hearing of Pam Bondi, whose main qualification to be attorney general is that she’s not Matt Gaetz. During her ferociously partisan appearance, she refused to acknowledge that Biden won the 2020 election, left on the table prosecuting Liz Cheney, Jack Smith and Merrick Garland, and delivered frequent taunts about Trump’s “overwhelming” victory in November. (He won by 1.5 percentage points and got less than 50% of the vote). “Look at the map of California,” she told California Democrat Adam Schiff. “It’s bright red, the popular vote, for a reason.” Trump lost California by 20 points.

After watching Bondi’s confirmation hearing this week, I must respectfully disagree with the *Washington Post’s* Editorial Board, which gave her a thumbs-up and pronounced her qualified to be attorney general. She appeared to take pride in how little she knows.

What were her thoughts on Trump calling those who attacked the Capitol on Jan. 6, 2021, “hostages” and “patriots”?

“I am not familiar with that statement.”

How about the recording of Trump urging Georgia’s secretary of state to “find” him 11,780 votes?

“I’ve not heard it.”

Trump’s nominee to head the FBI, Kash Patel, saying he would “come after” journalists “who helped Joe Biden rig presidential elections”?

“I am not familiar with all those comments.”

Patel’s threats to prosecute political op-

ponents, including some from the five-dozen-name enemies list published in an appendix to his book that labels them members of a “deep state”?

“I don’t believe he has an enemies list. He made a quote on TV, which I have not heard.”

But if Bondi was only playing dumb, Hegseth seemed to come by this trait more earnestly. Even his supporters (which, thanks to Trump’s threats, include virtually every Senate Republican) felt a need to acknowledge his lack of credentials.

“Admittedly, this nomination is unconventional,” the Armed Services Committee chairman, Roger Wicker (R-Miss.) allowed.

“Pete Hegseth is an out-of-the-box nominee,” submitted former senator Norm Coleman, introducing Hegseth.

Freshman Sen. Tim Sheehy (R-Montana) defended Hegseth’s thin résumé by saying “I don’t think any board in the world would’ve hired Steve Jobs or Elon Musk or Mark Zuckerberg when they founded their companies either.”

So now, we’re treating the 3-million-person U.S. military like a garage start-up?

Hegseth came armed with two strategies. The first was to say that all of the accusations of alcohol abuse and sexual and financial impropriety were fabricated by left-wing partisans. “What became very evident to us from the beginning: There was a coordinated smear campaign orchestrated in the media against us,” he spoke, using the royal “we.”

The second was to say that he has been “redeemed by my Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ” for all of the bad things he was falsely accused of doing by this left-wing smear campaign.

After the nominee’s third mention of Jesus, Sen. Markwayne Mullin, an Oklahoma Republican, informed the committee that “our Lord and Savior forgave me” — too, as did Mrs. Mullin. In fact, “the only reason why I’m here and not in prison is because my wife loved me, too,” he disclosed.

Mullin condemned Democrats as hypocrites, accusing his fellow senators of cheating on their wives and showing up drunk for votes. “The man’s made a mistake and you want to sit there and say that he’s not qualified? Give me a joke!” Mullin challenged.

Okay, Senator. A priest and a rabbi walk

into a bar ...

The real joke is going to be on the brave men and women of the military, who will soon be led by a man who has referred to military lawyers as “jagoffs” and who, at the hearing, left open the possibility that he would use the 82nd Airborne to conduct law enforcement in D.C. Hegseth was contemptuous of his questioners; he refused to meet with all but one of the Democrats, and Wicker restricted the questioning time over Democratic objections. Instead, the secretary-designate engaged his bros on the GOP side in high-testosterone talk.

“How many push-ups can you do?” Sheehy asked.

“I did five sets of 47 this morning,” the nominee replied, in apparent homage to the 47th president.

He repeatedly vowed to return the “warrior ethos” and “warrior culture” and to rebuild the military after the “defense cuts under the Biden administration.” Defense spending grew nearly 15% under Biden from Trump’s final year in office, and the men and women of the military never stopped being the most powerful warriors on the planet.

But you wouldn’t know that from Hegseth and his Republican interlocutors, who spoke endlessly about the supposed “wokeness” in the military.

As an example of this wokeness, Hegseth claimed that he was not allowed to offer protection during Biden’s inauguration in 2021 because he has a Christian tattoo. Pointing to his chest, he said “it’s called the Jerusalem Cross,” or Crusader’s Cross. He did not mention that he also has a tattoo proclaiming “Deus Vult” — “God wills it” — which was displayed during the White supremacist rally in Charlottesville in 2017 and during the Jan. 6 insurrection.

It’s not clear whether the tattoos caused Hegseth to be rejected from security duty. But if they did, that happened before Biden took office, during the woke Trump administration.

Days of Thunder? More like days of blunder.

*Dana Milbank is a political columnist for the Washington Post, where this appeared. Follow him on Twitter @Milbank. Email dana.milbank@washpost.com*

## Based on Merit Again?

By GENE NICHOL

President Donald Trump issued an executive order gutting DEI (diversity, equity and inclusion) programs in the federal government. Employees in DEI offices were placed on paid administrative leave straight away and agencies were required to submit plans “for executing a reduction in force by Jan. 31. Trump explained: “Our country’s going to be based on merit again, can you believe it?” Really.

You might think it “rich” that Trump, whose father, according to *The New York Times*, gave him \$413 million and who rose to prominence in the country famed economist Thomas Piketty said embraces economic inequality “probably higher than in any other society, at any time in the past, anywhere in the world,” would speak, unembarrassed, about “merit”. But there it is.

So, I had a look, then, at the rest of the newspaper, thinking on “merit.” Trump announced 1,500 pardons for folks who tried to overthrow the American government — hundreds of whom violently beat and maimed heroic police

officers defending the Capitol. I read, too, of wives, sons, former friends, neighbors and witnesses who spoke of going into hiding or leaving the country to escape the brutal “revenge” of these insurrectionist “patriots.” Merit.

Other stories reported Trump’s claims that he had suffered through four years of outrageous abuse at the hands of the justice system, so vengeance was in order. In truth, of course, Trump’s indictments, and dismissals, demonstrated, beyond peradventure, that his power and wealth could utterly defeat the American justice system. So, as to avoid offending him, our hideously embarrassing United States Supreme Court decided to abandon a centuries old commitment to the American notion that “no man is above the law.” Rarely did Trump attempt to show that he wasn’t guilty of these charged transgressions. He claimed, instead, that laws don’t apply to him. Now they don’t. Merits.

An astonishingly brave Episcopal Bishop, Rev. Mariann Budde, stood before the aspiring tyrant at an inaugural ceremony and pled: “In the name of God, I ask you to have mercy upon the people in our country who are scared now.” (Why is it always women who have the guts to confront Trump?). Trump responded, as he so frequently does with women, that she was “nasty” in tone. A Trump supporter,

time basis, provided that the department and agency heads shall make exemptions they deem necessary.”

Of course, return to work policies hurt women and minorities the most, research found—two groups Trump and his MAGA fans hate. The *Washington Post* reported:

“Research from Gartner and McKinsey, released in 2024 and 2022, respectively, said office mandates mostly impact women and people of color, who are more likely to quit over flexibility or office mandates. In a separate 2024 study released by the Wharton School at the University of Pennsylvania, researchers who studied the start-up labor market found that changing a job opening to remote work increased female applicants by 15% and minorities by 33%.”

Of course, the return to office policy could just be another one of Trump’s efforts to kill diversity in government.

Trump has vowed to end diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts in the federal gov-

ernment, and has even ordered federal employees to snitch on their coworkers who are involved in efforts to diversify the workforce so they can be fired.

As for Trump golfing, it’s likely to cost taxpayers a pretty penny. During Trump’s first stint in office, he played at least 142 rounds of golf, costing taxpayers \$142 million, according to data tracked by the now defunct site TrumpGolfCount.com.

**GOP GRAPPLES WITH TRUMP’S RELEASE OF VIOLENT RIOTERS AMID BACKLASH.** Democrats and Republicans responded very differently to President Donald Trump’s decision to unilaterally grant pardons to more than 1,500 people who attacked the U.S. Capitol on Jan. 6, 2021, in his name, Oliver Willis noted at Daily Kos (1/27).

Republican leaders struggled to defend him: Vice President JD Vance appeared on CBS’ “Face the Nation,” and was asked about the pardons handed out to one offender who

Kristan Hawkins, a Catholic anti-abortion activist, was reported in the *Times* saying: “Female bishop is all you needed to know about how it was going to turn out.” Merit.

Next, papers reported that Trump had issued a decree purporting to end birthright citizenship. The Fourteenth Amendment, ratified in 1868, says in its opening words: “All persons born or naturalized in the United States, and subject to the jurisdiction thereof, are citizens of the United States and the State wherein they reside.” It meant, explicitly, to overturn the horrifying U.S. Supreme Court decision in *Dred Scott v. Sanford*. Trump thinks the 14th Amendment can’t tell him what to do. Merit.

And, finally, I thought and read of Pete Hegseth, Kash Patel, Tulsi Gabbard, Robert F. Kennedy Jr., Kristi Noem, Mehmet Oz, Herschel Walker, Charles Kushner, Kari Lake and Matt Gaetz. Merit. All around.

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

## Dispatches ...

*Continued from previous page*

“No. I don’t think so. I’m busy,” Trump told reporters who asked if he’d be golfing.

Trump’s visit to one of his resorts to hit the links took place much earlier than his first disastrous term, when he waited until the first week of February to golf, according to the *Washington Post*, which tracked Trump’s frequent golf outings.

Trump golfing instead of working comes after he issued a memorandum on Inauguration Day requiring that all federal employees return to the office five days a week.

According to the memo:

“Heads of all departments and agencies in the executive branch of Government shall, as soon as practicable, take all necessary steps to terminate remote work arrangements and require employees to return to work in-person at their respective duty stations on a full-

used a stun gun to electroshock Capitol Police officer Michael Fanone, and another who hit an officer while wearing brass knuckles.

“Is violence against a police officer ever justified?” host Margaret Brennan asked.

Vance responded, “Violence against a police officer is not justified, but that doesn’t mean that you should have Merrick Garland’s weaponized Department of Justice expose you to an incredibly unfair process.”

On NBC’s “Meet the Press,” longtime Trump ally and booster Sen. Lindsey Graham was more blunt when asked about Trump’s boost to convicted criminals.

“Pardoning the people who went into the Capitol and beat up a police officer violently, I think was a mistake, because it seems to suggest that’s an okay thing to do,” Graham admitted.

Republicans will face more pressure to answer for Trump’s actions as Senate Democrats introduced a resolution condemning the pardons.

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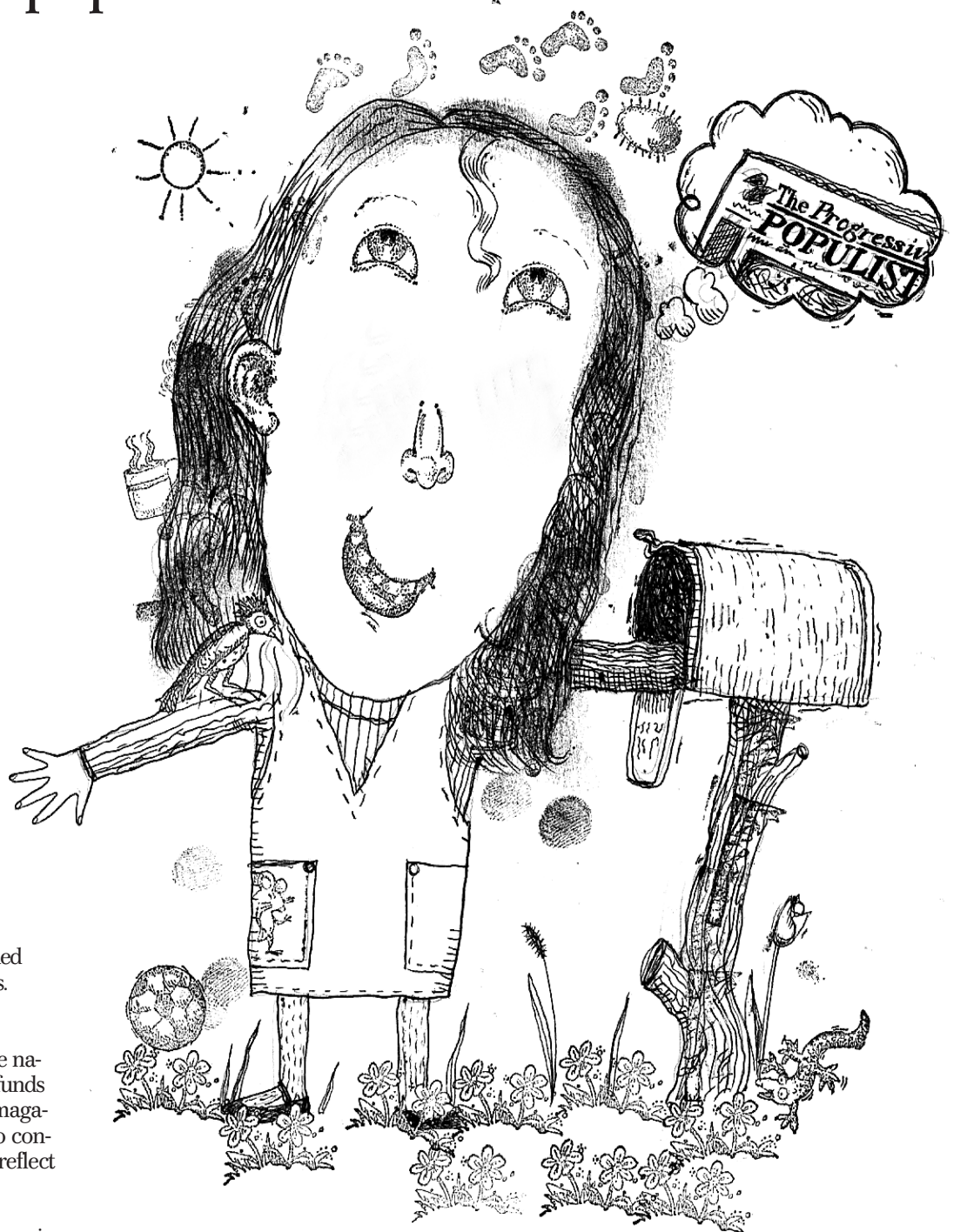
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