

The Progressive POPULIST

MARCH 1, 2025 • A JOURNAL FROM AMERICA'S HEARTLAND • VOL. 31, No. 4 • \$3

Trump's EPA Threatens Efforts to Clean Up Dangerous Air Pollution

In just two weeks, Donald Trump has made drastic changes to the Environmental Protection Agency. Here's how they could impact efforts to reform toxic hot spots across the U.S. and who will be left to safeguard these communities.

By LISA SONG, ProPublica

This story was originally published by ProPublica

More than three years ago, ProPublica spotlighted America's "sacrifice zones," where communities in the shadow of industrial facilities were being exposed to unacceptable amounts of toxic air pollution. Life in these places was an endless stream of burning eyes and suspicious smells, cancer diagnoses and unanswered pleas for help.

The Biden administration took action in the years that followed, doling out fines, stepping up air monitoring and tightening emissions rules for one of the most extreme carcinogens. Last year, the Environmental Protection Agency requested a significant budget increase in part to issue scores of hazardous air pollution rules and fulfill its obligations under the Clean Air Act. Had the effort been successful, experts said, it could have made a meaningful difference.

President Donald Trump threatens to dismantle the steps his predecessor took to curb pollution. In just over two weeks, the Trump administration has ordered a halt to proposed regulations, fired the EPA's inspector general, frozen federal funding for community projects and launched a process that could force thousands of EPA employees from their jobs.

So ProPublica set out to understand what modest reforms are now under threat and who will be left to safeguard these communities.

Weaknesses of State Enforcement

The first Trump administration told EPA staff to defer more to state agencies on environmental enforcement. But ProPublica has documented a long history of state failures to hold polluters accountable — mostly in areas where support for Trump is strong.

Continued on page 8



Illustration by DOLORES CULLEN

**INSIDE:
DON'T GET
DISTRACTED**

EDITORIAL, PAGE 2

CRYPTO'S ROARING '20S
Bros' invested big-time in the election and they want unrestricted access to global banks. What could go wrong?

SAM PIZZIGATI, PAGE 10

WILL THE REPUBLIC STRIKE BACK?
The attempted hostile takeover of the US government by Trump and Musk is beginning to hit a wall. Let's see if the wall holds.

ROBERT KUTTNER, PAGE 11

The Progressive
POPULIST

A Journal from America's Heartland

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

Subscription Department:
1-818-286-3104

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

Editorial Office:
PO Box 819
Manchaca, Texas 78652
512-828-7245
Email: editor@populist.com
http://www.populist.com

JAMES M. CULLEN
Editor

ART CULLEN
Managing Editor

DOLORES CULLEN
Illustrator

JEN OLSON
Copy Editor

PAT TURNER
Proofreader

STEVE HAMILTON
Legal Counsel

JOHN CULLEN
Publisher

The Progressive Populist is an employee-owned, independent journal that believes in the Bill of Rights and that the truth shall make us free.

Writers are responsible for their own work. In publishing them we do not necessarily agree with them, but we think their points of view are worth sharing. The Progressive Populist cannot vouch for representations made in advertisements.

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

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

The Progressive Populist is printed with soy ink on recycled paper.

AN EDITORIAL

Don't Get Distracted By Chaos

In his third week back in the White House, Donald Trump brought the United States' biggest trading partners to the brink of a tariff war, shut down the US Agency for International Development on the suggestion of volunteer co-president Elon Musk, and announced his plan to bring peace to the Gaza Strip by clearing Palestinians from the territory so the bombed-out rubble can be redeveloped into a Mediterranean resort.

Meanwhile, Republicans in Congress began to devise a way to pay for renewal of tax cuts for billionaires under special rules that allow them to get the budget through the Senate with a simple majority. But the reconciled budget cannot increase the national debt. So they must cut trillions of dollars from federal spending. Likely targets for cuts include health care, welfare and attempts to mitigate climate change. And they won't miss a chance to take a swipe at Social Security and Medicare.

Trump allowed Musk to become the freelance head of the self-styled Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE), operating under Trump's authority to conduct inquisitions of federal agencies to slash federal spending and replace entrenched bureaucracy with Trump loyalists.

The Office of Personnel Management (OPM), which is essentially the human resources agency for federal government, has been practically taken over by Musk lackeys who sent out a mass "deferred resignation" offer to federal employees in an attempt to get "deep state" bureaucrats to leave willingly, with the promise that they would get full pay and benefits through September. But union leaders said the offer was dodgy, would imperil pensions, and advised federal employees not to fall for it. A federal judge in Boston temporarily blocked the Trump administration from proceeding with the buyout while lawsuits proceed.

Musk got his minions access into the Treasury Department's payment system that disburses trillions of dollars and contains sensitive personal data on all Americans. The next thing you know, Musk announced that USAID, the 64-year-old agency that provides humanitarian assistance — mainly food and medicine—to combat poverty and support global health in 100 countries, is "a viper's nest of radical-left marxists who hate America," are "evil" and "a criminal organization ... Time for it to die." (USAID also happened to be investigating problems with Musk's Starlink satellite system, one of his many conflicts of interest with his probe of federal government waste.) But even if Republicans finally decided it was worth the risk to ignore epidemics around the increasingly mobile world, USAID's \$40 billion in annual appropriations isn't going make much of a dent in the \$2.3 trillion Republicans need to grease the planned tax breaks for the ultrawealthy. And don't expect that risking another pandemic at home will get working-class taxpayers much of a break.

In Trump's first term, households with incomes in the top 1% received an average tax cut of more than \$60,000 in 2017, compared to an average tax cut of less than \$500 for households in the bottom 60%, according to the Tax Policy Center. Trump brought the top corporate tax rate from 35% to 21%, and now he wants to bring it further down to 15%.

For the ultrawealthy, Republicans propose to eliminate the federal estate tax, which now charges a percentage of the value of a person's fortune after they die, with a \$14 million deduction. It would cost the government \$370 billion in revenue over 10 years.

Republicans plan to eliminate income taxes on tips, at a cost of \$106 billion over a decade, fulfilling a pledge Trump made to to service employees in Las Vegas during the campaign. But the Bait and Switch Party wants to broaden the exemption to include bonuses for executives.

One of the programs Republicans have targeted for major cuts is Medicaid, which provides health care for 72 million people with low incomes, as well as nursing home care for seniors, at a cost of nearly \$900 billion.

Republicans propose to "recapture" \$46 billion in savings from Affordable Care Act health insurance subsidies, which are set to expire at the end of the year, and they would limit eligibility for plans, based on citizenship status.

Other proposals would eliminate tax breaks for families with children. Currently, parents can get a tax credit of up to \$2,100 for child care expenses. The House Republican plan floats the elimination of that break. The cut is estimated to save \$55 billion over a decade.

They're also eyeing repeal of significant health care rules the Biden administration put in place, such as requiring minimum staffing levels at nursing homes. In addition to Medicaid and ACA cuts, Republicans hope to claw back bipartisan infrastructure and Inflation Reduction Act funding.

Also on the chopping block are Joe Biden's climate policies, which are estimated to cost as much as \$468 billion. Trump's promises to repeal Biden's "EV mandate," as well as discontinuing "Green New Deal" provisions from the bipartisan infrastructure law and green energy grants from the IRA.

When that doesn't do the job, Republicans are preparing to make the case for cutting Social Security and Medicare — touching the third rail of politics, Emily Singer noted at DailyKos.com. Rep. Riley Moore, R-W. Va, told Fox Business' Maria Bartiromo on Feb 10 that Republicans have been "discussing" cutting "mandatory spending" — that is, Social Security, Medicare, Medicaid and veterans benefits — in order to pass Trump's tax cut agenda. "This is our once-in-a-lifetime opportunity," Moore said.

Republican Sen. Mike Lee of Utah went further in a post on X, saying, "Social Security [is] a ripoff for most Americans compared to essentially any legitimate retirement investment."

Musk's unqualified DOGE bros have already accessed the Treasury Department's systems that make payments for Social Security, raising alarm bells from Democratic lawmakers.

"The federal government is not Twitter. It matters if Elon breaks things at the Social Security Administration. Musk has no clue what SSA employees do, nor does he care — it doesn't matter to him if you miss a Social Security Check. He belongs NOWHERE NEAR your Social Security," Democratic Sen. Patty Murray of Washington, posted on X.

Cutting Social Security benefits could cause a massive backlash from voters. But Republicans might fear the backlash from billionaires more, if the rich folks don't get those tax cuts they're expecting. Make them fear the wrath of voters more.

Republicans only hold a 218-215 majority in the House and 53-47 in the Senate. Call your senators and House member: If you can't get through the Capitol switchboard at 202-224-3121, call their local offices. Demand they protect Social Security and Medicare. And if they're Republicans, hold them to account for Trump's misuse of executive orders and defiance of courts. They supported a convicted felon for president. Now it's time to rein him in. —JMC

This issue in
The Progressive
POPULIST

COVER/Lisa Song p. 1
Trump's EPA threatens efforts to clean up dangerous air pollution
EDITORIAL p. 2
Don't get distracted by chaos
JIM HIGHTOWER p. 3
Bizarre: Today's politicians celebrate jerks and ignore grassroots genius | Costco shows Trump what a real mandate is | The royal threat behind Trump's petty pomposity | What in the name of Jesus is this?
FRANK LINGO p. 3
Climate crisis lowers U.S. home values
LETTERS TO THE EDITOR p. 4
DON ROLLINS p. 4
Nikki Giovanni: Suffering, universality, solidarity
RURAL ROUTES/Margot McMillen p. 5
Let the buyouts beware
DISPATCHES p. 5
Trump cuts to NIH research grants would cause 'irreparable damage,' top Dem says. Trump quietly fired head of office that protects whistleblower, lawsuit says. Judge says Trump admin is violating order to halt funding freeze. Confirmation of Project 2025 architect expected to intensify lawless Trump rampage ...

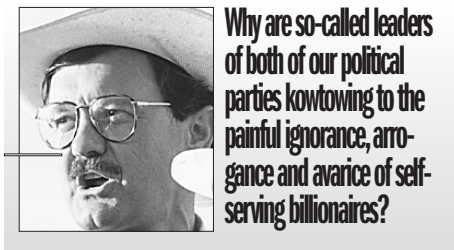
FROMA HARROP p. 6
Trade war: The pain starts with shame
ART CULLEN p. 6
All is quiet in Omaha
ALAN GUEBERT p. 6
Trump trade strategy: Big sticks, big bets
JOE CONASON p. 7
If you get ebola, don't forget to thank Trump
KAREN DOLAN p. 7
A coup attempt against American taxpayers
JOHN YOUNG p. 7
A time for protest — and here is mine
ALEX JACQUEZ and ELIZABETH PANCOTTI p. 8
A hostile corporate takeover of our democracy
DICK POLMAN p. 9
The all-American plummet, courtesy of the willfully blind
LIZ CAREY p. 9
Study finds that rural medical debt affects more than patients
SAM PIZZIGATTI p. 10
Will Crypto's roaring 20s lead to a second great depression?
GLYNN WILSON p. 10
Elon Musk security breach must be stopped
MARY SANCHEZ p. 11
How to cultivate a domestic terrorist by Donald J. Trump
ROBERT KUTNER p. 11
Will the republic strike back?
THOM HARTMANN p. 12
The billionaire coup is almost complete and no one stopped it — can we return to democracy?

SABRINA HAAKE p. 12
Firing federal employees for their politics violates the 1st Amendment
SONALI KOLHATKAR p. 13
Abolishing climate disasters
ROBERT B. REICH p. 13
What Trump ignores
CLARENCE PAGE p. 14
When disaster strikes, Trump's instinct is to blame DEI first
JOEL D. JOSEPH p. 14
Plastic tea bags may be killing you
HEALTH CARE/Joan Retsinas p. 15
A government of spoiled children
SAM URETSKY p. 15
The rise and fall of the rule of law
CHRIS MILLS RODRIGO p. 15
Health insurers profit from suffering, not care
WAYNE O'LEARY p. 16
Trump's twin fantasies: Protectionism and imperialism
GENE NICHOL p. 16
Is this what Phil Berger wants?
SETH SANDRONSKY p. 16
Resisting Trump's immigration policy
JUAN COLE p. 17
Trump, an American Stalin? Massive population transfers were a feature of communist dictatorship
JASON SIBERT p. 17
Carter's commitment to arms control
TRACEY L. ROGERS p. 17
Black history is every day, with or without the White House

JAMIE STIEHM p. 18
A coup by any other name
BARRY FRIEDMAN p. 18
Riding with Trump
SATIRE/Rosie Sorenson p. 18
Hoisted by Musk's petard
RALPH NADER p. 19
Underestimating Americans: A coming plunge of dictator Donald
TED RALL p. 19
Democrats want a divorce
DENNIS HINKAMP p. 20
The Salton Sea's weirdness is what's appealing
ROB PATTERSON p. 20
When the village had a voice
MARK ANDERSON p. 20
Tariffs are just taxes by another name
FILM REVIEW/Ed Rampell p. 21
'The Bibi Files' nails Netanyahu
EDGE OF SPORTS/Dave Zirin p. 21
Trump's presence at the Super Bowl was an affront to every NFL player
AMY GOODMAN p. 22
Trump proposes ethnic cleansing of Gaza to build 'Riviera of the Middle East'
BONNIE JEAN FELDKAMP p. 22
This tennis club shows why DEI is here to stay
DANA MILBANK p. 23
Trump is in it only for himself

Cover illustration by Dolores Cullen
See our blog at progressivepopulist.blogspot.com
Like us at Facebook.com/ProgressivePopulist
Call the White House at 202-456-1111
Call Congress at 202-224-3121

JIM HIGHTOWER



Bizarre: Today’s Politicians Celebrate Jerks and Ignore Grassroots Genius

Corporate chieftains are giants, even geniuses — right? Years ago, *laissez-faire* ideologue Ayn Rand hailed them as society’s supermen, comparing them to Atlas, the mythological Greek god who “holds the world on his shoulders.” But look, here comes one of her modern-day gods now — Timothy Wentworth! He stands astride Walgreens, the multibillion-dollar drug store conglomerate. In January, Wentworth demonstrated his corporate prowess by offering a stunning insight. He noted that, with shoplifting on the rise, chains like his had reacted by moving much of their merchandise into locked display cases. But the ever-alert Big Boss has now deduced that this impacts sales, “because when you lock things up, for example, you don’t sell as many of them.” Wow ... pure genius! Did I mention that Walgreens pays Timothy \$13 million a year? Or that his monopolistic chain is closing some 1,200 of its “less-profitable” stores, which will leave entire communities with no pharmacies to meet their crucial needs? My point is not to disparage one silly corporate boss but simply to say: Hey, why are the so-called leaders of both of our political parties kowtowing to the painful ignorance, arrogance and avarice of the most self-serving group of egos in the world: billionaires? Look at them — Elon Musk is a jabbering jerk, Mark Zuckerberg is a pathetic whiner, and Jeff Bezos cluelessly floats around on a garish yacht he financed by underpaying and mistreating his workers. These are our giants? What about schoolteachers, family farmers, mechanics, cooks — and other everyday people who *really* make things work? America needs to start listening to them — and reinvesting in their genuine genius.

Costco Shows Trump What a Real Mandate Is

I guess I’ll just have to throw myself on Donald Trump’s mercy, for I confess that I am a repeat violator of MAGA’s high crime of DEI-ism. Diversity, Equity, Inclusion. Guilty on all counts! But it’s not my fault. From childhood, I was fed a steady diet of that kind of all-in-this-together thinking by my parents, teachers and ministers. So next thing you know, I was doing DEI on my own. Then, when I was elected to be Texas Agriculture Commissioner, I shamelessly promoted all three as agency goals (particularly for women and minorities who had long been excluded). But I now see that such egalitarian concepts are out of step with the moral precepts of Trumpocracy. Thus, I’m an outlaw. You might be, too, for the MAGA minority now ruling in Washington is thuggishly expunging DEI values from our schools, corporations, libraries, churches, etc. You have two choices, they bark: Comply ... or be forced to comply. Sure enough, even corporate powerhouses like Amazon, Disney, Facebook, Target and Walmart are sucking up to the new regime by cravenly surrendering DEI principles and promises without a fight.

Well, they whine, we have no choice. But wait — this is America! The choice has always been clear: Don’t just comply, defy! Even corporations can stand for the people’s democratic principles, as Costco recently did. The popular retailer was assailed by a right-wing group demanding that shareholders terminate its DEI efforts. But Costco executives didn’t cower, and guess what? *Ninety-eight percent* of Costco’s shareholders stood with them, emphatically endorsing diversity, equity and inclusion as core American values. This is Jim Hightower saying ... 98%! That, Mr. Trump, is a *real* mandate.

The Royal Threat Behind Trump’s Petty Pomposity

In the 1787 Constitutional Convention, the framers were clear on what they were NOT creating: a monarchy. One delegate expressed the group’s absolute conviction that the founding document must exclude even the “fetus of monarchy.” Yet, 238 years later, watching Donald Trump’s inaugural week, it was both awful and comical to see the royal pretensions of King Donald. There were silly gestures, like him waving around a ceremonial sword (made more ludicrous by the fact he was a cowardly rich-boy draft dodger). Plus, the staged spectacle of him imperiously signing stacks of orders, proclamations and pardons in a show of “Kingliness.” Petty pomposity aside, though, he is an untethered megalomaniac whose inaugural speech re-asserted such monarchical concepts as “the divine right of kings” and “manifest destiny.” And let us not naively dismiss Trump’s flat-out claim that the Constitution gives him “the right to do whatever I want as president,” or that he previously suggested “termination” of the Constitution to return him to the White House. Indeed, he now contends that he can unilaterally terminate a bedrock constitutional right: the 14th Amendment provision guaranteeing citizenship to everyone born in the USA. He has royally and unconstitutionally decreed that children born here whose parents were undocumented immigrants are not citizens but “aliens.”

Well, at least there’s the 22nd Amendment, which *makes clear* that he can’t be president again, right? Uh ... maybe. Trump is already suggesting his royal court might find a way to keep him in power, just as they’re now contriving to void the clear citizenship protection of the 14th Amendment. Despotism doesn’t obey Constitutions — they pervert them. And We the People must reject the perverters.

What in the Name of Jesus is This?

The far-right potentates of Christian nationalism not only say they speak to God, but they now claim to speak *for* God. They might, however, want to ponder a cartoon I recently saw. It pictured one of these pious flimflammers demanding entry to heaven, bragging that he had been God’s personal messenger on Earth. “Really,” said God, “You don’t look at all like Dolly Parton.” But now — Great God Almighty! — here comes a gaggle of these lordly pretenders proclaiming that Yahweh has ordained their narrow religious sect to be America’s governmental rulers. Last month, a flock of these “chosen ones” descended on the Texas state capitol, announcing that God has instructed them to transform our government into an authoritarian arm of their own fundamentalist churches. “We take charge and authority of [this] legislative session,” one of their leaders declared, informing the rest of us that his cult has “been given spiritual jurisdiction over the affairs of men.” Unfortunately, this is not just another case of Crazy Texas. The extremist Christian nationalist show at the Texas Capitol was fully embraced and coordinated by the extremist Republican governor, attorney general, legislative leaders and state party hierarchy. More pointedly, it’s all part of a

messianic crusade by two Bible-thumping, West Texas oil billionaires, Tim Dunn and Farris Wilks. This plutocratic/theocratic duo is pumping unlimited sums of crude political cash into the GOP to “Christianize” elections and all public policies. So don’t laugh — pay attention. This right-wing, religious, anti-democratic power play is unfolding all across America. Ludicrous as it seems, they’re out to crucify our

Climate Crisis Lowers U.S. Home Values

By FRANK LINGO

In case we thought the climate crisis wasn’t going to affect our personal lives, here’s a news flash. No one wants to learn their home’s value is dropping but First Street Foundation says that in some areas it probably is. The non-profit research and technology organization’s mission is to assess the financial risks of climate change for companies and governments.

A Feb. 4 report by First Street entitled “Property Prices in Peril” (how absurd to advocate with an abundance of alliteration) was covered by CBS News and USA Today. It predicts that American home values will likely sink nearly \$1.5 trillion in the next 30 years due to damage from floods, fires and crumbling coastlines caused by the climate crisis.

Besides the drop in value for homes in harm’s way, there are rising insurance costs for those properties. No, not everyone’s home will lose worth. But the amount of money lost will be six times the amount gained, according to First Street’s projections. Be assured that the insurance companies take studies like these very seriously because their profits depend on realistic risks for compensating claims. As property prices in the sunbelt might drop up to 40%, the report estimates insurance premiums in Jacksonville and New Orleans will triple and Miami’s will quadruple.

There are already climate migrations by the millions going on in America. People have moved from California to flee the frequent forest fires and from Florida and the Gulf of Donald to avoid recurring hurricanes. The Midwest seems to be their fa-

freedoms and force their state-run theology on everyone — all in the name of Jesus.

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

vorite destination even though they have to acclimate themselves to winter weather, which was what they had moved away from to begin with. So some of these returning refugees now had to sell their homes at a loss from what they had paid. Meanwhile, to underscore the urgency of climate change, temperatures in the Arctic Circle soared by 36 degrees Fahrenheit above average in February to reach the point of ice melting and that’s in the middle of winter!

Such extreme warming of the northern icecap could accelerate the rising of sea levels. If the same thing happens in Antarctica during the Southern Hemisphere’s winter a few months from now, we could be looking at cataclysmic flooding of coastal areas worldwide. Projected models of sea levels are basically guesswork anyway, and such warming of the poles could bring the future into the present splashing on our shores. A state like Florida which is flat as a pancake and only a few feet above the ocean, could suffer the drowning of whole cities.

Also meanwhile, President Felon 47 is actually set to increase U.S. oil production which set a record high in 2024. So we’re doubling down on our murder-suicide of the world and our human family.

Maybe there’s a chance that an economic wake-up call like the First Street Foundation’s report will jolt us out of our fossil fool bottom-of-the barrel behavior, but would you bet on it?

The smart money says things are getting worse, and we just elected the world’s worst spoiled brat to lead the nation in our treatment of 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. See his website: Greenbeat.world



all in one place
jim hightower • amy goodman • thom hartmann • froma harrop
clarence page • margot mcmillen • ralph nader • mary sanchez
ted rall • joan retsinas • robert reich • jamie stiehm
Subscribe to The Progressive Populist • Call 1-818-286-3104 (9 am to 6 pm Central Time, Monday-Friday)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Trump Is Most Dangerous

After carefully reviewing recent and current events both world-wide and nationally, I have reached the sobering and, yes, horrifying conclusion that at this time Donald Trump is the most dangerous human being in the world.

This is neither hyperbole nor exaggeration, but is, if anything, a reasoned assessment of a nation that is entering a dark era of fascism. Trump's pardoning of the Jan. 6th insurrectionists and White supremacists gutted with near finality any concept of justice and the rule of law.

Add to this obscenity Trump's recent wholesale termination of virtually every prosecutor and government employee who dared to challenge and question his blatant criminality and we begin to see a Federal government that is being hollowed out and left in shambles.

The checks and balances that help preserve those precious and fragile ideas that we call democracy are being shredded by both Trump and the most unqualified and jaw dropping group of hand picked appointees in our nation's history. And there is a sum total here that is both horrifying and becoming clearer with each passing day.

Simply said, a huge part of our nation was willing, if not eager, to minimize Trump's personal history — his alleged assaults on 47 women, his abundant felony convictions that he minimizes as "fake news," and a host of other criminal activities that will leave future historians in a state of shock and bewilderment on what transpired in the United States that would allow a career criminal and narcissistic sociopath a successful path to the presidency.

Trump's history as a career criminal and con man pale though, when contrasted with his wholesale assault on decency and the safeguards that Americans have put in place over the centuries. Trump has openly embraced a culture of fascism, the likes of which American's have never seen. He has with conviction, pride and hubris opened the doors for the dark and ugly underbelly of entrenched American hatred and he has both legitimized and praised it. Add to this both Trump's total contempt and hatred for global-warming climate change science and his belief that nuclear war is still a viable option, and you have a man who indeed poses perhaps an unrivaled threat to the planet, eclipsing history's most evil and notorious figures. There is still hope and room for optimism, for both the nation and the planet. However it will be a terminal and sentinel mistake if we the people minimize the threat to the world that Donald Trump presents.

JIM SAWYER, *Edmonds, Wash.*

Racism Will Never DEI

Critics of DEI [diversity, equity and inclusion] and affirmative action say we need to work towards "race neutrality." Well, there is no "race neutrality" when Trump defines certain jobs as "Black jobs."

While on the campaign trail, Trump said, "Migrants are taking Black jobs."

Trump sees picking crops, lawn care, roofing, house painting, hotel cleaning, washing dishes, cooking food, waiting tables, janitorial work or working at a meat-packing plant — as "Black jobs." These are honorable jobs that deserve a livable wage, but they are not "Black jobs," or people of color jobs.

Trump's thought process is the very reason why affirmative action was created. White people in power positions that view Blacks intellectually inferior and then do no allow Blacks or all people of color to advance to high-level jobs.

Send letters by email to progpop@gmail.com or write c/o PO Box 819, Manchaca, Texas 78652

Nikki Giovanni: Suffering, Universality, Solidarity

By DON ROLLINS

"If we [Black Americans] can't drive, we will invent walks and the world will envy the dexterity of our feet. If we can't have ham, we will boil chitterlings; if we are given rotten peaches, we will make cobbles; if given scraps, we will make quilts; take away our drums, and we will clap our hands. We prove the human spirit will prevail. We will take what we have to make what we need..." — Nikki Giovanni

I was introduced to writer-prophet, Nikki Giovanni, in 2016. The occasion was trumpeter extraordinaire Wynton Marsalis' holiday concert at her beloved Virginia Tech — two hours spent with one of the tightest jazz ensembles imaginable.

I vowed ahead of time not to blather on

about what a pleasure it was to meet a living legend (although that would be a gross understatement). Just shake her hand if offered, and keep it simple: "Thanks for all you've given us, thanks for all that's yet to come."

Indeed, there would be more to come before Nikki Giovanni died last December at age 81, nearly seven years to the day after Marsalis and band pumped new life into old Christmas standards. More poetry, more prose, more presentations and interviews. More reminders of our capacity for both justice and joy.

It was this ongoing tension that made Giovanni so accessible. Her most razor sharp poems cut deep, but so too the heartfelt appeals to Black beauty and Black resilience. She could rattle the locks of systemic oppression. She could write about laughter and tears in the same poem.

Giovanni was born in Knoxville, Tenn., on Dec. 7, 1943. Although her education and early work led elsewhere, she returned to middle Appalachia and identified with the Affrilachian community of Black artists

These attacks upon DEI are going to make people hesitant to hire people of color, whether in the public or private sector, because they will be fearful of the government or anti-affirmative action activists coming after them and accusing them of secretly practicing DEI.

Here's the racist absurdity of this — if a golf course hired 20 Blacks to maintain the golf course, no one would see this as secretly practicing a DEI program, but if a college hired 20 Black professors, many people would view this as the college practicing DEI.

"Black jobs" vs. non-"Black jobs."

FRANK ERICKSON, *Minneapolis, Minn.*

Cleaning Up After Trump

"Pity the meek," wrote humorist Don Marquis, "for they shall inherit the Earth." Were he alive today, and concerned about ecology, he would have said the same!

We shall have the pollution of the air, water, plastic and various other contaminations to be drawn from our bodies. And the Trump administration doesn't tender much hope for environmental improvement during the ensuing four years. Instead, it seems to follow the wholly opposing course of "drill, baby, drill," and other contrarian eco policies.

We must press forward with our environmental progress since the early 1970s. Our health and our lives may depend upon such prudence. Our world is unique, and we cannot venture elsewhere. Consequently, we must rescue our "island home" as soon as we as well as we are able. And from the Atlantic to the Pacific! And from Canada and Mexico!

WILLIAM DAUENHAUER, *Willowick, Ohio*

Doomsday Clock Moved Closer to Midnight

On Jan. 28, the Doomsday Clock was moved the closest it has ever been — 89 seconds before midnight. The Clock is reset each year by world-renowned atomic scientists and Nobel laureates and has become a universally recognized indicator of the world's vulnerability to global catastrophe caused by nuclear weapons, climate change, biological threats and potential disruptive technologies, such as AI.

One reason the Doomsday Clock moved closer to midnight is that the nuclear risk is the highest it has ever been since the Cuban missile crisis. We also have an unstable president with sole authority to order the use of nuclear weapons. In 2024, hundreds of psychiatrists signed an open letter in the NY Times declaring Donald Trump to be too mentally unstable to be president. Trudy Rubin, a *Philadelphia Inquirer* writer, even compared Trump to Putin for making bombastic threats to seize Greenland and the Panama Canal—"sounds like Putin on Ukraine."

It is easy to despair. But the Doomsday Clock is a call to action. See what you can do to prevent nuclear war and ensure that the President doesn't have sole authority to launch a nuclear strike. See preventnuclearwar.org/.

KATHLEEN WELCH, PhD, MPH, *Back from the Brink (Hub Leader for the Philadelphia Area), Phoenixville, Penn.*

Weather Better Under Trump?

Barely into his second presidential term, Donald Trump, bolstered by his climate change opinions, has already begun sweeping the coldness of Joe Biden's single-term administration into the dustbin of US history. Under DJT's charge, the country is already benefitting from warmer temperatures and sunnier skies. We all, including the Georgia weather maven Majorie Taylor Greene, have much to be grateful for.

Tongue in cheek or not?

JERRY McDERMOTT, *Largo, Fla.*

Yes, Trump is a Convicted Felon

There is a misconception amongst Florida MAGAs based on the false assumption that since Donald Trump voted in the 2024 election, he cannot be a convicted felon. Rubbish. Yes he is, and here's why.

Florida has one of the toughest voter disenfranchisement laws in the country. If Trump were convicted for crimes committed in Florida, he would have been barred from voting. However, his conviction was in New York, and under Florida law he is ineligible to vote "only if the conviction would make the person ineligible to vote in the state where the person was convicted." In New York, such a conviction is disenfranchised only when the guilty party is incarcerated. Trump wasn't jailed, therefore he could vote in Florida.

Trump's voting status does not erase his 34 New York felony convictions.

It doesn't matter what MAGA Faux News analysts claim. The infotainment network paid \$787 millions for lying about the 2020 election results. So much for their credibility. Like New York, there are 23 other states that disenfranchise potential voters only if they are incarcerated at the time of the election voting cycle. The rest, like Florida, have tougher laws regarding types of offenses or fines and fees owed even after serving their sentence. Florida Republicans have taken full advantage of this by erasing hundreds of thousands of potential voters, mostly people of color, from their voting rolls in the past. With a MAGA Supreme Court guaranteed for decades, expect this policy to continue.

Main Source—Brennan Center For Justice (7/29/24)

ED ENGLER, *Sebring, Fla.*

Why Is Fort Bragg, Calif., So Racist?

Braxton Bragg was a slave owner from the South. Bragg was an angry, abusive, inbred alcoholic lout. The product of Confederate cousins reproducing, he became a general in Dixie who was confusing. His battle orders were ridiculous and nonsensical. General Bragg was a master at killing his own men. So stupid was Bragg, the Union should honor him.

Fort Bragg, California — why not lean into the joke? Statues of Braxton everywhere covered in egg yolks? But eggs are so expensive now, it would be a waste when we can just simply change Fort Bragg's name! I prefer town monikers that are intentionally dumb, so here's ten options for that racist town's residents to choose from:

- 1) White Trash Beach
- 2) Mendocino's Disgrace
- 3) Rednecktopia
- 4) Sundown Town
- 5) J.D. Vance's Couchville
- 6) Kash Patelistan
- 7) Ku Klux Klan Land
- 8) Grand Dragon Dunes
- 9) Surf Nazi City
- 10) Trumptard Town

JAKE PICKERING, *Arcata, Calif.*

Editor's Note: The military institution in North Carolina formerly known as Fort Bragg was renamed Fort Liberty in 2022-23.



Let the Buyouts Beware

FROMA HARROP



Even if it's part of a twisted game of negotiation — Trump put off the war with Mexico and Canada by a month — the economic damage is lasting.

Trade War: The Pain Starts with Shame

Never mind how Donald Trump's threatened trade war ultimately pans out. Though a 25% border tax would hurt the economies of Canada and Mexico more, Americans would also feel the ill-effects. But America is already suffering. Start with the shame of menacing and sliming our good neighbors with lies.

Even if it's part of a twisted game of

negotiation — Trump has already put off the war with Mexico and Canada by a month — the economic damage is lasting. (Trump's game is to jump on some small concession to declare victory.) Meanwhile, Made-in-Trump's-USA is becoming a toxic label.

Canadians recently booed "The Star-Spangled Banner" at a hockey game in Ottawa. Something tells us they don't want to become the 51st state.

Now Canada and Mexico could retaliate against American exports, starting with steel, pork and bourbon. They would focus on economic interests in Trump country, a reflection of their understanding that much of America shares their mystification, if not horror, at this sadistic show.

But these trading partners have more subtle weapons than slapping their own tariffs on American products. They can decide that the United States is an unreliable trading partner and look for replacements.

America's Midwest refineries rely on crude from Alberta. Trump says Canadian energy would get a special deal, a tariff of only 10%. Alberta Premier Danielle Smith says even 10% is not OK. She likes to point out that if you subtract energy from the trade numbers, the U.S. would probably have a trade surplus with Canada.

For all of Trump's sniveling about the price of oil, it would go higher if Canada, our largest foreign supplier, decided to sell it to someone else. Canada is already considering ways to move the product west and then onto Asia.

The best-selling beer in the U.S. is Modelo Especial from Mexico. It is made from barley harvested in places like Idaho, Montana and North Dakota. About 75% of U.S. barley exports go to Mexico. But Argentina, Chile and Brazil also grow barley and would probably be very happy to take over those sales. And the loss of that business would hurt American farmers.

Note that none of these responses involve retaliatory tariffs toward American products.

The North American economy has been integrated to our benefit as well as that of our neighbors. A "Made in America" vehicle, for example, crosses borders several times before the final product rolls to the showroom. This production sharing lets things get done in the most cost-efficient places. It is also done in Europe and Asia.

Contrary to Trump's baloney excuse for making economic war against our neighbors, Canada is the source of almost no fentanyl entering this country. And the fentanyl

that comes over the border from Mexico enters through legal ports of entry, hidden in truck tires and suitcases. If that's the case, isn't it the job of U.S. authorities to check those tires?

Same goes for undocumented migrants. Of course, the border was already peaceful by the time of Trump's inauguration. Before the tariff standoff, Canada and Mexico had already stepped up helping control these migration flows on their sides of the border.

The usually Trump-friendly *Wall Street Journal* has called this "The Dumbest Trade War in History." That it isn't in our interests doesn't even seem to matter. The crisis serves Trump's unhinged need to be constantly at the center of the world's attention and his sick pleasure in extracting pain. War or no war, he's already achieved both.

But the pain felt by Americans trapped by a leadership in Washington that has gone haywire endures. And when the cruelty gets dumped on our friends, the pain starts with shame.

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

All is Quiet in Omaha

By ART CULLEN

If you really wanted to clear out undocumented immigrants fast and send a ringing message, you would start around Omaha, Neb., and Sioux City, Iowa. They have thousands upon thousands of paperless Latinos waiting for a raid of food plants in ardently conservative states. Omaha has an FBI office and an ICE operation. Lots of jail cells and abandoned buildings are available to lock them up.

The top story in the *Omaha World-Herald* was about a junior golfer named Gutchewski from the city's west side. The *Sioux City Journal* led with the Hawkeye women's big win at Washington.

Nothing about raids.

Just rumors, the Polk County Sheriff said about mass deportation in Des Moines — one defendant was hauled out of the courthouse by ICE agents. Rumors spread that agents were in Iowa City and West Liberty. No arrests.

Nada, nothing in Storm Lake, Denison, Sioux Falls or Worthington. Waterloo, too. Not in the first two weeks, anyhow. *Qué sera.*

The Trump Administration moved to

revoke the legal status of refugees from certain places like Haiti, Venezuela and Cuba. It seeks to deny birthright citizenship — a federal judge appointed by President Reagan quickly ruled that Trump's order was "blatantly unconstitutional." The military has been dispatched to the Mexican border. The governor ordered the state patrol to stand guard and help out ICE.

Sen. Joni Ernst (R-Iowa) told us several weeks ago that Storm Lake didn't have anything to worry about. Trump was going after criminals first. He told her so, she said. That's not what he was telling the public. The administration wants to revoke protections for Dreamers, for crying out loud.

Ernst can wink and let you in on a secret: Nobody can afford raiding the packing plants. Tyson insists it only hires legal workers. Trump's brain, Stephen Miller, formally complained last May that Tyson was effectively discriminating against other workers by hiring immigrants. Yeah, okay, that was then, but now we're talking for real. Trump actually could command the troops to sweep up Storm Lake. It has been done before, in 1996. Since then, we have come to rely a lot more on Latino workers.

Trump ordered immigrant workers onto the kill floor during the height of the COVID pandemic. He was joined by gover-

nors Kim Reynolds of Iowa, Pete Ricketts of Nebraska (now a U.S. senator), Kristi Noem of South Dakota (now Homeland Security secretary), and the meat industry in that effort.

Raids could come. Only the malign spirit wishes it on Storm Lake. Vulnerable people are bracing for it. Local organizations are trying to offer support to immigrants. It is an instinct: flight. When the cops walk in the front door of the bar, that guy who was just shooting pool with you slips out the back door before you can turn around. The kid is not in school the next day. Nobody knows.

If you want to make noise, you target Chicago. It's a media center. Sioux City, not so much.

Trump said he would deport all undocumented immigrants. Day One. His czar, Thomas Homan, threatens to arrest anybody who gets in his way in Chicago. That would get some prime TV, which would drive social media.

Eggs are high — \$8 a dozen on the coasts. Better not raid the henhouse. Pork is pretty cheap, but if you back up hogs things can get out of control quickly. Food prices shooting up 50% in two weeks is why Trump ordered sick workers back to chopping Iowa chops in his first go-around.

We might not abide Mexicans but we

would prefer cheaper bacon with our cheaper eggs.

Agribusiness will have a tough enough time with tariffs. The new ag secretary says easing the pain of tariffs and bird flu are her top concerns. She did not talk at all last week about what would happen if you shut down slaughterhouses for lack of labor. The cows must be milked. No reports of raids in Sioux County dairy barns. Those are facts.

If you deport the undocumented permanently, it would reorganize agri-industry. Mass deportation would bust the meat trust. Not even the Shanghai Reds could hold Smithfield together in that event. The dairy conglomerates would burst an udder. If you deport the undocumented male, remember that his legal wife who works at Tyson goes with him.

It's hard to believe that Tyson, Smithfield, JBS and Cargill will allow that to happen. It hasn't, yet. Fear is the whole point, not inflation.

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

Trump Trade Strategy: Big Sticks, Big Bets

By ALAN GUEBERT

Sir Isaac Newton—he of "For every action there is an equal and opposite reaction" fame— was a polymath who excelled in math, physics, astronomy, alchemy, and theology.

And now, if you squint, economics, because, as his Third Law of Motion suggests, when you push markets one way with tariffs—as the Trump White House did in early February, you should expect an equal and opposite reaction from those same markets.

Take Colombia, the first target of President Trump's tariffication policy. On Jan. 27, the White House imposed 25% tariffs on Colombian imports when it resisted the use of U.S. military flights, rather than 4 to 8 times cheaper commercial flights, to repatriate undocumented Colombians.

Most American farm leaders gulped at the news for the little known reason that Colombia is "the largest South American market for U.S. agricultural products," according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), "and the seventh-largest market for U.S. food and beverage exports globally."

That tariff tempest blew over in 24 hours but the knee-buckling use of U.S. power over costly, showy military flights is not likely to be forgotten by Colombian food buyers.

They don't need to buy American, especially if U.S. leadership makes a point to embarrass them in their own commodity-rich backyard.

American farm leaders blanched again when the White House threatened to unilaterally hit our long-at-peace neighbors and best U.S. ag customers, Mexico and Canada, with similar 25% import tariffs a week later. Both nations immediately imposed reciprocal tariffs but then quickly announced settlements that included little new for anyone, according to several news services.

Other than, of course, handing the White House what it touted as a trade win when, in fact, explained the Feb. 4 *New York Times*, "ambiguity ... seems to be as much a part of [Trump's] strategy as the threat of tariffs themselves."

So no one gained much of anything in this week-long game of international chicken even though the White House insists that its big-stick trade policy won the day because Colombia, Mexico, and Canada didn't want to pay U.S. tariffs.

Which is perfect nonsense because exporters don't pay tariffs, importers do.

This up-is-down misrepresentation matters because it involves U.S. ag's three biggest farm and food importers: No. 1, Mexico that will buy \$30 billion in U.S. ag goods in 2025; No. 2, Canada, that will buy \$29.2 billion; and No. 3, China, that will buy \$23.3 billion of U.S. farm goods and now is also under tariff threat by the White House.

Collectively, the three account for 48% of all forecasted 2025 U.S. farm sales abroad.

The last time the Trump White House

played this wrong-headed tariff game, American farmers lost markets in China and the White House paid out \$23 billion in special federal payments to (principally) corn, soybean, and cotton growers because of those lost markets.

American taxpayers paid that \$23 billion tab, not China, and certainly not any Chinese tariffs.

Will Congress, now searching U.S. Capitol couch cushions for nickels and dimes to fund the estimated \$5 trillion extension of the 2017 Trump tax cuts, pony up billions more to clean up a wrongheaded, second Trump ag tariff war?

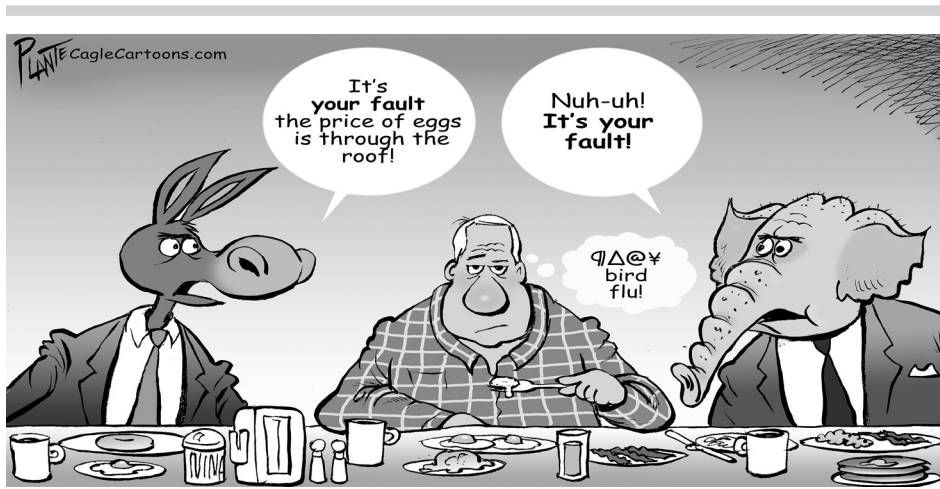
Probably, but you wouldn't know it from the silence that's descended over Washington. No one in GOP ag leadership denounced the Trump tariffs last week and a few—unbe-

lievably—actually endorsed them.

That's just crazy and you know it and so does every GOP member of the ag committees.

Pushback—payback—is coming and that actual cost will fall on every American taxpayer, farmers and ranchers included.

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 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 information at farmandfoodfile.com



If You Get Ebola, Don't Forget to Thank Trump

By JOE CONASON

The last time Americans faced the possible spread of Ebola to U.S. territory, in 2014, Donald Trump irresponsibly stoked public fears and barked at Barack Obama while doing nothing useful to protect us. Now the same deadly virus has showed up in the crowded capital of Uganda — where a nurse has died — and is threatening to spread further, which means it could eventually arrive here. And this time Trump has done something far worse, mindlessly ripping down the shield that has defended us from Ebola and similar menaces. If and when the hemorrhagic virus arrives here to kill Americans, he won't be able to point an accusing finger at Obama or anyone else.

Last August marked the 10th anniversary of the Ebola outbreak in Liberia that the Obama administration stopped through the work of the U.S. Agency for International Development and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, overseen by White House officials, all working in cooperation with other countries and the World Health Organization.

It was a complex undertaking: Led by Ron Klain, who later became Joe Biden's chief of staff, veteran officials mounted what's known as a "whole of government" effort to confine the outbreak in West Africa and bolster the local response with advanced medicine, protective gear, burial teams and experienced clinicians.

The result they achieved was an enormous success that

saved many lives and enhanced American prestige abroad. Hundreds of idiotic carping tweets from Trump, then just a celebrity conspiracy monger, were an ignoble footnote.

Flash forward to our current dark moment, when the Trump administration is abruptly eviscerating all kinds of vital government functions — including our once-unparalleled capacity to suppress a hazard like Ebola before it seriously imperiled our citizens.

Almost as soon as he returned to the Oval Office, the president misused his power to cripple all the agencies whose personnel and expertise are most needed at this moment to guard against the return of Ebola. On his orders, the United States withdrew from the WHO, while his minions took down USAID websites and shut down most CDC functions.

Mark Leon Goldberg, a journalist who superbly covers international organizations and America's role in the world, explained how the system is supposed to work in his Global Dispatches column on Substack:

"Under normal circumstances, there would be no need to panic. Since the 2014 West Africa Ebola outbreak, local health officials in Africa and the international community have become skilled at containing outbreaks before they spread out of control. There have been at least eight separate outbreaks in the region, but all have been contained. None spread internationally, least of all to the United States.

"At the center of these efforts to stop the international spread of Ebola are the World Health Organization, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and the United States Agency for International Development. These agencies work with local authorities and provide platforms for international cooperation that help develop and deploy vaccines, conduct disease surveillance, and work directly with local health officials to provide capacity where it may be lacking."

He quotes Stephanie Psaki, a former National Security Council official, outlining the "playbook" that those agencies followed to stem countless disease outbreaks — implemented at high speed with international partners, emergency funding and trained health professionals in place.

What's suddenly different, says Goldberg, is that "there's no one left to execute that playbook. Trump fired most of them. ... Simply put, the methods and strategy that have successfully kept Americans safe from eight Ebola outbreaks over the last decade are no longer operational."

The same numbskull who once mouthed off about Ebola has left us more vulnerable to it than we've ever been before. Trump's own former surgeon general, Dr. Jerome Adams, recently warned against the vindictive and stupid assault on the nation's public health infrastructure by his old boss.

"Regardless of how you feel about 'public health,' or '[Anthony] Fauci,' it's a real bad time to have blocked public communications from CDC, and work with WHO," Adams scolded on social media. "Republicans must understand (that) they're gonna own any and all preventable outbreaks / harm moving forward."

He means the Republicans who are letting Trump run wild. But no worries! When the coffins are lined up, I'm sure they will all send thoughts and prayers.

Joe Conason is the editor in chief of NationalMemo.com and author of several books, including (with Gene Lyons) "The Hunting of the President: The Ten-Year Campaign to Destroy Bill and Hillary Clinton" (St. Martin's Press, 2000). Conason co-produced a 2004 documentary film, "The Hunting of the President," based on the book. His new book is "The Longest Con: How Grifters, Swindlers, and Frauds Hijacked American Conservatism," with a foreword by George T. Conway III.

A Coup Attempt Against American Taxpayers

Trump's attempt to freeze federal funds for government services was an effort to steal our tax dollars to enrich billionaires. And he'll try again.

By KAREN DOLAN

President Trump caused panic and chaos when his Office on Management and Budget ordered a sweeping freeze on federal funding for programs American families rely on.

The backlash was fast and fierce as programs ranging from Medicaid to Meals on Wheels to cancer research were impacted. By the end of the day, a federal judge had temporarily "frozen the freeze" — and the following day, the administration reluctantly revoked it.

But make no mistake: This was an attempt to force unconstitutional cuts to vital services that our taxes paid for. Programs that help Americans get food, housing, education, health care, and more have been plunged into uncertainty. And the administration's efforts to use whatever means necessary to line their own pockets by picking ours are just beginning.

In this case, the administration told agencies their funding would be frozen until they could prove they were "supporting activities consistent with the President's policies and requirements" — and not "Marxist equity, transgenderism, and green new deal social engineering policies," whatever that means.

A sloppy, two-page memo from the Office on Management and Budget exempted Social Security and Medicare in a footnote, along with "assistance directly to individuals." But much of that assistance goes through programs or nonprofits that reported disruptions after the memo came out.

All 50 state Medicaid offices, for example, immediately reported losing access to the federal Medicaid payment portal. Portals for Head Start, housing programs, after-

school programs, some charter schools, and Special Olympics funding were also disrupted.

First Focus on Children estimated that over \$300 billion in funding for children's well-being was at stake. And a spokesperson for Meals on Wheels told HuffPost reporter Arthur Delaney that seniors were panicked "not knowing where their next meals will come from."

All told, over 2,000 federal programs were put at risk. Alongside those for food, health care, education, and housing, experts worried domestic abuse shelters, suicide prevention services, disaster relief, small business funding, child care, and much, much more could also be impacted.

These programs are lifelines for families — and cuts to them are enormously unpopular among voters. For instance, 81 percent of Americans oppose cuts to Medicaid, while around 70% or more oppose cuts to SNAP, Head Start, child care, and housing assistance.

This was a brazen, unlawful attempt to steal our tax dollars. And it was an assault on our democracy as well as our families. The Constitution gives Congress alone the authority to pass laws and appropriate

funds, not the president.

Whichever way this pans out, one thing is clear: this administration is trying every tactic — legal or otherwise — to fund its planned massive tax handout to its billionaire backers. And this won't be the last attempt — even after the memo to agencies was pulled back, Trump's press secretary tweeted, "This is NOT a rescission of the federal funding freeze."

Meanwhile, the administration is still trying to cancel funding for green jobs, infrastructure, and climate that our lawmakers already approved — which amounts to more theft of our tax dollars. And future budget proposals will pair tax cuts for corporations and billionaires with harsh service cuts for the rest of us.

The White House will keep pushing the envelope to grab as much power as they can to fleece working people and enrich its billionaire backers. Our families deserve better. And fast.

Karen Dolan directs the Criminalization of Race and Poverty Project at the Institute for Policy Studies. This op-ed was distributed by OtherWords.org.

A Time for Protest — and Here is Mine

By JOHN YOUNG

The reprise of all things Dylan ("A Complete Unknown," great movie; see it) raises the question: What happened to protest singing?

Listen around. T'ain't been heard for years, and we need it more than ever.

Taylor Swift has the chops, but her tunes are tightly engineered around Taylor Swift.

Chappell Roan has the guts, but "Pink Pony Club" is not the stuff to levitate the Pentagon.

Listen around. Listen to the apathy and the ignorance by which fascist theatrics took center stage in Washington on a recent stay-inside January day.

Blowin' in the wind. Avengement paraded as policy. Hatred saluted as patriotism. A rube with a king complex and all the tools of king-ery.

Singers, alert. Look at the people we awarded power:

Herr gazillionerr Heil-on Musk, shadow president.

A.I. Vance, vice president. (No typo there — no human, either. From the Silicon Valley Workshop, a lifelike, boy-like means by which tech bros can run a nation remotely.)

Mike "Mr. Roboto" Johnson, House speaker: a Roomba in good shoes.

Too much to take in assessing the goon squad nominated for Cabinet posts:

The new secretary of defense is a white supremacist. Just read his tats.

The national intelligence director-designate couldn't say enough good things about the self-exiled Butcher of Syria, and she thinks the rapist of Ukraine is a suitable date.

The person tabbed as education secretary owes her fortune — and thereby her influence — to men in tights.

The new head of Homeland Security killed her little dog and thought it worthy of her memoir.

This leads us to the person who thinks all of these people are the best and brightest, and that just about anyone on a public payroll not of his (natural) skin color is a DEI hire.

"DEI hire" reframed: donors, enablers, incompetents.

Protest singers: Don't leave all the heavy lifting to "Saturday Night Live."

Me — I can't sing. That doesn't mean I can't protest.

So here goes: I will challenge vigorously, as a citizen and commenter, what this power-addled man does as president. I will write about him more often than many readers may wish to read.

But as often as I mention him, I will not write his name. Repeat: not write his name.

For now, I've settled on President Blob. Blob. Empty of form. Empty of virtue. Empty of human decency.

It's my statement of calculated disrespect — toward a person who showed no respect for me and all who voted him out in 2020. He tried to lie away his defeat. He used coercion and a host of underhanded means to subvert the results.

He is owed no respect from me, for he is a study in disrespect.

With the policies he now unveils, he shows no respect for the disenfranchised and marginalized.

He treats public employees like dirt — torrents of abhorrent generalizations.

Don't forget officers of the law. His supporters spit fire over Black Lives Matter protests. They spoke of "Backing the Blue." Then when President Blob pardoned assaultants who battered and trampled Capitol police, they stabbed the blue in the back with their assent. They also played along with Blob's transparently self-serving assault on agents of the FBI for following his tracks as he broke the law.

Face it. He shows respect to no one, not even the obeisant partisans whose faces reflect from his shoe tops.

This is a man who told the Republican Georgia Secretary of State Brad Raffensperger he was breaking the law by following it, who likely would be facing jail if he hadn't cast his spell over the hinterlands and just enough over the rest of the land on Election Day.

"Working-class" voters who delivered to him an "X" on Election Day to him will soon see jobs X-ed out because snuffing what remains of the stunning job-creating works of Joe Biden's infrastructure and clean-energy legislation is the order of the day.

Watch, also, the job-killing nature of a full-on trade war.

President Blob will not lower unemployment. He sure as heck won't lower the price of eggs. After all, he doesn't control them. And why should it matter to him now? The Egg McMuffin is ever a bargain.

He will not make the world or the nation safer. He will not make government work better. What he'll do is watch television like a blob and be informed by his favorite cable channel that whatever he does — or doesn't do in, say, a pandemic or a riot he incites — is right for the country.

Where are the protest singers?

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

Give a friend a gift subscription to The Progressive Populist Call 818-286-3104

Cover Story...

Continued from page one

“States generally do not have the resources, experience, equipment, nor the political will to quickly and effectively respond” to serious pollution complaints, Scott Throwe, a former senior enforcement official at the EPA, said in an email.

In Pascagoula, Mississippi, complaints from residents rolled in to the state’s environmental agency for years as a nearby oil refinery, a shipbuilding plant and other facilities regularly released carcinogens like benzene and nickel, according to emissions reports the facilities sent to the EPA.

The futility of the complaints became apparent when the nonprofit Thriving Earth Exchange learned in early 2023 that the scientific instruments state contractors had used in the neighborhood to investigate recent complaints weren’t sensitive enough to detect some of the worst chemicals at levels that could pose health risks. The instruments were designed to protect industrial workers during eight-hour workdays, not children and medically vulnerable people who need greater protections at home.

“I don’t live in this house eight hours! I live here 24/7,” said resident Barbara Weckesser, who has complained to the state about the toxic air for more than a decade.

Jan Schaefer, communications director for the Mississippi Department of Environmental Quality, said the agency uses “scientifically sound methods and tools” to address complaints and that looking at just one episode omits “critical context and broader actions taken by the agency to address air quality concerns in Mississippi.”

Before Trump’s inauguration, the EPA’s regional office said the state agency had applied for a grant to install air monitors, and data collection should begin this spring. The \$625,000 long-term air monitoring effort could finally determine the source and scale of the pollution, but the data it produces isn’t “going to trigger something magical to happen,” said Barbara Morin, an air pollution analyst who advises the environmental agencies of eight northeastern states. Either the state or Trump’s EPA will need to analyze the data to see what’s causing the pollution and how to stop it, Morin said.

Almost immediately after taking office, Trump ordered a freeze on all federal grants, including those at the EPA, sparking a legal battle. Nevertheless, Schaefer said the project’s schedule is on track.

The EPA confirmed that similar activities in the tiny city of Verona, Missouri, where the agency had been cracking down on an industrial plant spewing a dangerous carcinogen, remain ongoing.

While making an animal feed additive, the plant releases ethylene oxide, a colorless gas linked to leukemia and breast cancer.

In response to a request from the city’s then-mayor, Joseph Heck, the state conducted a cancer survey of residents in 2022 and determined there wasn’t enough data for detailed analysis. That same year, the plant, operated by BCP Ingredients, leaked nearly 1,300 pounds of ethylene oxide, the EPA reported.

The EPA intervened, setting up air monitoring in the town, fining the company \$300,000 and ordering it to install equipment to remove 99.95% of the ethylene oxide coming out of a particular smokestack. (BCP Ingredients didn’t return a request for comment.) “The EPA has done a lot more than I think the state can ever do,” said Heck, whose partner died of cancer in 2022. Crystal Payne was in complete remission from breast cancer before they moved to Verona, Heck said, but within a year it came back and spread to her brain and her liver.

A spokesperson with the Missouri Department of Natural Resources said the EPA used its authority under the federal Clean Air Act to compel the company to update its pollution-cutting equipment after the spill. He said the state lacks the power to do that.

“Texas Is Extremely Industry Friendly”

For years, a facility that sterilizes medical equipment in Laredo, Texas, released more ethylene oxide into the air than any other industrial plant in the country, according to emission reports the facility submitted to the EPA.

Nearly 130,000 nearby residents, including more than 37,000 children, faced an elevated lifetime cancer risk, a ProPublica and Texas Tribune investigation found. The parents of two children diagnosed with acute lymphocytic leukemia, a cancer linked to ethylene oxide exposure, recounted their ordeal and said they had no idea about the risks.

A statement from Midwest Sterilization Corporation, which operates the Laredo plant, said the company “meets or exceeds all federal and state law requirements” and performs the “important job” of sterilizing medical equipment, which “saves lives.”

After the EPA released a report in 2016 on the dangers of ethylene oxide, Texas’ environmental agency conducted its own review of the federal study. The state concluded that people could safely inhale the chemical at concentrations thousands of

times higher than the EPA’s safe limit.

The state then passed a rule that meant that polluters didn’t need to lower their emissions.

Richard Richter, a spokesperson for the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality, said the agency conducted an in-depth analysis that “led to the conclusion that there was inadequate evidence to support” a link between ethylene oxide and breast cancer.

Scientists told ProPublica that the state agency reached that verdict only after wrongfully excluding studies that linked ethylene oxide to breast cancer and using a flawed analysis of the data EPA relied on.

The state is the nation’s top ethylene oxide polluter and home to 26 facilities that emit ethylene oxide, according to ProPublica’s 2021 analysis of EPA data from 2014 through 2018.

“Texas is extremely industry friendly,” said Tricia Cortez, executive director of the nonprofit Rio Grande International Study Center.

Cortez said deferring more responsibility to the states “would be disastrous for normal everyday people. ... Why should it matter how much you’re protected based on your state’s affiliation? People exposed to something so horrible and cancer-causing should have the same protection everywhere.”

Representatives for Trump’s transition team didn’t return a request for comment.

Hannah Perls, a senior staff attorney at Harvard’s Environmental & Energy Law Program, said giving states more control over how they implement and enforce federal laws enables “legal sacrifice zones,” reinforcing or creating disparities based on geography.

Federal Rules in Danger

One important reform that promises relief for the residents of Laredo is an updated rule adopted by the EPA last spring.

Prompted by a lawsuit brought by Cortez’s group, the federal agency’s rule will eventually require facilities nationwide, including those in Texas, to conduct air monitoring for ethylene oxide and add equipment to reduce emissions of the chemical by 90%.

Facilities have until 2026 to comply and can ask for extensions beyond that.

But the attorney reportedly nominated to lead the Trump EPA’s air pollution efforts is a friend of the industry that depends on the chemical. Aaron Szabo recently represented the Advanced Medical Technology

Association, an industry trade group that includes commercial sterilizers that use ethylene oxide. (His work for the group was first reported by *Politico*.) Last year, according to his lobbying report, Szabo lobbied the EPA on its “regulations related to the use of ethylene oxide from commercial sterilizer facilities.”

Szabo didn’t return a request for comment.

Trump and his key picks for important positions in his government have made it clear they intend to roll back environmental protections that burden industry.

How far they go will have lasting consequences for residents in the more than 1,000 hot spots ProPublica’s 2021 analysis identified as having elevated and often unacceptable cancer risks from industrial air pollution.

Another rule issued by the EPA last year offers a new way to tackle pollution in Calvert City, Kentucky.

Last June, a local chemical plant operated by Westlake Vinyls leaked 153 pounds of ethylene dichloride, a dangerous carcinogen, according to EPA records.

It was the latest in a series of problems at the factory that state and federal fines had failed to stop. From 2020 to 2023, the EPA had found 46 instances when the facility didn’t correctly operate controls for the chemical. During one inspection, the concentration of dangerous gases coming from a tank was so high that it overwhelmed the EPA’s measuring instrument, according to agency records obtained by ProPublica. Westlake did not respond to requests for comment.

The EPA’s updated rule will require more than 100 facilities, including Westlake and the refinery in Pascagoula, to install air monitors along the fence line, or perimeter. The monitors will measure up to six toxic gases, and the data will be posted online. (It’s unclear exactly which chemicals these two facilities would monitor, though the requirement could cover ethylene dichloride.)

Michael Koerber, a former EPA air quality expert, said the rule could finally give residents some much-needed transparency. Koerber said an earlier EPA rule, which required oil refineries to install fence line monitoring for benzene, led to a significant decrease in benzene from those facilities.

But the new rule doesn’t fully take effect until next year.

That leaves its enforcement up to the Trump administration.

Lisa Song reports on the environment, energy and climate change for ProPublica.

A Hostile Corporate Takeover of Our Democracy

Never before has one billionaire so thoroughly infiltrated our government and bent it to their will for personal gain.

By ALEX JACQUEZ and ELIZABETH PANCOTTI

Be fitting a presidency inaugurated by a parade of tech billionaires, President Trump has taken Mark Zuckerberg’s infamous “move fast and break things” approach to the opening weeks of his second term — and break things he has.

Trump quickly handed over the federal government’s keys and wallet to unelected billionaire Elon Musk, who has treated Congress, federal law, and regulators with the same brazen disregard he displays in his business ventures.

Under the guise of the Orwellian Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE), Musk — the richest man in the world — has bought de facto control of the U.S. government for a cool \$288 million in political donations. That’s a bargain compared to the nearly \$7 trillion in taxpayer dollars currently at his fingertips.

After sparking confusion, outrage, and temporary restraining orders with their hasty attempt to halt federal spending — imperiling vital programs like Head Start, Meals on Wheels, and Medicaid — Trump and Musk continue to rampage through government.

In a few short weeks, they’ve shuttered federal agencies, fired civil servants, and handed over access to Americans’ sensitive personal and classified information to a group of 20-somethings — all illegally.

According to reporting, Musk’s minions have seized control of the Treasury Department’s payments system. That’s the plumbing that ensures that tax refunds, Social Security payments, and other democratically authorized spending reaches its destination, leaving experts and long-time employees fearful of what comes next.

With Musk serving as judge, jury, and executioner for what constitutes “wasteful” government spending, there’s nothing to stop him from, say, killing investigations into Tesla’s workplace harassment in his California plant or self-driving systems after a fatal pedestrian crash in Arizona.

There’s nothing to stop him from cutting off rivals and securing even more in federal funding and contracts for his company SpaceX, which has taken in more than \$15 billion in taxpayer dollars to date.

More concerning, there’s nothing to stop him from using the vast reams of sensitive and personal information he’s now stolen from millions of Americans to train his artificial intelligence systems, hone his X

(formerly Twitter) algorithms, or even go after specific individuals and nonprofits that criticize him on social media.

This isn’t a government efficiency program — it’s a hostile corporate takeover of American democracy.

While the ultra-rich and large corporations have long used their political influence to secure power and advance their own interests, never before has one billionaire so thoroughly infiltrated the federal government and bent it to their will for personal gain.

In a way, this is the logical endgame for a political system that’s long rewarded those with pockets deep enough to pay for access and drowned out the needs of working people. Musk has gone directly to the source, raiding the public coffers for his own benefit and interests. This way, he can keep the spigots flowing to himself and his companies, while he champions cuts to vital programs that serve workers and families but not billionaires.

Musk rails against the career federal workers who serve under both Democratic and Republican administrations as “unelected bureaucrats,” but you know them as your mail carrier, your social worker, and your Veterans Administration nurse.

New polling for our organization, Groundwork Collaborative, shows that nearly 60% of voters already believe this unelected tech billionaire has too much influence over Trump and the federal government.

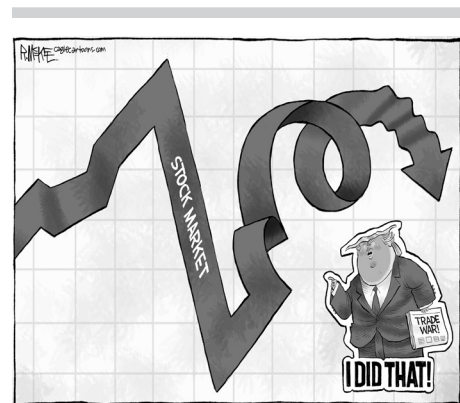
The more they learn, the less they like.

Musk’s audacious \$2 trillion target for spending reductions is infeasible without deep, painful cuts to veterans benefits, Social Security, Medicare, and food assistance, all of which voters find unacceptable by stunning 50 point margins.

Already, scores of lawsuits have been launched against Musk and DOGE’s blitzkrieg through the federal government. Whether they will stop his reckless behavior is one question. Whether he and Trump will listen if they do is another.

Congress must step in and thoroughly investigate DOGE and check Elon’s unbridled power, before he breaks our government and our democracy beyond repair.

Alex Jacquez is the Chief of Policy and Advocacy at Groundwork Collaborative. Elizabeth Pancotti is Groundwork’s Managing Director of Policy and Advocacy. This op-ed was distributed by OtherWords.org.



The All-American Plummet,
Courtesy of the Willfully Blind

Eight years of dire
truthful warnings
amounted to nothing

By DICK POLMAN

Punxsutawney Phil popped his head from his hidey-hole and prophesied four years of fascism here in the Turd Reich. Millions of Americans are rightly terrified. Some of them have even emailed me to ask why I'm not sounding the alarm the way I used to, back when I inveighed against Trump as many as five times a week.

My typical response: For eight long years, I tried. Hundreds of times I tried. So many of my political journalism colleagues tried. But what good did it do? In the land of the willfully blind, what's the use of being clear eyed?

Did I try hard enough? Did I do my part? You be the judge.

"Narcissistic Personality Disorder is characterized by a long-standing pattern of grandiosity (either in fantasy or actual behavior), an overwhelming need for admiration, and usually a complete lack of empathy toward others. According to psychiatric websites, someone with an NPD has a grandiose sense of self-importance (e.g., exaggerates achievements and talents, expects to be recognized as superior without commensurate achievements); is preoccupied with fantasies of unlimited success and power; requires excessive admiration; and has a very strong sense of entitlement, e.g., unreasonable expectations of especially favorable treatment

or automatic compliance with his or her expectations. Gee, does that sound like anyone we know?" (May 2016)

"We can't become so numb to his demagoguery that we can't recognize the clear and present danger he poses to our democratic values." (October 2016)

"He has no respect for the peaceful transition of power, in part because he is ruled by his vile temperament and his vengeful impulses; in part because he has no clue about the responsible exercise of power. Shame on us if we take this as normal." (October 2016)

"An authoritarian sensibility, a strong-man cult, a systematic breakdown of our democratic institutions ... Yes, it can indeed happen here. That future is down the dark path at the fork in the road. If we take it, we own it." (November 2016)

"The most dangerous thing that this in-temperate, unqualified man-child could possibly do is precisely what he continues to do - alienate the people whose job is to protect our national security." (January 2017)

"And to think that 184,000 American soldiers died in Europe, fighting to protect us from fascism. (Voters in 2016 were warned) that he would debase himself, disgrace the presidency, and shame this nation. Not enough paid the requisite attention, tragically oblivious to the gathering storm, and so we are left not knowing when or how we can escape its fury...What a shame that the Founding Fathers didn't require impeachment in cases where the president is simply a miserable excuse for a human being." (August 2017, when he made excuses for neo-Nazis in Charlottesville)

"Trump is a clear and present danger to our national security." (December 2018)

"This guy is going to get a lot of people killed." (March 2020, at the dawn of the COVID pandemic. A year later, the medical

journal Lancet reported that Trump's "ap-alling response" to the pandemic "ex-ecited the spread of COVID" and it said he was responsible for as many as 40% of the 470,000 deaths on his watch.)

"A demagogue who plunders America's democratic institutions and aspires to role-model Russian despotism, a stoker of violence, a sociopathic liar who has dodged accountability his whole life...Strip away everything else about the guy, if that were even possible at this point, and his dearth of empathy and decency is more than enough to render him unfit for more power." (November 2020)

"It's not uncommon for democracies to be fatally undermined from within - Germany in the early '30s, Turkey and Hungary more recently - and we can't afford to flatter ourselves with the delusion that we're simply destined to be different." (February 2021)

"It would be existentially dangerous to deliver the presidency to a 78-year-old whose brain has melted to the consistency of guacamole. He should have medical care, not the nuclear codes." (October 2024)

One particular dude, way back in 1988, warned in a radio address that it would be nuts to threaten tariffs and engage in economic warfare against our friends. He called it "a cheap form of nationalism...Our peaceful trading partners are not our enemies; they are our allies. We should beware of the demagogues who are ready to declare a trade war against our friends - weakening our economy, our national security, and the entire free world - all while cynically waving the American flag."

Thank you, Ronald Reagan. (In today's MAGA GOP, he'd finish dead last in the Iowa caucuses.)

I'm not the proverbial smartest guy in the room; anyone with eyes and ears and

functioning cognition understood the metas-tasizing MAGA threat prior to the '24 bal-loting, and knew what indeed would happen if the criminal and his conspirators were coronated. But mass denial and willful ignorance won the day and now its happening. Now here we are - fated to live as hostages, not citizens - our most treasured financial in-formation having already been stolen.

Fascism in this era is not cattle cars en route to extermination camps. Timothy Snyder, the esteemed scholar of fascism, de-scribes the American version — the digital coup — already in progress:

"A couple dozen young men go from government office to government office, dressed in civilian clothes and armed only with zip drives ... They gain access to the basic computer systems of the federal gov-ernment. Having done so, they proceed to grant their supreme leader access to infor-mation and the power to start and stop all government payments... In the third decade of the 20th century, power is more digital than physical."

The big question (now that it's too late) is how we live with all this, how we cope, and (ideally) how we resist. We of course can entertain ourselves with all manner of trans-itory distractions — How 'Bout Dem Eagles, West Wing reruns, pretty sunsets, YouTube videos of ocean surf — but, ultimately, un-less there's a critical mass of pushback (with Democrats getting off their asses), the nation we loved with be irrevocably shattered. We will be Russia and Turkey, leaving us Hun-gary for more.

Dick Polman, a veteran national political columnist based in Philadelphia and a Writer in Residence at the University of Pennsylvania, writes at DickPolman.substack.com and is dis-tributed by Cagle Cartoons newspaper syndi-cate. Email dickpolman7@gmail.com.

Study Finds That Rural Medical
Debt Affects More Than Patients

Hospitals struggling to
collect medical debts
are also threatened by
mounting financial burdens.
With rural facilities
having narrower financial
margins, the threat looms
even larger there.

By LIZ CAREY / The Daily Yonder

When rural patients incur medical bills they can't pay, the impact of the debt reaches far beyond their own personal pocketbooks, a new study has found.

Medical debt also impacts the hospitals that can't collect on the debt and the communities they serve, according to a research brief from the Rural Health Research Center at the University of Minnesota. Although medical debt is something all communities have, it hits rural communities harder, Carrie Henning-Smith, co-director for the center, said.

Researchers interviewed rural hospital administrators in seven states — Arkansas, California, Illinois, Texas, Vermont, Washington and West Virginia — to look at the implications of medical debt on rural communities at large.

"We know how widespread medical debt is," Henning-Smith said in an interview with the Daily Yonder. "We weren't particularly surprised by anything we heard, but I think one thing that stands out to me is that this is not just an issue of healthcare facilities passing on big bills to patients and then patients shouldering that burden."

"This is really an issue that impacts individual patients, whole communities, and healthcare facilities, and I think smaller rural facilities that have a more tenuous bottom line are some of the most impacted," she said.

Research indicates that about 44% of all U.S. adults are affected by medical debt, and that \$88 billion in outstanding medical bills is currently in collections across the

country. Researchers found the debts impact a rural hospital's ability to continue paying their employees. With fragile bottom lines, rural hospitals are less likely to absorb the debt, respondents said.

A respondent from a Midwestern state said to the researchers, "One of the statistics that I think is really relevant is that we are about a \$150 million organization... and 65% of those dollars go back in the form of compensation and benefits to our employees. So when we have medical debt that becomes excessive and we're struggling to collect on the work that we do, it impacts our ability to employ [providers] and to serve our patients."

With less revenue coming in, most respondents said, they are less likely to invest in equipment upgrades and their facilities, as well as less likely to hire more staff. Additionally, respondents said it's harder to collect on that debt.

"It's a non-recourse issue. We can't go back and take back what we've done," a Southern state administrator told researchers. "You can't repossess anything medical like you can with a car or a home or anything like that when there's financial troubles. We end up really just getting unpaid, mostly."

Researchers found that much of the blame for the debt issue is not solely because of patients who are underinsured. In many cases, insurance companies and other payers — including Medicare, Medicaid and Medicare Advantage — are not covering the cost of care that the hospitals provide.

"They need to have their cost recouped for the care that they provide," Henning-Smith said, "and when they have patients who are uninsured or underinsured or when they are dealing with insurance companies and payers that are not providing a sufficient amount to pay for the cost of the care, then the facility suffers and the patients and community suffer too."

"It's clear that our payer system is broken and that we have people whose care is not compensated at all or not at the rate that it needs to be to keep these facilities financially thriving," she said.

Even if a patient is insured, some hospital administrators surveyed pointed out that underinsurance can create problems for patients and hospitals as well. High deductibles and plans with limited coverage options shift the responsibility for payment

from the insurance company to the patient.

An administrator from the Midwest told the researchers, "Even the people who have the ability to pay, when you have more things like a high deductible health plan, no matter what your income is, it's not easy for very many people if you have a \$5,000 deductible. When that bill comes, that's a difficult thing."

Alan Morgan, CEO of the National Rural Health Association, said when rural hospitals don't get paid, the impact is far reaching. Hospitals are typically among the largest employers in rural communities, and if a hospital fails because it can't pay its bills, the whole community suffers.

"We're in the midst of a hospital closure crisis and declining points of access to care in rural communities and it is because of bad debt, period," Morgan said in an interview with the Daily Yonder. "When a hospital has to find ways to write off bad debt ... for a lot of these rural hospitals, they're operating on the margin and carrying large amounts of debt and uncompensated care that sometimes drives them to closure."

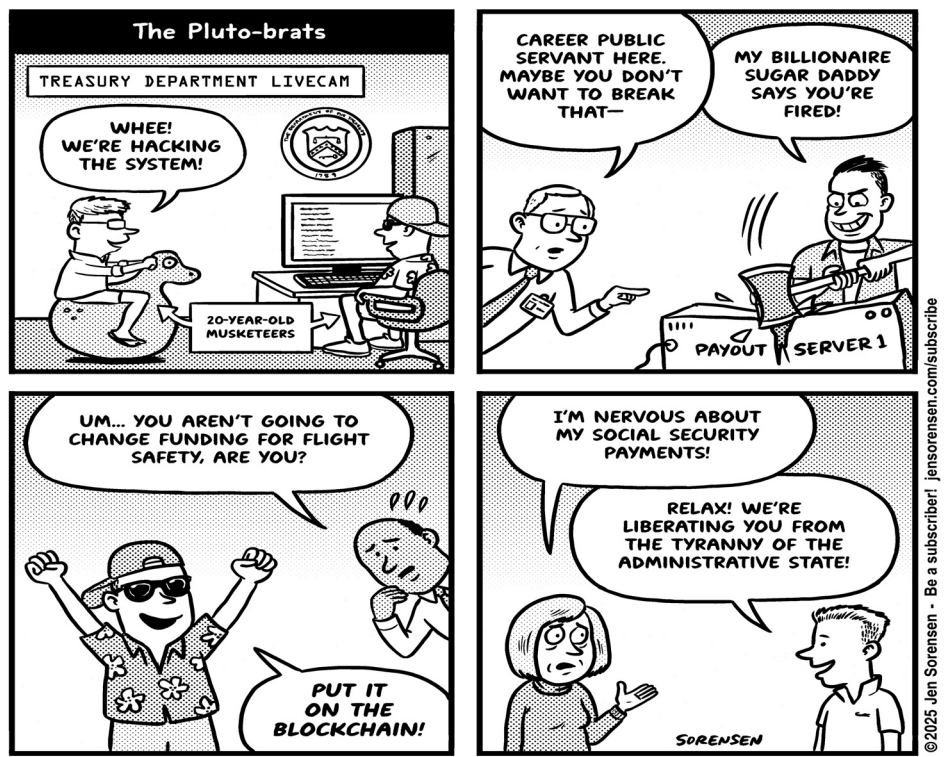
When hospitals close due to financial problems, the economic hit on the commu-

nity is multi-faceted, he said. The lost jobs not only reduce tax revenue coming into the community, but also impact the amount of consumer dollars being spent in the community. It means less income for businesses indirectly linked to the hospital, like flower shops, he said. And once the hospital closes, getting new families and businesses to move there becomes more difficult.

Fixing the issue will mean reforming how rural hospitals are reimbursed, Henning-Smith said.

"The message needs to continue to be about payment reform and understanding that medical debt is a widespread issue that's not going away, but it's not an individual issue and it's not a matter of personal and individual responsibility," she said. "It's a community and a collective and a societal issue that if we don't address, it's not going to only impact the health and access to care of individuals, but it's also going to impact availability of care in rural communities and places that need that care the most."

Liz Carey of Versailles, Ky, is a correspondent for DailyYonder.com, where this story was originally published. For more rural reporting and small-town stories visit dailyyonder.com.



Will Crypto’s Roaring ’20s Lead to a Second Great Depression?

Crypto ‘bros’ invested big-time in 2024’s presidential and congressional campaigns and want unrestricted access to the global banking system. What could possibly go wrong?

By SAM PIZZIGATI

Life in the United States has never been better—if your personal fortune stretches well into the thousands of millions.

Our new year has dawned with 813 Americans cavorting in billionaire land. These deep pockets ended 2024, notes an Institute for Policy Studies analysis, with a combined wealth over \$6.7 trillion. They averaged over \$8.2 billion each.

Need some perspective on that \$8.2 billion? The typical American worker, according to the latest U.S. Bureau of Labor stats, would have to work over 136,000 years to earn that much.

Billionaires, of course, don’t have to actually do any labor to collect their billions. They just let their money do the heavy lifting.

That money, if invested in enterprises that provide us with useful goods and services, can add real value to an economy. But these days our billionaires and their billions don’t have to produce anything of value to climb up the wealth ladder. They can make big bucks manufacturing—at a heavy environmental cost—a product that has no real-life value whatsoever.

Welcome to the world of cryptocurrency.

Crypto emerged amid the turmoil of the Great Recession, an economic catastrophe that began late in 2007 with the bursting of a housing bubble that U.S. financial institutions had pumped up with subprime mortgages and assorted other exotic financing schemes.

Crypto’s early aficionados, notes the British economist Michael Roberts, claimed that cryptocurrencies like Bitcoin would eliminate “the need for financial intermediaries like banks.” Cryptocurrencies existed only electronically, as elaborate computer code that takes huge amounts of energy to “mine.” No government guarantees backed their value, and no crypto champs sought those guarantees.

Within this frame, crypto values spent a dozen years bouncing mostly upward. By mid-2024, the crypto world had turned into a speculative colossus worth some \$2.5 trillion. But crypto’s biggest players were doing little celebrating. The industry seemed to be losing its big-time momentum.

Just two years before, a spectacular crypto crash had cost the sector’s founders and investors a combined \$116 billion. By the end of 2023, some 20 nations had banned

banks from dealing with crypto exchanges, and critics were blasting the crypto industry for pumping ever more fossil fuels into the atmosphere “to solve complex mathematical problems that have no productive purpose.”

Early in 2024, Pew Research polling found the American public exceedingly “skeptical” about cryptocurrency, with almost two-thirds of the nation’s adults having little to no confidence that cryptocurrencies rated as either reliable or safe. Only 19% of Americans who had actually invested in crypto, Pew found, deemed themselves “confident” with the industry’s “reliability and safety.”

Last June, one of the nation’s most influential financial market analysts, Securities and Exchange Commission chair Gary Gensler, gave cause for even more public unease. In congressional testimony, Gensler described the crypto market as a “Wild West” that has investors putting “hard-earned assets at risk in a highly speculative asset class.”

“Many of those investments,” Gensler added, “have disappeared after a crypto platform or service went under due to fraud or mismanagement, leaving investors in line at bankruptcy court.”

In the battle for public opinion, crypto kings realized, they were losing. Their response? Crypto’s big guns moved to lock down as much political help they could buy. They spent last year flooding millions upon millions of dollars into primary and general election races against lawmakers who had dared to support meaningful moves to regulate crypto’s digital highways and byways.

“It’s time to take our country back,” roared one deep-pocketed crypto mover-and-shaker, Tyler Winklevoss. “It’s time for the crypto army to send a message to Washington. That attacking us is political suicide.”

In no time at all, the Lever’s Freddy Brewster notes, this new crypto offensive had lawmakers in Congress, from both sides of the aisle, signaling their openness to minimizing any serious attempts at crypto regulation. The November elections would go on to generate a substantial crypto-friendly majority in the House and a Senate almost as crypto-committed.

Helping to produce this smashing crypto triumph: over \$250 million in campaign contributions from the three top cryptocurrency political action committees.

No one would ultimately jump on the 2024 crypto political bandwagon more dramatically than Donald Trump. Up until then, the former president had been a pronounced crypto skeptic.

“I am not a fan of Bitcoin and other Cryptocurrencies, which are not money, and whose value is highly volatile and based on thin air,” Trump announced on social media in 2019. “Unregulated Crypto Assets can facilitate unlawful behavior, including drug trade and other illegal activity.”

But Trump would eventually come to see the potential in crypto campaign dollars and turn himself into the political world’s most visible crypto booster. In May 2024, Trump became the first major presidential candidate to accept donations in cryptocurrency. In July, he gave a fawning keynote address at one of the crypto world’s premiere annual conferences.

Trump saw something else in crypto as well. The industry, he ever so accurately perceived, could turbocharge his own personal wealth, to levels far outpacing his old-school investments in office towers and classic hotels—and

all without engaging in any sort of real risk.

So Trump did that crypto engaging. By Inauguration Day, thanks to the release of his own “red-hot” crypto token, Trump had more than 90% of his personal net worth in crypto assets.

To protect that investment, Trump will undoubtedly put his signature on legislation—first introduced by Wyoming Republican Sen. Cynthia Lummis—designed to force the federal government to buy up a national stockpile of cryptocurrency as a reserve just like the gold in Fort Knox. Getting crypto reserve status, cheers billionaire MicroStrategy executive chair Michael Saylor, would rank as a truly noble 21st-century “Louisiana Purchase.”

But independent analysts see “no discernible logic” to any move in that direction.

“I get why the crypto investor would love it,” observes Mark Zandi, the chief economist at Moody’s Analytics. “Other than the crypto investor, I don’t see the value, particularly if taxpayers have to ante up.”

Turning crypto into a reserve currency, explain other analysts, would “prop up” cryptocurrency prices. Reserve status, note Wall Street on Parade editors Pam and Russ Martens, would enable crypto billionaires to sell their crypto “without driving down” cryptocurrency prices—because these billionaires would have “a perpetual buyer on the other side of their trade.”

Having the government buy up crypto, as Dean Baker at the Center for Economic and Policy Research recently told *The Nation*, has “literally no rationale other than to give money to Trump and Musk and their crypto buddies.”

Not surprisingly, conventional financial institutions—outfits ranging from Goldman Sachs and Citigroup to BlackRock and other big asset manager funds—would like to share in that money harvest. They’ve all begun entering the crypto “fray,” points out the economist Ramaa Vasudevan, and institutional investors “are also banging at the door.”

Crypto, adds Vasudevan, is “turning on a spigot of financial fortune-hunting.”

That sort of hunting, historically, has almost always ended in crashes that left average people the hardest hit. In our new crypto age, that could easily happen again.

The various crypto crashes we’ve seen over recent years, as the Lever’s Freddy Brewster noted last month, have “mostly affected” people already invested in cryptocurrencies. But the growing linkages between crypto and the more traditional economy have expanded the economic peril.

“Potential victims of future crashes,” Brewster warns, “could balloon if the nascent industry is allowed to become more entrenched with traditional banks.”

And that entrenching is approaching overdrive.

“Crypto bros are heading into 2025 with great expectations,” notes Bloomberg columnist Andy Mukherjee.

These “bros” invested big-time in 2024’s presidential and congressional campaigns. Now they want, Mukherjee adds, “unhindered access to the global banking system.”

What could possibly go wrong?

Sam Pizzigati, an Institute for Policy Studies associate fellow, co-edits Inequality.org, where this appeared. Email editor@toomuchonline.org.

Musk Security Breach Must Be Stopped

It’s not clear who might stop Trump now that he has the power of the presidency, complete with Supreme Court Immunity, and a guaranteed pardon for any crimes he commits with this massive breach of privacy and imminent threat to national security

By GLYNN WILSON

MUSCLE SHOALS, Ala. — Well folks, it was my intent to retire from daily news and politics after the 2024 election. Even if it had gone the other way, although I would have felt much better about the future with a different outcome.

We tried to warn people about the total disaster ahead, what’s left of the watchdog press in America. I wrote about Project 2025 a year before anyone else picked up on it.

I shared the video with JD Vance in the room with the head of the Heritage Foundation when they made their big announcement in Washington, before he somehow managed to get Trump to pick

him as his choice for Vice President. The bad boy of “Hillbilly Elegy” had become a card carrying member of Opus Dei, a radical, right wing-cult within the Catholic Church, advocating for the end of democracy and a return to monarchy, or theocracy on top of oligopoly, with an authoritarian dictator in charge.

Not enough people believed it could ever be as bad as we warned, or just didn’t find out about the stories because they were buried by the bots on social media, and not covered on cable TeeVee or treated as if it was normal politics as usual. Some called it “sane washing.”

Immersing myself in the history of rock and roll and the swampy Muscle Shoals sound for a book, I’ve spent the past couple of months conducting research and watching YouTube videos, listing to the music that came to be called “Southern Rock.” It’s been fun.

But when I woke up the first Monday morning in February, and saw all the stories about Elon Musk invading the Treasury Department and other agencies of the federal government, and then went to buy a few things with my Social Security money that hit the bank in the morning, it came as a shock to find out that my money was frozen in the bank. I could not use my bank card as debit or credit. When I called the bank, they claimed there was a “hold” on my account, and demanded that to get the hold lifted and access to the money, I would need to MAIL them a bunch of documents proving my identity and my “permanent” address.

Never mind that I’ve had this account

for 20 years, and used it while traveling around the country in a camper van RV in New York, Pennsylvania, Montana, Utah, Arizona, Oklahoma, Maryland, Virginia, Washington, D.C., North Carolina, Tennessee, Missouri, Arkansas, Mississippi, Alabama and Florida, and never had a problem before.

So it became clear that what Musk was doing with his newfound high level security clearance was using the data to target Trump’s “enemies list,” including journalists, you know, his “enemies of the people.” He probably already has a database on the enemies list, looking for ways to screw us. Hey, Trump promised “retribution.” This is just the beginning.

So I guess I have no choice now but to suit back up for the fight. I called every lawyer in my contact list, and ran a story on my website with all the other stories from Substack, the *Washington Post* and *New York Times*, and shared more stories, including one about a pending lawsuit against Musk on Facebook.

As we used to whisper in a certain newsroom back when it was a joke: “It’s a war, and no one is safe.”

Well it’s a war now, and it’s not funny anymore.

Some of my friends have already left the country, some moving to Portugal, South America and Canada. I figured to wait it out and see what went down, mostly not watching the news, just a little morning reading online.

Well now the shoe has dropped. Musk is obviously supposed to play the role of Trump’s “tip of the spear” to gut the federal

government and run off as many career employees as possible, even at the Department of Justice and F.B.I. as well as E.P.A. and the National Park Service. Musk has moved into a federal building in Washington with his team of hackers like he did in San Francisco when he first took over Twitter. They have Trump’s enemies list, and now your Social Security information too, and will stop at nothing to ruin the lives of anyone who ever said a bad word about Trump.

A simple search for “Donald Trump” on the New American Journal website reveals that we have run 1,080 stories on Trump over the past 10 years, none of them flattering.

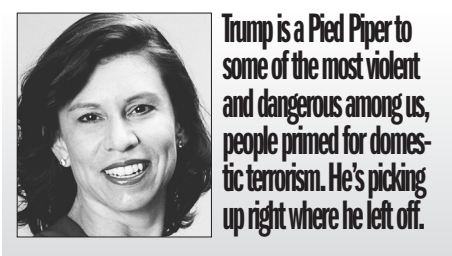
Oh, and of course Musk is deep in business and dependent on China to build his crappy cars and other parts for his other businesses, so how could someone with such a blatant conflict of interest get the security clearance to invade the Treasury Department and get anyone fired who stood in his way? Only with the tacit approval of Trump, who will no doubt share his broad immunity granted him by his Supreme Court and his pardon power to protect Musk and others from any federal criminal charges.

He is doing some of what he’s doing claiming he will help in Trump’s war against China, including a space weapons race that is already under way. How do we know he won’t also share this information with hackers in China? We don’t. He probably will.

He’s also in bed and financially dependent on Saudi Arabia. What could go wrong?

Continued on next page

MARY SANCHEZ



How to Cultivate a Domestic Terrorist by Donald J. Trump

More than a week into his presidency, Donald Trump was using a shock and awe approach to governing. Hopefully, he will not come to regret it. Because he is once again fanning the flames of extremism with the potential for things to get violent. Trump is known for swinging from stance to stance, boldly proclaiming that he'll do one thing, but then doing the opposite. He's loyal to no one, and sheds close confidants on a whim. And yet, there's one strategy from which he doesn't deviate – He coddles the worst attributes of human nature. Our new president has created conditions pleasing to a surly mass of anti-government, conspiracy-spouting, racist extremists. Trump is a Pied Piper to some of the most violent and dangerous among us, people primed for domestic terrorism. In the first few weeks, he's accomplished much, picking up right where he left off in his first term. Trump has long cozied up to some of these groups. Remember, he stoked the fal-

lacy that former President Barack Obama, a Black man, couldn't be president, spinning lies about Obama's birth certificate. But he's outdone himself lately. Few were surprised that he used his first hours as president of the U.S. to pardon many of the Jan. 6 rioters. He long referred to them as "hostages," claiming that they were being unfairly held in prisons. Trump preposterously wants the nation to see them as victims of out-of-control federal prosecutors. The problem isn't just that he pardoned or commuted the sentences of the Proud Boys, Oath Keepers, and militia members, some of the most violent Jan. 6 rioters who flooded D.C. as part of the "Stop the Steal" protest to keep then in-coming President Joe Biden from taking office. The danger is heightened because the pardons come in conjunction with other Trump actions. Week two of Trump's presidency saw the elimination of the easily accessible database maintained by the Department of Justice that details those Jan. 6 rioters who were convicted and charged, along with supporting documents on the cases. With fewer records to access, many will no doubt reimagine the events of that day as less violent, less planned. They might even get behind the idea that the mobs were patriotic in their desire to overturn the results of a free and fair election. The Trump administration has dismissed career civil servants within the federal government's law enforcement arms. Some were the reasoned voices with institutional knowledge of how to track domestic terrorists. A swath of inspector generals who independently oversaw investigations of the federal government were also sent packing. Then there's the administration's hyper focus on the southern border, along with its unrelenting verbiage that paints immigrants as the key perpetrators of crime, which isn't supported by the data.

Then we have Trump's many enablers. One, former South Dakota Governor Kristi Noem, who during her confirmation hearings for her new post as Secretary of Homeland Security, had to be prodded into saying a few words about domestic terrorism. At every chance, Noem pivoted, continuing to parrot the Trump-pleasing lines about the dangers at the U.S.-Mexico border. This anti-immigrant rhetoric fuels absurd beliefs in eugenics, or replacement theories about the birth of too many non-white babies. We've experienced this ill-advised shift in focus before as a nation. After the terrifying and deadly attacks of Sept. 11, 2001, the government's attention understandably focused on foreign-born Islamic terrorists. The Department of Homeland Security was formed at this time. The problem, as reporting in hindsight has shown, was that federal agencies overlooked the threat of domestic terrorism, which began to flourish. The federal government, at least prior to the Trump administration, defined "domestic terrorism" as criminal acts dangerous to human life on U.S. soil that appear intended to coerce a civilian population or influence the conduct of government. Numerous reports show a significant rise in domestic terror incidents, especially in cities. A 2023 U.S. Government Accountability Office study noted 231 incidents (attacks or plots) between 2010 and 2021. The report also noted a 357% increase in domestic terrorism-related investigations during the previous 10 years. The Center for Strategic and International Studies cited growing political polarization and the mainstreaming of extremist beliefs. In 2021, White supremacists, anti-government militias, and like-minded extremists committed the majority of attacks. Most people are familiar with the Ku Klux Klan, neo-Nazis and Skinheads. Lesser

known are the extremist militias and ideological groups that arose in recent decades. Some have self-branded themselves as Christian patriots. They include the Three Percenters, Proud Boys, Patriot Prayer and Oath Keepers, some of whom were present at the Capitol riot. They're not going to be satisfied with pardons and commutations of their sentences. Some, like Proud Boys leader Enrique Tarrio (convicted of seditious conspiracy), are calling for retribution. They have grievances against the previous administration that they believe did them wrong. These people aren't Trump fans in the vein of a conservative who might don a red MAGA ball cap at a Trump rally. Some fantasize about being part of a citizen militia as warriors in a race war they want to ignite in the U.S. These are people who hoard firearms and partake in paramilitary training on the weekends. Historically, they're unpredictable. Fights and falling outs occur in their leadership. Groups splinter and form new ones. Dozens of masked members of the White supremacist group Patriot Front (which split from Vanguard America) paraded around the National Mall with flags during the recent March for Life, chanting "Reclaim America." Trump is stoking a swirling cauldron of these extremists. He is encouraging and giving cover to people who are anti-government, antisemitic, homophobic, xenophobic, and filled with racial and ethnic hatreds. At best, the president is dangerously clueless about the mindsets he's courting. More likely, he's doing it fully aware, not caring that U.S. lives could be at stake.

Mary Sanchez is a syndicated columnist for Tribune Content Agency, formerly with the Kansas City Star. Email msanchezcolumn@gmail.com Follow on Twitter @msanchezcolumn.

Will the Republic Strike Back?

The attempted hostile takeover of the U.S. government by Trump and Musk is beginning to hit a wall. Let's see if the wall holds.

By ROBERT KUTTNER

The latest executive orders and outright seizures of government agencies have one thing in common: They are patently illegal. Much of what President Trump and Elon Musk have done can only be legally done by changing statutes. This leaves them all vulnerable to court injunctions. We got a taste of this choreography when Trump's OMB issued an order freezing most government payments. That was Jan. 27. By Jan. 28, facing a political outcry from both parties, OMB modified the order. Later that day, a federal district judge in D.C., Loren AliKhan, issued a temporary restraining order blocking the OMB action. OMB then withdrew its order entirely. Then on Jan. 31, a federal district judge in Rhode Island, John McConnell, in response to a suit from 22 state attorneys general and the District of Columbia, issued a much broader permanent injunction providing that the Trump administration cannot "pause, freeze, impede, block, cancel, or terminate" taxpayer money already allocated by Congress in the 23 jurisdictions that filed the suit. OMB has complied. Score one for the rule of law. The latest ploys by Trump and Musk are even more audacious and outrageous. Consider these. Musk is attempting to shut down the U.S. Agency for International Development. USAID headquarters were closed at Musk's order, and the Department of Homeland

Security barred officials from entering. Employees were also blocked from accessing the agency's website. On X, Musk called the agency "evil" and a "viper's nest of radical-left marxists who hate America." He added, "USAID is a criminal organization. Time for it to die." "It's been run by a bunch of radical lunatics. And we're getting them out," Trump said to reporters. USAID is the world's largest supporter of famine relief. All of this is illegal. USAID was created by an act of Congress, and it can only be shut down by an act of Congress. In addition, nearly all of the employees that Musk and Trump propose to fire have civil service protections and due process rights. Those also can only be altered by an act of Congress. We can expect lawsuits. These actions are so patently illegal that litigants will likely find a federal district judge to issue an injunction. The Trump administration has also flagrantly sought to politicize our secret police, the FBI. They have reassigned agents, subjected them to Trump loyalty tests, and gone after agents who worked in the January 6th investigation and prosecution. This is also illegal. They have also tried to oust all of the Bureau's regional directors. At least one, James Dennehy, who heads the Bureau's largest and most important field office in New York, is fighting back. "Today, we find ourselves in the middle of a battle of our own, as good people are being walked out of the F.B.I. and others are being targeted because they did their jobs in accordance with the law and F.B.I. policy," Dennehy wrote in an email to his staff. We can expect a lawsuit to follow. Some ousted inspectors general are also challenging their dismissals. Phyllis Fong, of the U.S. Department of Agriculture, one of 17 IGs illegally fired by Trump, told colleagues that her dismissal was illegal and that she wasn't leaving. She was marched out of her office by security agents. Her office was also involved in a 2022 investigation into Elon Musk's brain implant startup, Neuralink, which remains ongoing. These illegal firings will also end up in court. Potentially the most alarming of these extralegal incursions is Musk's penetration of the Treasury's payments system. If Musk succeeds in getting control of the system, he and his minions could conceivably block payments of which they disapprove. This risk is the subject of David Dayen's companion post. A lawsuit has now been filed about this action. We will probably see injunctions by federal district judges against every one of these extralegal actions. Then the fat will be in the fire. Will Trump and Musk honor the injunctions? Which of these cases will work their way up to the Supreme Court? As I wrote in an earlier post, the strategy of flooding the zone could backfire on Trump, because it will also flood the Supreme Court's crowded docket, and the Court cannot possibly accept all of these cases for appeal. If challenges to the illegal Trump-Musk actions prevail in the lower courts, many of which are being filed in jurisdictions where the judges are relatively liberal, the Supreme Court could let them stand. With Trump controlling both Houses of Congress, the courts are the last check on what amounts to an attempted coup. But there is always the risk, cited by executive-power legal scholars Robert Bauer and Jack Goldsmith, that Trump might just decide to ignore the courts. IF MUSK AND TRUMP GET AWAY WITH HIS HOSTILE TAKEOVER of government, we are headed for full-on fascism, in which a dictatorial regime can operate by whim, with no legal restraints. But there is one notable difference about Trump's brand of fascism. When Hitler took power in Berlin in January 1933, he soon marginalized all opposition parties and turned the Reichstag into a rubber stamp. It did not take him long to get control of the entire government, and he enforced his will with state-sponsored terror. But Hitler was all about imposing order on a society weary of chaos. We have never seen a fascistic government imposing chaos for its own sake. In some respects, as in the case of the Treasury payments system, and the effort

to gain political control of our secret police, the FBI, this is classic fascism. But in other respects, such as the attempted destruction of USAID or the CDC or the NIH, this is something new, that seems to grow out of the ideology of destroying the so-called deep state. (Hitler was just fine with the deep state; he just wanted it to serve his purposes.) One thing that fascists have in common is that as unrestrained despots, they are at risk of making serious mistakes. This is even more the case when they are impulsive and half-crazy, which describes both Hitler and Trump. Hitler was more strategic and better informed than Trump. As late as August 1939, he had cowed the rest of Europe into acceding to his demands. But then Hitler made a few very big mistakes. One was assuming that the U.S. would stay out of the war. A second was assuming that Britain would have to make peace on his terms. The most fatal mistake was deciding to invade Russia. Trump and Musk, if anything, are more reckless and more prone to blunders than Hitler. Unlike Germany in 1933, the U.S. retains some elements of democracy. Will they prove strong enough?

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

Wilson... Continued from previous page Is there anything anyone can do about it? Not clear. The only thing I can do is write about it, and hope at least some of the American people will support us in this cause to try to save democracy. It won't be easy. It might not work. Guess we have no choice but to try. Glynn Wilson is editor and publisher of New American Journal (NewAmericanJournal.net).

The Billionaire Coup is Almost Complete and No One Stopped It — Can We Return to Democracy?

How America's ultra-rich dismantled democracy, one Supreme Court ruling at a time.

By THOM HARTMANN

There is one thread that ties together Trump's destruction of American government agencies, his offer to take the Gaza crisis off Israel's hands and dump it on our military, and senators' and representatives' failure to challenge him: This is how kingdoms operate. Rule by decree.

It proves that we're asking the wrong question.

Plug "Can American democracy survive Trump?" into a search engine and you'll find thousands of websites, blogs, articles, and podcasts devoted to that one, single question.

But American democracy was knee-capped by five Republicans on the Supreme

Court years ago when they ruled that money was the same thing as "free speech"; that corporations are "persons" with rights under the Bill of [Human] Rights; and that political operatives can engage in virtually unlimited purges of voting rolls, accompanied by racial- and gender-targeted laws to make it harder to vote.

The correct question is: "Can the American system — now that it's become flooded with dark money and the 'right to vote' has become a mere privilege in Red states — ever again represent the interests of average citizens? Can we ever return to democracy?"

In an open call on X with Republican Senators Joni Ernst and Mike Lee, apartheid billionaire Elon Musk — whose father says he was chauffeured to school in White-run South Africa in a Rolls Royce — lit into the regulations that created and protect the American middle class and our democracy:

"Regulations, basically, should be default gone. Not default there, default gone. And if it turns out that we missed the mark on a regulation, we can always add it back in."

In a child-like echo of Ayn Rand, Musk added:

"These regulations are added willy-nilly all the time. So, we've just got to do a wholesale, spring cleaning of regulation and get the government off the backs of everyday Americans so people can get things done. ... If the government has millions of regulations holding everyone back, well, it's not freedom.

We've got to restore freedom."

Both capitalism and democracy could be likened to a game — say, football — ideally played to benefit the largest number of people by creating and guaranteeing "Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness."

But imagine if the NFL were to suspend their regulations just before the Feb. 9 Super Bowl. And the Chiefs, like most elected Democrats, chose to continue playing by the old regulations, but the Eagles started gut-punching, facemask-pulling, and even threw five extra players onto the field.

The only team that would ever win would be the one most willing to play dirty or buy off the refs. And, increasingly, that's where we are today, both with our democracy and our economy.

We know this is crazy: Every state in the union has put into place an agency to regulate insurance companies because that very industry has a long, horrible history of ripping people off and refusing to pay claims unless the power of the state is invoked against them.

We regulate banks and brokerages for the same reason; when we deregulated them in the 1920s and the late 1990s the result was huge rip-offs that produced the Republican Great Depression and the Bush Crash of 2008.

We regulate automobile manufacturers because they have a history of putting profits over the lives of their customers (Ford

Pinto 900 dead, GM trucks 2000 dead, etc.); refineries because their emissions cause cancer and asthma; drugs because unscrupulous manufacturers killed people in previous eras; workplace safety after the Triangle Shirtwaist fire killed 146 young women; voting because corrupt politicians rigged elections.

We regulate traffic with signs and stoplights to keep order and reduce accidents; we regulate police to prevent them from abusing innocent people; we regulate building codes so peoples' homes don't collapse or catch on fire from faulty cheap wiring.

And there was a time in America when we regulated money in politics and guaranteed the right to vote.

Those two types of regulations were passed in the late 19th and early 20th centuries after multiple scandals, like in 1899 when William Clark — then the nation's second-richest man — openly bribed Montana legislators by standing outside the legislative chamber passing out brand new \$1,000 bills to the men who voted his way. Or when state after state — most all former Confederate states — repeatedly refused to allow Black people to vote.

We passed regulations guaranteeing a minimum wage, unemployment insurance, and the right to unionize to create the world's first large-scale middle class. And we regulated the morbidly rich with a 90% income

Continued on page 14

Firing Federal Employees for Their Politics Violates the First Amendment

By SABRINA HAAKE

After repeatedly claiming that he has "nothing to do with Project 2025," Trump has signed warp speed executive orders to effectuate Project 2025.

A fever dream of Christo-nationalist Heritage Foundation and other rightwing extremists, Project 2025 seeks to advance Trump's authoritarian vision for America. At full tilt, it would enact tenets of Christianity into law (controlling and punitive tenets of the Old Testament, not the woke stuff about loving your neighbor), accelerate climate change, further marginalize immigrants and the poor, and replace the federal workforce with Trump loyalists.

Project 2025's unifying theme is the expansion of executive authority, a GOP goal nearly 40 years in the pipes. Through fiat of executive order, Trump is reaching for an unprecedented expansion of his own power, and the Republican majority on the Supreme Court may very well support his efforts.

Revenge terminations and impoundment

One of Trump's first acts was to summarily fire Justice Department prosecutors who helped investigate Trump's criminal attempts to overthrow the 2020 election. These prosecutors were not political hires from the Biden administration; they were career DOJ prosecutors who worked under presidents of both political parties. Their loyalty oath was to the Constitution, not the President.

Trump's acting attorney general, James McHenry, made clear that the terminations were political. He wrote in his firing memo that, "Given your significant role in prosecuting the president, I do not believe that the leadership of the department can trust you to assist in implementing the president's agenda faithfully."

In Trump's trademark Orwellian spin, his executive order weaponizing the DOJ was titled, "Ending the Weaponization of the Federal Government." The order reads like a campaign ad, and accuses the Biden administration of "unprecedented, third-world weaponization of prosecutorial power," calling investigations into Trump's J6-related criminality—not Trump's criminality itself—"misconduct."

In addition to illegally firing career

DOJ prosecutors, Trump is also trying to strong arm all 2.3 million federal employees into quitting, offering an alleged 'buy out' that would pay them to resign now and collect partial salaries through September. (Any federal employee reading this, beware, there's a statutory limitation of \$25,000 in effect for such federal employee 'buy outs,' far below the eight months of salary promised, suggesting Trump/Musk won't honor the terms of their 'offer.')

Trump's attempted purge comes on the heels of a gag order barring external communications from federal health employees at the National Institute of Health, and, in violation of the Impoundment Control Act of 1974, an order unilaterally grabbing the power of the purse from federal legislators by impounding funds they allocated for programs Trump doesn't like.

Political firings of most federal employees are unconstitutional

The Trump administration has made clear that they terminated DOJ prosecutors and are trying to replace "deep state" employees due to their politics. Under current case law, however, public officials cannot condition their subordinates' employment on their politics. The First Amendment prohibits an elected official from hiring those who support or affiliate with him and terminating employees who do not.

In 1976, in *Elrod v. Burns*, the Supreme Court held that a public employer inhibits an employee's constitutionally protected belief and association where it terminates him for lack of political support. In 1980, the Supreme Court reaffirmed this rule in *Branti v. Finkel*, holding that public employers cannot condition employment on political affiliation because, "[i]f the First Amendment protects a public employee from discharge based on what he has said, it must also protect him from discharge based on what he believes."

In light of these cases, courts evaluate 1st A political retaliation claims under the "Elrod/Branti test," which holds that the First Amendment protects public employees from termination based upon their political beliefs, affiliation, or non-affiliation unless their work "requires" political allegiance. To show that loyalty is substantively "required," Trump would have to show that the government has a vital interest in employing only MAGA prosecutors. Trump's personal desire to stay in office for life, an idea he has repeatedly floated, and his desire to use the presidency for profit and revenge are distinct from—and contrary to—the government's vital interest.

Trump's 1% victory was neither landslide nor mandate

The legal necessity of showing that political firings advance the government's "vital interest" may be why Trump, Republicans and Fox News keep repeating that Trump won by a landslide, which has given him a "mandate." Although the 1st A doesn't care how popular or hated Trump is, winning by 1% is laughably distinct from winning a mandate.

The math bears repeating: Trump won 77 million votes compared to Harris' 75 million votes; 49% of the vote compared to 48%, a difference of 1%. More importantly, in terms of "mandate," 90 million eligible voters didn't vote at all, a number that exceeds the number of voters for either Trump or Harris.

In short, out of 245 million eligible US voters, nearly 70% did not vote for Trump. (75m Harris voters + 90m non-voters= 165 million, or 67% of 245 million eligible voters.) Only a math moron would continue to present this as a mandate, or argue that it shows the government's 'vital interests.'

Trump's unconstitutional orders are meant to trigger judicial review

In addition to 1st A protection afforded to all public employees, many federal statutes have specific built-in protections

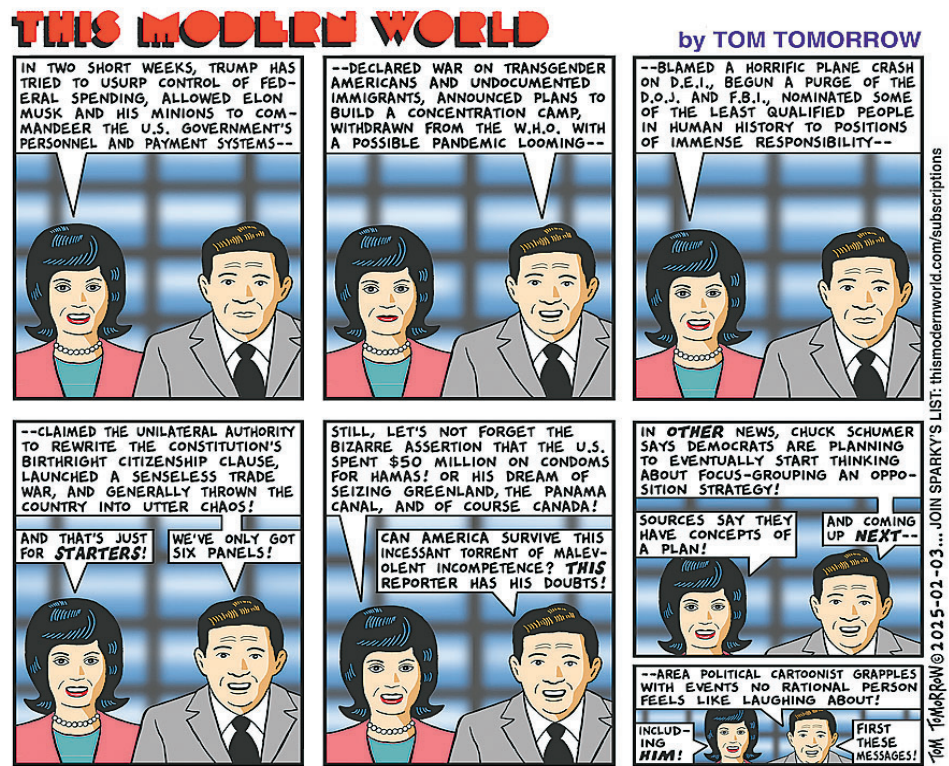
for agency workers, to stabilize the federal government and guard against the whims of politicization.

Acts creating the Federal Reserve System, Postal Service, Federal Trade Commission, National Transportation Safety Board, Federal Energy Regulatory Commission, Consumer Financial Protection Bureau and other agencies allow termination only "for cause" identified as inefficiency, neglect of duty, and malfeasance in office.

Trump's purge, in light of these statutory protections, is headed to the Supreme Court, where a Republican-appointed majority may strike down the protective statutes, based on its push in recent years to expand presidential authority. Whether it will also pervert nearly unanimous 1st A jurisprudence on political terminations remains to be seen, but as Dobbs illustrated, conservative justices who support Project 2025 are unconstrained by precedent.

Current conservative justices with an expansive view of executive power may be anxious to invalidate congressional restrictions on the White House. After allowing Trump to commit crimes with impunity, influencing voters and thus serving as Trump's literal get out of jail card, these Machiavellian jurists don't seem inclined to stop him from building an empire with their own religious values as its foundation.

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.



Abolishing Climate Disasters

We need to apply an abolitionist framework to climate change, pouring money into a safe and resilient climate and out of the oil-based economy.

By SONALI KOLHATKAR

“Under racial capitalism, land is treated as nothing more than a natural resource to be extracted, and violence is committed against the climate and the waters,” said Leah Penniman, who runs Soul Fire Farm in upstate New York and is the author of the acclaimed book “Farming While Black.”

Penniman’s words have been echoing in my mind since Jan. 8, 2025, when I awoke to find myself on the floor of a cramped hotel room in Southern California, where I had evacuated, escaping the Eaton Fire. My multi-generational family—parents, kids, and cat—fled our home the night before as ferocious Santa Ana winds whipped around us, threatening power lines and fueling a firestorm that sailed down the San Gabriel Mountains, miles into densely inhabited areas, burning down houses within two blocks of my home.

In my quarter of a century of living here, the fires never came so close, and they never raged in early January. The Eaton Fire is part of a conglomeration of wildfires across Southern California racking up more than a quarter of a trillion dollars’ worth of damage.

Three days after the fires started on Jan. 7, I returned to my north Pasadena home, a structure covered by ash and soot on the outside, but well-sealed on the inside; Los Angeles sheriffs had barricaded all streets entering Altadena. Local authorities had requested National Guard forces to join them, ostensibly to

deter “looters,” and prevent homeowners from returning to the toxic ashes of their former homes.

I found myself on the front lines of the world Penniman described in the conversation I had with her a year ago, one of 12 such conversations I had with leaders, thinkers, academics, and activists who describe themselves as “abolitionists.” The conversations are gathered together in my new book, “Talking About Abolition: A Police-Free World is Possible” (Seven Stories Press) released on Jan. 14, exactly one week after the most catastrophic climate devastation my community has ever experienced.

The abolitionists interviewed in the book—luminaries such as Ruth Wilson Gilmore, Andrea Ritchie, Cat Brooks, and Penniman—want to see a transformation of our current economic framework, one that enables the destruction of communities and enforces capitalism’s inequities through policing and prisons. They use the same descriptor for themselves—abolitionist—that people working to dismantle slavery used generations ago.

What does abolishing police and prisons have to do with climate change and the devastating Southern California fires?

The answer is everything.

Today’s economic and social status quo accepts ongoing climate change as a necessary price to pay for market capitalism and deregulated industries. This is the same status quo maintaining inequities along lines of race, gender, national origin, and sexual orientation—what Penniman calls “racial capitalism.”

In such a world, climate disasters like the Los Angeles fires are an inevitable part of our lives. We must suffer, see our homes burn, and our air and water turn toxic, to ensure profits for the oil and gas industry.

In such a world we must also pay our tax dollars to clean the damage their carbon emissions have caused and pay to police our own communities against small-time petty criminals while the bigger corporate perpetrators of climate change go free.

In such a world we must also pay out of our pockets to have private insurers protect our homes and health and then accept their refusal to cover the costs of repairing our homes and health.

how much subservience I get.” Because, as I’ve noted, this is all performative. It’s about showing strength — not just displaying it to Canada and Mexico, but also to the rest of the world — and, in return, getting shows of submissiveness.

The oldest bullying technique is to threaten little guys who don’t have nearly the power you have — say, Canada, Mexico, Colombia, and Greenland (Greenland!) — and then, when they appear to cave, announce that your bullying has worked. And then move on to larger targets.

Trump is now talking about imposing tariffs on the European Union. What does Europe need to do to avoid them? Trump hasn’t said. If they asked him, he’d say, “We’ll see.”

Meanwhile, the world trading system is quietly reorienting itself. Businesses in Canada, Mexico, and Europe are eyeing each another as potentially larger partners for trade and direct investment — the hell with the United States.

China is sending out invitations to them all. The United States is a huge economy, but China’s is bigger. Its market is enormous. And it can produce wonders. Why kiss Trump’s derriere? Why take a chance with even more of his bullying?

This is China’s moment.

Trade is a small part of Trump’s bullying, of course. He wants signs of submission — performances of respect — from everyone, including power centers inside the United States.

Total submission will wreck American democracy, which was designed to prevent a monarch from taking over. But total submission will not get America back on track.

Feb. 3, a politically diverse group of scholars released a report card on American well-being. As Trump hurls threats and insults at Canada, Mexico, and Europe, the report presents a sobering comparison of the United States relative to other rich countries.

It finds that the United States has the lowest life expectancy of any rich country.

In such a world, everything is upside down. We pay to be damaged, violated, and policed and we pay to repair the damage, and still we remain broken.

An abolitionist vision for the world turns it right side up. What if we invested in our own safety by paying to prevent harm in the first place?

In “Talking About Abolition,” Andrea Ritchie, a nationally recognized expert on policing and prisons, described abolition as “a call to take resources, power, and legitimacy away from institutions rooted in anti-Blackness, in racial capitalism, and death making: policing, punishment, surveillance, and exile. It’s a call to reinvest in the commons, a society built around the notion of the common good, and everyone’s needs being met.”

This may sound like a pipe dream even to those who agree that our priorities need to be reconfigured. But abolitionists—led primarily by Black women—are not waiting for power brokers to adopt this big idea. After all, progressive change rarely happens from the top-down. Activists such as Cat Brooks in Oakland are already implementing local abolitionist projects. Brooks is the co-founder and executive director of the Anti Police-Terror Project (AFTP) where she was instrumental in the formation of MH First Oakland, a non-police alternative for people experiencing mental health crises.

“We are responsible for creating the world that we want,” said Brooks. “Organizing is what gets the goods. We are responsible for creating these replicable models, and we need to stop begging the state for the money, the resources, etc., to create these models.”

Since the Eaton Fire that destroyed my community, victims, survivors, neighbors, local officials, and leaders have been attempting to identify the culprits, to understand why this horrific, catastrophic disaster happened. Some are fixated on power lines as the source of the fire, whipped up by strong winds. Others are angry about the low water resources available for firefighters to douse fires. Still, others are rightly pointing out our reliance on incarcerated and obscenely underpaid firefighters at the same time as fire departments are severely understaffed.

All of these are important and critical issues. But they do not address the biggest source of the problem—climate change—and

(This was not true for most of the 20th century.)

America also has the highest murder rate of any rich country — not because undocumented people are plundering and pillaging their way across the land (the rate of violent crime by people in the United States illegally is lower than the rate of violent crime by people here legally) — but because of our remarkably high rates of poverty and homelessness, and our extraordinarily easy access to guns.

America has the world’s highest rate of fatal drug overdoses — not because drugs are pouring in from over the border but because we have among the highest rates of youth depression and hopelessness, especially among young people who won’t be graduating from college.

And we have one of the lowest rates of trust in the federal government. Why? My guess is it’s because most Americans see American politics in the pockets of big money from giant corporations and the super-wealthy (like the Muskrat, who sank more than a quarter billion into getting

its resultant confluence of “weather whiplash,” unnaturally low humidity, and unusually strong Santa Ana winds.

We cannot eradicate fire to protect ourselves from climate change—fueled wildfires. Fire is a part of life. Similarly, there is not enough water in any given place to douse thousands of homes exploding in fire all at once. Fire trucks, even ones with full tanks, sped past burning houses in Altadena, rightly prioritizing saving lives over homes.

What we can do is stop pumping carbon into our atmosphere, right now. We can pour money into the things that keep us safe—renewable energy, energy conservation, public transportation, local economies, and more—and stop investing in things that endanger us, such as oil and gas profits, policing, and prisons.

We human beings are hardwired, especially in times of disaster, to help one another and to work in collective ways to keep each other safe. Such sentiments are visible on the edges of barricaded and burned Altadena, in my community of north Pasadena. On the border between the two towns, the state’s financial priorities are on full display to the north, with police and National Guard forces standing armed and ready to arrest anyone violating curfew. Meanwhile, to the south, community mutual aid hubs have spontaneously popped up, sharing food, water, clothing, toys, and other necessities with those who have lost everything.

As Robin D. G. Kelley said in the foreword to Talking About Abolition, “Abolitionists seek to replace death-dealing ugliness with life-sustaining beauty.”

We have been trained to go against human nature and normalize the funding of our own destruction. We must return to our human instinct to think collectively and embrace an abolitionist approach to ensure our world remains standing for our children. If not, today Altadena is on fire; tomorrow it’s your hometown.

Sonali Kolhatkar is the founder, host and executive producer of “Rising Up With Sonali,” a television and radio show that airs on Free Speech TV and Pacifica stations. She is a writing fellow for the Economy for All project at the Independent Media Institute, which produced this article, and this article appeared at LProgressive.com.

Trump elected, and the 13 other billionaires now working for Trump).

Americans don’t hate government. They just want a government that works for them — providing Social Security and Medicare, and help when they need it (say, emergency relief from FEMA) — not one that bails out big banks and doles out corporate welfare. (Hands up if you think the Muskrat is going to end corporate welfare.)

Overall, when Americans are asked how satisfied we are with our lives, we rank lower than we did three decades ago. Our economy is much larger than it was then, but we’re more miserable. Is it any wonder?

Instead of dealing with these real problems, Trump is telling Canada and Mexico to do what they’ve already been doing. He also wants Canada to become the 51st state.

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.

ROBERT REICH



Trump wants signs of submission from everyone, but total submission will wreck U.S. democracy, and won’t get America back on track.

What Trump Ignores

While he tries for subservience from other world leaders, he’s turning his back on the real problems of America.

Asked Feb. 3 whether there was anything Prime Minister Justin Trudeau of Canada could offer to avoid tariffs, Trump said, from the Oval Office, “I’d like to see Canada become our 51st state.”

That, my friends, sums up where we are.

Canada and Mexico avoided tariffs for at least 30 days, but they haven’t really done anything differently than they were doing before Trump threatened them.

Canada’s border plan was already underway, including the deployment of additional technology and personnel to the border. Mexico had already ramped up border enforcement before Trump’s threats.

Yet Trump is declaring victory over Canada and Mexico, and when asked whether he’ll follow through on raising tariffs on our neighbors next month, says, “We’ll see.”

Every time Trump says “We’ll see,” what he’s really saying is “I’ll wait and see



When Disaster Strikes, Trump’s Instinct is to Blame DEI First

By CLARENCE PAGE

As the investigation into the Jan. 29 air disaster in Washington was still getting underway, President Trump didn’t bother to wait for actual evidence to figure out what was to blame: “DEI.”

That’s shorthand, in case you haven’t heard, for diversity, equity and inclusion programs, a controversial hiring practice that has become a one-size-fits-all bludgeon for the president and his allies to use against Democrats — even when facts don’t support them.

Such partisan eagerness to demonize DEI for every disaster reminds me of the liberal critics whom former United Nations ambassador Jeane Kirkpatrick, a Ronald Reagan appointee, labeled the “blame America first” crowd for their habitual response to foreign policy challenges.

Now Trump, with his notoriously casual regard for inconvenient facts, habitually responds to disasters by blaming DEI first.

We saw that as wildfires recently burned through the hills of Los Angeles and Internet trolls blamed DEI, apparently because Los Angeles Mayor Karen Bass is Black and the city’s fire chief Kristin Crowley, a 22-year veteran of the department, is the first woman and openly queer person to lead it.

Among the trolls beating that bogus drum was Trump’s billionaire buddy Elon Musk who shared screenshots of the fires and wild accusations like “DEI means people DIE.”

Similarly, waves of trolls blamed the collapse of Baltimore’s Francis Scott Key bridge on “Baltimore’s DEI mayor,” Mayor Brandon Scott, who happens to be Black, as soon as he appeared on TV to update the public.

The X account of something called the Young Conservative Federation posted a picture of a Black woman, Karenthia Barber, who served as a port commissioner. Her bio listed her experience in DEI audits and consulting.

That led Phil Lyman, a Republican and gubernatorial candidate in faraway Utah, to chime in with an attack on Maryland’s Gov. Wes Moore, who also, yes, happens to be Black.

Lyman wrote on X: “This is what happens when you have Governors who prioritize diversity over the wellbeing and security of citizens.”

The allegation might have risen above ignorant innuendo if Lyman had tried to show any evidence that the governor, the mayor or the port commissioner had anything to do with the container ship striking the bridge.

But that’s the exciting life DEI has taken on in the MAGA imagination. It’s no longer merely a set of principles in the realm of hiring and workplace relations. It now elects “diverse” agents of destruction into government.

In another twist to the craziness, a trans woman wrongly named as one of the pilots in the Jan. 29 deadly air collision urged the public to spread the word on how fake this news really was.

“Some craziness has happened on the Internet and I’m being named as one of the pilots of the DC crash,” posted Jo Ellis, a Chief Warrant Officer 2 who is a UH60 Black Hawk pilot for the Virginia National Guard. “It’s insulting to the victims and families of those lost and they deserve better than this BS from the bots and trolls of the Internet.”

I remember how diversity policies began in the 1960s when the racially inflamed violence and politics of the decade spread to ranks of the military. I had been drafted, and I witnessed some of the tensions first hand, as well as a services-wide effort to weed out racial discrimination.

Anti-discrimination efforts resulted in some excellent promotions in the U.S. armed forces. Many excellent African Americans and others who had been turned down for promotions got a second look. One of them was Colin Powell, who would later rise to become chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and beyond, and served as the first Black secretary of state.

But that’s not to say that I don’t have questions about DEI policies, just as many other practically minded people on the right and the left, or in-between.

It’s no simple matter to fight discrimination against women and minorities without swinging too far into the “reverse discrimination” that creates unfair outcomes as well.

The Trump administration is correct to eliminate any program that gives an unfair advantage to one group at the expense of another. Merit matters. Or at least it should.

But, as Team Trump rolls in with its reforms, it must be cautious about dumping programs that undermine the value of merit while also protecting legitimate policies that offer protection against unfair discrimination and that open doors to opportunity.

To do that, takes more than slogans. DEI may seem like a pain, but everyone wants fairness. That’s a goal worth working for. Even when we fall short, that means we should reach higher.

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

Plastic Tea Bags May Be Killing You

By JOEL D. JOSEPH

I have always believed tea was very healthy. Unfortunately, during the past 10 years, many tea companies have replaced paper tea bags with plastic tea bags.

Microbiologists at the Independent University of Barcelona (Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona, UAB), Spain, studied plastic released by three different tea bags and their effect on human cells. This study was conducted in 2024. Ricardo Marcos Dauder, one of the study authors from UAB, said, “when scientists talk about microplastics, they don’t just mean plastic that degrades and produces small pieces of plastic, but pieces of plastic that can be easily measured in micrometers: between 1 and 1000 micrometers, equivalent to one thousandth to one millimeter. This study specifically looked at nanoplastics, measured between 1 and 1000 nanometers—which is even smaller.

“All the data shows that the smaller the size, the higher the uptake [of plastic] into the cells,” said Dauder. “The smaller the size, the higher the risk.”

The microbiologists found that commercially available tea bags released huge amounts of plastic particles into hot water when brewed. They experimented with tea bags made from three plastics: polymers called polypropylene, nylon-6 and cellulose.

They found that tea bags containing polypropylene released approximately 1.2 billion particles of plastic per drop—or milliliter—of tea. Those containing cellulose re-

leased 135 million particles per drop and nylon-6 released 8.18 million particles per drop.

After 24 hours, a specific type of digestive cell that produces mucus in the intestines had absorbed considerable amounts of micro and nanoplastics. The plastics had even entered the nucleus of some of these cells, which is where genetic material is kept.

In 2023, the International Journal of Surgery published an article on the significant health risks posed by microplastics in tea bags. March 24, 2023. The article reported:

“Due to the potential health risks and negative impacts on the environment, the use of MPs in tea bags and other products is a major issue. In spite of the material’s non-biodegradability, polypropylene is frequently used in manufacturing tea bags. Given that tea bags are subjected to high temperatures during the brewing process, it is concerning that certain branded teas are offered in tea bags made from allegedly ‘food grade’ polymers, such as nylon. In tea bags additionally available are fluorine compounds, arsenic, radium salt, aluminum, copper, lead, mercury, cadmium, barium, nitrates, and many more. So you are sipping tea and consuming these dangerous substances in the same bag. Tea bag plastics, which can take hundreds of years to decompose in nature, may fragment into [micro] particles. . . .”

How to Protect Yourself

The easiest way to protect yourself from plastic in tea bags is to brew your tea using loose leaf tea. You can also find tea bags that do not contain plastics. The following teas do not contain plastics:

- Stash tea bags are free of microplastics and are non-GMO certified.

- Republic of Tea bags are plastic free, compostable, and come in a reusable tin

- Lipton Quality Black and Intense. These traditional tea bags are made from cellulose fibers and Manilla hemp, and are compostable

- The Tea Spot’s sachets are made from sugar cane fibers, which are biodegradable and compostable.

- Numi Tea — “Our teas are pesticide-free and non-GMO verified,” confirms a company rep. “Our tea bags are made from manila hemp cellulose, and free of epichlorohydrin. The tags are made from 100% recycled material and soy-based inks.”

- Rishi Tea’s certified organic line is bagged with PLA—polylactic acid, creating “silken” bags. Unlike other “silky” bags, which can be made with PET plastic, these are corn- and potato starch-based. Adds Assistant Tea Buyer Jeff Champeau, “Our Natural Fiber Loose Leaf Tea Filters are made without glue or any other binding agent.”

- EDEN Organic- “The bags are made from oxygen washed manila fibers with no polluting whiteners used,” confirms company rep Wendy Esko. “Once filled, the bags are crimped and sealed with 100% cotton string. No staples, plastics, or glue are ever used.”

- Organic Stash - “The filter paper used for the bags is made from 100% cellulose fibers (wood) and is made to appear white by forcing air between the fibers. No bleach is used,” explained at Stash. “The filter paper is not coated with the compound called epichlorohydrin, and does not contain any free epichlorohydrin.”

- Choice Organic Teas - One of the company’s consumer relations experts, Nia, as-

sured consumers that their line is not only organic but free of epichlorohydrin.

- Two Leaves Organic Teas - “We pride ourselves on being pesticide-free as well as on having corn-based tea sachets,” says a company rep. The website adds, “Our sachets are made of biodegradable cornstarch based nylon, not petroleum based nylon.”

Organic Yogi Teas (USA & Canada) “We currently use a non-heat seal-able filtration paper made from a select blend of high quality manila hemp (abaca) fibers and wood pulp,” says a Yogi representative. “The filtration paper does not contain epichlorohydrin, nor plastic or polypropylene. It is oxygen bleached using a natural process that is completely free of chemicals or toxins, including dioxin.”

Brands With Tea Bags the Contain Plastic

Some of the largest tea companies, Tazo, Celestial and Mighty Leaf, use plastic tea bags. I have given these three companies legal notice under California Proposition 65, also known as the Safe Drinking Water and Toxic Enforcement Act of 1986. This law requires businesses to warn Californians about significant exposures to chemicals that may cause: cancer, birth defects, and other reproductive harm. I asked these companies to either cease using plastic tea bags or to comply with the law and print a warning notice on their packages indicating that their tea could be hazardous to your health.

Joel D. Joseph of La Jolla, Calif., is a lawyer and CEO of WarAgainstPlastic.com. Email joeldjoseph@gmail.com.

Hartmann...

Continued from page 12

tax rate to prevent them from amassing so much wealth that their financial power could become a threat to our democratic republic.

And, of course, it’s those regulations — money in politics, the right to vote, and preventing the accumulation of dangerous levels of wealth — to which today’s broligarchs most strenuously object.

In each case, it was five Republicans on the US Supreme Court who gutted our protective regulations and put America on a direct collision course with today’s oligarchic neofascist takeover.

- They ruled that billionaires can buy politicians because giving money in exchange for votes isn’t bribery, but merely an expression of First Amendment-protected “free speech.”

- They claimed that corporations aren’t soulless creations of the law but are “persons” with the same right to share their “free speech” with politicians who do their

bidding.

- And they ruled that voting is not a right in America — in open defiance of US law — but a mere privilege, giving the green light to Republicans to purge or refuse to count over 4 million votes in the 2024 election.

The result of all this Republican corruption is that the will of the majority of American voters hasn’t been fulfilled in two generations. The last time our political system was truly responsive to the voters was in the 1960s, when Medicare, Medicaid, and food stamps were created, and the Civil Rights and Voting Rights Acts were passed. And in the early 1970s, when we outlawed big money in politics.

Then, in 1978, five Republicans on the Supreme Court ruled in the Bellotti decision (written by Lewis Powell himself) that corporations are persons and money is merely free speech. Two years later, Ronald Reagan floated into the White House on a river of oil money and systematically began gutting the protective regulations that had built the

largest and most successful middle class the world had ever seen.

Since then, big money has frozen us like a mosquito in amber. Even Barack Obama’s big effort to establish a national healthcare system with an option for Medicare had to kneel before the throne of rightwing billionaires and the insurance industry.

Every developed country in the world has some variation on a free or low-cost national healthcare system, and free or even subsidized higher education. In most developed countries homelessness is not a crisis, nobody goes bankrupt because somebody in their family got sick, and jobs pay well enough (and have union pensions) so people can retire after 30 or 40 years in the workforce and live comfortably for the rest of their lives.

But not in America. Since the Reagan Revolution, rightwing billionaires have blocked any of those things from happening because they’d be paid for with taxes, and there’s nothing rightwing billionaires hate more than paying taxes.

- Dark money has destroyed the notion of one-person-one-vote.

- Monopoly — allowed because corporations can now buy politicians — has destroyed the small businesses that once filled America’s malls and downtowns.

- And voter suppression and voter list purges handed the 2024 election to Trump, as reporter Greg Palast documented in a recent, shocking report.

So, yeah, let’s do away with all the regulations like wannabe Kings Elon and Donald say. And make the United States look and operate more like Syria and its failed-state relatives than anything Americans would recognize.

After all, freedumb!

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.

A Government of Spoiled Children

Child psychiatrists, along with parents, recognize the “spoiled child syndrome”. The child expects special treatment, rails at “no.” The child has no empathy, is overly demanding, resists compromise. The child’s favorite phrase: “I don’t wanna,” followed by “I wanna.” Presumably most spoiled children grow up into reasonable adults.

Not Donald Trump and his minions. Sadly for the country, this syndrome has segued into their adulthood. Our President has turned his hatred of authority onto government. Who needs all the rules and regulations? Certainly not the well-remunerated (by income or inheritance) among us, who profit from dismantling those irksome rules. Only the losers need Uncle Sam. And we all hate losers. Remember the schoolyard bullies who bullied the weaklings? The bullies fill our government.

Here are some irksome rules that this President wants to nix, mostly because his predecessor, along with scores of pointy-headed bureaucrats, pushed them.

- Requiring anti-lock brakes on new cars. Many drivers are now accustomed to anti-lock brakes. Research suggests that they reduce collisions. Not surprisingly, car manufac-

turers, gauging the cost of any mandate, are unenthusiastic, arguing for voluntary compliance on these rules that President Biden had required. President Trump has halted action. Perhaps there is room for compromise, but, befitting the spoiled child, this President abhors compromise.

- Vaccines. We have a slew. And thanks to vaccines, we have all but stopped the spread of polio, measles, chicken pox, whooping cough, tetanus, diphtheria. Most American physicians have never seen these diseases. But under the mantra of “you can’t make me,” this government is willing to relax the rules demanding childhood vaccination. Already the rhetoric is working: trust in vaccines is ebbing, as the incidence of measles rises. The victory for the “anti-vaxxers” is Pyrrhic: even the upper wealthiest, the healthiest among us cannot shelter from viruses. This “just say no” mantra will reverberate back on all of us.
- Participating in the World Health Organization. Who cares about the rest of the world, particularly the less-developed world (the one that has sent us millions of workers, from field workers to baristas to nurses to scientists)? Let it rot. Let bird flu, the virus du jour, thrive wherever it began — though birds do fly across country boundaries. Pre Trump, Uncle Sam spearheaded some notable world health battles. In 1989, the CDC launched an initiative on HIV with South Africa. In 2003, The U.S. President’s Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) focused on both HIV and tuberculosis. Those initiatives saved thousands of lives. In 2025, expect the spoiled child to nix these.
- The mania for “medical freedom” takes aim at long-accepted rules, like fluoridated water. Healthy people have children with healthy teeth. Who needs fluoride, which the

web chat says is harmful? Let’s shelve it as one more onerous burden.

- Ditto for the insistence on pasteurized milk. Scientists cite the need, decry the risks from contamination. But a lot of back-to-earth and/or conservative Americans decry those rules. They yearn to drink raw milk. Let them. They understand the benefits (benefits that are now touted on the web as the zeal to loosen regulations mounts). If there are risks, which raw milk enthusiasts deny, let them take those risks. Waving the banner of “medical freedom,” we are casting off a burdensome Uncle Sam.
- The Environmental Protection Agency rules can go. Maybe even the EPA itself. If the rules purportedly protect our air, our water, our land, so what? We will still have air, land, and water, without the rules. (Of course, we will have polluted rivers, wildfires, sick animals, toxic drinking water ...)

Indeed, the President’s choice of Cabinet nominees marks a clinical demonstration of the spoiled child syndrome, as he deliberately chooses the most controversial, the least experienced people to lead us — throwing down his gauntlet, letting everybody know that he, the entitled one, can do whatever he wants.

Parents recognize the solution for a spoiled child: ignore the tantrums, the absurd demands, the resistance to authority. Our country’s solons, Democrats and Republicans, should learn from the legions of parents who have said “no” to their bullying progeny.

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

The Rise and Fall of the Rule of Law

By SAM URETSKY

The Law is the true embodiment. Of everything that’s excellent. It has no kind of fault or flaw, And I, my Lords, embody the Law. — W.S. Gilbert (Iolanthe)

Sovereign immunity is a legal doctrine that shields a sovereign state or government from being sued without its consent. “Sovereign” means “having the highest power or being completely independent.” The original meaning applied to kings — in the meaning of “sovereign.” Since kings made the laws, anything that the king said was the law, no matter how self contradictory. The idea was that since the king made the laws, he could not be held accountable to his own courts.

There was a limit of course: the threat of insurrection. The king may have been the commander in chief of the army, but the barons had their own militias, and if enough of them joined forces, they could intimidate the king. That’s what happened in 1215, when a group of nobles presented King John with The Magna Carta, meaning “Great

Charter” in Latin. This was the foundational document in the history of democracy and the rule of law. It established the principle that everyone, including the king, was subject to the law. It included clauses that protected certain rights, such as the right to a fair trial and protection from unlawful imprisonment. It laid the groundwork for the development of common law, a legal system based on precedent and custom.

It wasn’t anything like democracy, it only protected the nobility and not the commoners, but it was a start. It took centuries for a more liberal form of government to even suggested. John Locke (1632 to 1704) was one of the most important figures of the Enlightenment and had a considerable influence on the Declaration of Independence, writing that hat individuals possess inherent rights to life, liberty, and property. Locke also argued for religious liberty, that individuals possess inherent rights to life, liberty, and property, which governments cannot infringe upon. This was a refutation of Henry VIII who decided that he was the head of the church because Pope Clement VII refused to give Henry a divorce from Catherine of Aragon. When Henry’s daughter, Mary, became queen, she wanted to restore Catholicism, and burned an estimated 300 people for the crime of being Protestant.

Democracy expanded over the centuries. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), adopted by the United Na-

tions General Assembly on December 10, 1948. It sets out fundamental human rights to be universally protected, regardless of race, sex, language, or religion. It’s a statement of human rights, but not legally binding.

And then came Donald J Trump and his tame Supreme Court. On July 1, 2024, a divided Court set a precedent for immunity from criminal charges made against former presidents. In *Trump v. United States*, Chief Justice John Roberts’ majority decision said that a former president has criminal immunity for some official actions taken while in office. “At least with respect to the President’s exercise of his core constitutional powers, this immunity must be absolute. As for his remaining official actions, he is entitled to at least presumptive immunity.” In the majority decision, Chief Justice Roberts wrote that the president had exclusive powers derived from the Constitution or an act of Congress. “Congress cannot act on, and courts cannot examine, the President’s actions on subjects within his ‘conclusive and preclusive’ constitutional authority.”

Justice Ketanji Brown Jackson she was “concerned” about the court’s divisive decision to grant sweeping immunity to former President Donald Trump because it treats one person differently than others in the criminal justice system.”

Justice Sotomayor said, “[Let’s say he] orders the Navy’s Seal Team Six to assassi-

nate a political rival? Immune. Organizes a military coup to hold onto power? Immune. Takes a bribe in exchange for a pardon?” “Immune. Immune, immune, immune.” Elie Mystal, in *The Nation* (7/21/24) wrote, “The President Can Now Assassinate You, Officially.”

“Under this new standard, a president can go on a four-to-eight-year crime spree and then retire from public life, never to be held accountable ... Presidents can murder, rape, steal, and pretty much do whatever they want, so long as they argue that murdering, raping, or stealing is part of the official job of the president of the United States. There is no crime that pierces the veil.”

President Trump has fired a number of Inspector Generals in spite of the law which specified a detailed procedure. President Trump’s removal of inspectors general without specified reason appears to violate federal law, which requires Congress to receive 30 days’ notice of any intent to fire a Senate-confirmed inspector general. The White House’s action has been met with criticism from lawmakers in both parties, who have questioned the decision and its potential impact on the independence of federal watchdogs — but he seems to be immune from anything but quotes on MSNBC.

Sam Uretsky is a writer and pharmacist living in Louisville, Ky. Email sam.uretsky@gmail.com

Health Insurers Profit From Suffering, Not Care

The country’s largest insurer just posted record revenues. That money comes from denying care and gouging patients — who are now sharing their stories.

By CHRIS MILLS RODRIGO

Health care is big business in the United States. So big it can be hard to wrap your head around.

America’s largest health care company, the UnitedHealth Group, pulled in over \$100 billion in revenue in just the fourth quarter of 2024 alone. For the full year, the giant’s insurance division, UnitedHealthcare, just reported record revenue of \$298.2 billion.

These staggering revenue totals actually fell below investor expectations. Right after the announcement, UnitedHealth Group shares slipped 6% on the New York Stock Exchange.

That tells you a lot about what’s important in the healthcare industry: profit, not care. Health insurance companies in particular can only profit by paying out less in claims than they collect in premiums. And that means denying patients coverage for the care they need.

Just outside the New York Stock Exchange, victims of

our for-profit healthcare system — doctors and patients alike — recently braved freezing temperatures to call out the suffering that engineered UnitedHealth’s exorbitant earnings.

One of those demonstrators, Jenn Coffey, has been battling complex regional pain syndrome (CRPS), a condition so incredibly painful that it’s often called the “suicide disease.”

UnitedHealth denied her the prior authorization needed to have her critically important treatment adequately covered. “UnitedHealthcare would rather leave me in torture than grant me the peace my infusions bring,” says Coffey. “I’m asking for a life worth dignity. I’m left begging for a life worth living.”

Several other speakers shared their deeply personal experiences with a health care system that far too often treats patients as disposable.

Dr. Toutou Moussa Diallo, a New York-based researcher and health care activist, detailed how insurance denials led to subpar treatment for his broken ankle that only made the initial injury more debilitating. Nephrologist Cheryl Kunis shared the story of a patient who died after UnitedHealthcare refused to cover a PET scan of a malignant neck tumor.

These experiences amount to much more than isolated one-off incidents. The outpouring of anger after the December killing of UnitedHealthcare CEO Brian Thompson — anger not at the shooting but at the company Thompson represented — shows just how many Americans are currently suffering under our privatized health care system.

The ongoing campaign protesting how UnitedHealth does business began well before Thompson’s headline-grabbing killing. The Care Over Cost mobilization, led by People’s Action, has been organizing rallies protesting America’s

biggest private insurers for years.

UnitedHealth has — for good reason — become the most powerful lightning rod for patient and medical staff critiques of how private insurers operate. The company’s gargantuan profits rest on decisions that regularly exploit patients at every opportunity.

Just a few snippets from recent news accounts offer a vivid picture about how UnitedHealth goes about making its billions.

UnitedHealth Group’s pharmacy benefit manager, Optum RX, marked up some cancer treatments by over 1,000%. UnitedHealthcare systematically limited access to critical treatments for children with autism to cut costs. And along with two other insurers, the company intentionally denied nursing care to patients covered by Medicare Advantage — all to maximize profit.

And how has the UnitedHealth Group been spending all its ill-gotten gains? One telling stat: UnitedHealth Group CEO Andrew Witty pocketed an astonishing \$23.5 million in 2023 compensation.

As the rally in front of the New York Stock Exchange ended, protesters called on UnitedHealthcare to publicly release its claim denial rates, oppose federal tax cuts that would result in Medicaid service reductions, and end the company’s care-denying prior authorization requirements.

Those eminently reasonable demands for the company. Meanwhile, the rest of us should consider whether we want health care to be a tool for the public good — or just private profit.

Chris Mills Rodrigo is the managing editor of Inequality.org. This op-ed was adapted from Inequality.org and distributed for syndication by OtherWords.org.

WAYNE O'LEARY

Trump's Twin Fantasies: Protectionism and Imperialism

It's been said that a little knowledge is a dangerous thing, an observation containing considerable truth. Our newly inaugurated president is a case in point.

Donald Trump, who suddenly fancies himself an expert on American history, has selected a new presidential role model. In his first term, it was Andrew Jackson, apparently because hard-nosed "Old Hickory" did things like enthusiastically wielding executive power to override political enemies and opposing branches of government. Now, the presidential predecessor to be emulated is the unremarkable 25th chief executive William McKinley (1843-1901), heretofore known mostly for getting himself assassinated and thereby opening the door for his vice president, Theodore Roosevelt, to ascend to the White House.

Trump's McKinley obsession, as Jamelle Bouie noted recently in a perceptive *New York Times* column (1/19/25), appears related to the Donald's advocacy of radically higher protective tariffs, a key element in his proposed economic program. Someone in Trump's circle — it could have been Newt Gingrich, who holds an advanced history degree — introduced him to the fact that Republican McKinley was likewise a high-tariff proponent; Donald certainly didn't find out on his own, being bone dumb when it comes to book knowledge.

What Trump's McKinley whisperer did-

n't tell him was that his new high-tariff hero was a disastrous political leader and weak executive. As an Ohio congressman in 1890, he authored the so-called McKinley Tariff, an extreme example of protectionism — it imposed the highest U.S. import duties to that date — increasing domestic living costs, cutting government revenues (imports crashed), and helping bring on the Depression of 1893. As a consequence, Republicans temporarily lost both Congress and the White House.

Undeterred, McKinley sponsored the even more extreme Dingley Tariff as president in 1897, following his defeat of Bryan and the populist Democrats, and high protection remained the rule until well into the Progressive era of the early 20th century. Donald Trump, who knows little history, views this as a glorious period for America and said so in the weeks leading up to his inaugural, calling his idol McKinley a great and highly underrated president.

According to Bouie's reporting, Trump told the Economic Club of New York in September that McKinley's protective-tariff policy, which he hopes to emulate, made American life "sweeter and brighter." He subsequently followed that up with a true whopper, that the Republican high-tariff years of the late Gilded Age (the 1880s and 1890s) were the best of times, when Americans were "proportionately the richest" in our history.

In fact, the reverse is true; it's why the original populist movement sprang into being at that very moment. Historians are in general agreement that the Republican Party's economic stewardship of the period, including its high-tariff regimen, exacerbated the growth of monopolies and trusts, produced the first generation of American oligarchs (the Rockefellers, Carnegies, Vanderbilts and Morgans), and dramatically increased poverty and inequality. At the turn of the 20th century, 1% of American families owned over 85% of the national

wealth, while 80% led economically marginal lives. According to one analysis, the cost of living rose by one-quarter between 1897 and 1907, likely due in large part to the exorbitant Dingley Tariff. Sorry, Donald.

But Trump's rosy imagining of tariff-generated prosperity is probably not the only reason he's doting on William McKinley. Besides being a convinced protectionist (protection for America's oligarchs, that is), McKinley also evolved into an imperialist during his brief time in office, something that meshes perfectly with the Trumpian worldview.

Republican kingmaker Mark Hanna took McKinley on as a protégé after the congressman lost his seat over the 1890 tariff act, got him elected Ohio governor twice, then president in 1896. Although initially peace-oriented, the malleable McKinley was easily pressured into adopting the predominant warlike stance of his expansionist party, basically giving in to popular sentiment, the blandishments of the jingoistic "yellow press," and the flag-waving Vice President Theodore Roosevelt.

Once converted, McKinley went all-in as an imperialist. He quickly endorsed war with Spain in 1898 and the global annexations that followed: Cuba (as a protectorate until 1934), Puerto Rico, the Philippines, Guam, Hawaii, and other territorial acquisitions that fulfilled what the president called America's "manifest destiny." The Philippines were forcibly brought into the fold kicking and screaming after a native independence movement was quashed, so that Uncle Sam could, in McKinley's words, "educate the Filipinos, and uplift and Christianize them." (They were finally granted nationhood in 1946.)

McKinley the imperialist was every bit a man after Donald Trump's heart, as was McKinley the protectionist. What, after all, are the crazed foreign-policy initiatives the incoming president is advocating than a bizarre and twisted form of imperialism?

Let's review Trump's imperial pipe dreams. First, he wants to acquire Greenland, seizing it by force if necessary. This is presumably for some undefined reasons of national security, plus access to rare mineral deposits. There's one complication: the ice-covered, semi-arctic island is owned by Denmark, supposedly our friend and ally, which has indicated no desire to part with it and might raise a nasty ruckus.

Well, there's always Canada. Trump thinks Canadians can't wait to become Americans, an option they've resisted for 250-odd years. He suggests they become the 51st state and issues thinly-veiled threats if they don't. That would be a state bigger than California, whose liberal-leaning populace would likely vote Democratic. Be careful what you wish for, Donald.

It would probably be easier for Trump to take back the Panama Canal, formally transferred to the Panamanians by Jimmy Carter; he's threatened to do so, and we've intervened there before. Of course, the result would be turmoil in Central America, cries of "Go home, Yankee," and perhaps a nice guerrilla war to boot.

That leaves Mexico, which Trump has promised to invade in order to pursue and eradicate the Mexican-based drug cartels that service America's home-grown addiction habit. This violation of another nation's sovereign territory would bring on a bloody conflict and justifiably raise anti-Americanism in the Southern Hemisphere to new heights.

But our Donald just wants to make America great again. And when was it last "great"? In his confused understanding, that would be the 1890s, a supposed idyllic time in the nation's history he evidently longs to revisit policywise.

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.

Is This What Phil Berger Wants?

By GENE NICHOL

We stand at a moment of peril in North Carolina.

The Republican dominated General Assembly, aided and abetted by the most partisan state supreme court in America, has deployed extreme political gerrymandering to dramatically marginalize Democrats in the state legislature. Despite winning the major statewide races, often handily — where elections can't be stolen through the drawing of district lines — Democrats won only a third, or a little more than a third of the seats in the House and Senate. As Sen. Lisa Grafstein has shown: "More people voted for Democrats to represent them in the General Assembly than voted for Republicans." And yet the Republican advantage is lopsided. (You get the votes, we get the seats.)

And when Democrats, as they typically do, engage in the perceived heresy of electing a governor or attorney general or other member of the Council of State, Republicans turn to the Carolina two-step — gutting the coveted office of its powers, to prove to the voters that they won't get their way. The moves, of course, violate the North Carolina Constitution, aggrandize Republican lawmakers, and effectively overturn election results. In any other state, they'd be thrown out by the courts without pause. But not here, our justices, as they have repeatedly proven, are not actually judges. Don't let the robes fool you.

And now there's more. A defeated Supreme Court justice candidate, Jefferson Griffin, wants the North Carolina Supreme Court to steal a seat for him. So much for the rule of law. Democracy is old school. The case has triggered procedural intricacies, and, to be sure, national outrage. But our Republican justices have, shockingly, blocked the certification of Allison Riggs' election and

four justices (a majority) have shown they're ready to do the deed. Perhaps no other court in the land would commit the theft. But our crew is seemingly up for it. It's just their Huckleberry. What could be more thrilling than selecting their own new member? What a way to own the libs. In the process, they'll demonstrate that Democrats will be effectively, or completely, marginalized in all three branches of North Carolina government — even when they're the majority. Viktor Orban smiles. Invitations to Mar-a-Lago await.

Is this, when the push becomes the final shove, what Phil Berger wants for North Carolina? Berger is immensely powerful. At the least, he's the state's most potent Republican leader. But it's possible he's not merely an angry ideologue like his son or Chief Justice Paul Newby. Possible. He knows, surely, that stealing the Riggs election will destroy the North Carolina Supreme Court as an institution for decades. Newby may not know it, but Berger does. Is this additional theft of authority worth that?

It will also uncover the façade of anti-democratic entrenchment and sought-after permanent minority rule, for all to see, across the nation and perhaps the planet. North Carolina Republicans will no longer be able to pretend that they believe in the American experiment. They'll show themselves as simple authoritarians, first, last and ever. Will Berger allow, or require, his minions to cross this bridge far, too, too far? Or might he say, in effect, we're willing to cheat to win, we've been doing it for decades. We're the masters. But we won't literally, after these centuries, cast democracy out of North Carolina's house.

We'll know soon.

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.

Resisting Trump's Immigration Policy

By SETH SANDRONSKY

It is a new day for federal immigration enforcement in the USA. The Donald J. Trump administration's recent announcement on immigration enforcement is ending the longstanding "sensitive locations" policy, and allows federal immigration arrests at schools, churches and hospitals.

This big change will have immediate impacts on immigrant communities in California, America's most populous state of 39 million people. This is why.

"California is home to 10.6 million immigrants — 22% of the foreign-born population nationwide," according to Marisol Cuellar Mejia, Cesar Alesí Perez and Hans Johnson of the Public Policy Institute of California. The Pew Research Center estimates that 1.8 million immigrants in California were undocumented in 2022, down from 2.8 million in 2007; that is, the undocumented share fell to 17% from 28%.

Against that demographic backdrop, George Galvis is the executive director of Communities United for Restorative Youth Justice (CURYJ), based in Oakland, California. The following interview was conducted via email.

Seth Sandronsky: How will this immigration policy change of Trump's affect immigrant families' access to essential services?

George Galvis: The Trump administration's decision to allow the Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) into schools, churches and healthcare facilities is creating a climate of terror in our communities. While we continue advising families to access these essential services, this policy makes parents afraid to take children to a doctor's appointment or attend school events. This type of immigration enforcement is systematically cutting off immigrant families from the basic services and support systems that all human beings need to survive and thrive.

SS: Talk about the broader pattern of criminalization of immigrant communities.

GG: This latest policy fits a broader pattern of criminalizing and dehumanizing im-

migrant communities. The administration keeps pushing false narratives about public safety and national security to justify increasingly aggressive enforcement, despite clear evidence showing immigrants commit crimes at lower rates than native-born citizens. What we're really seeing is increased racial profiling, surveillance, and policing of our communities under the guise of immigration enforcement.

SS: Explain community-based alternatives to punitive immigration enforcement.

GG: At CURYJ and through our partnerships with other community organizations, we're demonstrating that there are more effective, humane approaches focused on building power and supporting families rather than tearing them apart. Through our Youth Power Zones, we're creating safe, healing spaces that provide comprehensive support and resources to young people and their families, regardless of immigration status. These zones serve as a model for community-led public safety that doesn't rely on criminalization or enforcement. We provide know-your-rights education, help develop family safety plans, and work to maintain vital community connections and access to

services. Our model shows that we can create safety through solidarity and support, not through punishment and fear.

SS: What are the economic and social contributions of immigrant communities?

GG: The reality is that immigrant communities are essential to the fabric of our society and economy. We're talking about business owners, workers, taxpayers, and community leaders. When enforcement policies make people afraid to participate fully in society — whether that's running a business, reporting crimes, or engaging with their children's schools — it weakens our entire community. True public safety comes from ensuring everyone can fully participate in and contribute to our communities without fear.

(At press time, the city of Oakland terminated a CURYJ contract amid the Trump administration's messaging a withdrawal of federal support for community groups providing social services.)

Seth Sandronsky is a Sacramento journalist and member of the freelancers unit of the Pacific Media Workers Guild. Email sethsandronsky@gmail.com

Trump, an American Stalin? Massive Population Transfers were a Feature of Communist Dictatorship

By JUAN COLE

ANN ARBOR — Donald Trump’s proposal to ethnically cleanse Gaza of its 2.3 million Palestinians constitutes a profound reversal of post-1945 U.S. norms, which condemned such mass relocations of indigenous populations. It is the sort of thing Soviet dictator Josef Stalin used to do, and Trump has to decide if he wants his legacy to be that of an American Stalin.

During his first term, President Trump’s own diplomatic representative to the 57-member Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, Chargé d’Affaires Harry Kamian, denounced Stalin for having forcibly transferred 230,000 indigenous Tatars from Crimea in 1944-47 to Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan.

Kamian said, “75 years ago, over 230,000 Crimean Tatars suffered a terrible fate, when, on May 18, 1944, the Soviet government ordered their mass deportation from their Crimean homeland to Soviet Central Asia. Thousands of families were forcibly separated. Nearly half of those deported between 1944 and 1947 perished. This was part of a larger program of deportations within the Soviet Union.”

Kamian’s concerns were not merely historical. He condemned Vladimir Putin,

as well, saying “Today, the Crimean Tatars, now citizens of an independent Ukraine, again find themselves the victims of the Kremlin’s repression and brutality. Since invading and occupying Crimea in 2014, the Russian government has carried out a campaign of violence, including killings, forced disappearances, and torture against Crimean Tatars and others who oppose the occupation.”

The Fourth Geneva Convention of 1949, to which the United States is a signatory, is pretty plain on the matter: “Individual or mass forcible transfers, as well as deportations of protected persons from occupied territory to the territory of the Occupying Power or to that of any other country, occupied or not, are prohibited, regardless of their motive.” Of course in the 19th century the US had been guilty of horrible such crimes against Native Americans. But after WW II a chastened Greatest Generation attempted to craft new and better norms for the post-war world, norms that we are now betraying most foully.

In short, that language was intended to forestall the tactics used by Nazis and other powers during WW II from being implemented again in the future by members of the United Nations. But I guess avoiding acting like Nazis or Stalinists is no longer an American value nowadays.

So, the question is, whether Kamian’s complaints were merely another cynical US use of international law, where convenient, to slam Moscow, or whether Washington actually minds people being uprooted en masse from their homeland. Because 2.3 million Palestinians are 10 times as many people as the 230,000 Tatars whom Stalin displaced thousands of miles from home.

Stalin’s population transfers were deemed crimes by Premier Nikita Khrushchev, who revealed them to the the 20th Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in 1956. He also charged that Stalin had built up a “cult of personality,” deeply distorting Socialist ideals. Appalled at the revelation of these and other crimes, half of the remaining 100,000 members of the US Communist Party left the party.

Let me repeat: American Communists of the mid-1950s showed more revulsion at a cult of personality and at crimes against humanity than most members of today’s Republican Party, vanishingly few of whom have objected to Trump’s Stalinesque plans for massive population transfers. Speaker of the House Mike Johnson (R-La.) called the move “common sense.” Rep. Nancy Mace, (R-S.C.) said that the U.S. should “turn Gaza into Mar-A-Lago.” Indeed, the few demurrals on the Republican side were not to the idea of ethnically cleansing a people but to using US troops to do so. Apparently they think it would be all right if somebody else carried it out.

Campana Aurélie at France’s premier political science institution, SciencesPo.fr, lists many more ethnic cleansing campaigns by Stalin.

She notes, “1937, September-October: The first large-scale operation of massive deportation occurred in the Soviet Far East. About 175,000 Koreans living along the Chinese and Korean borders were relocated by force to Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan. They were charged with espionage, spying for the Japanese. After a brutal expulsion, the Koreans experienced severe living conditions. Moscow did not inform the local Uzbek and Kazakh authorities about the arrival of a large

population of “administrative settlers.” Nothing was prepared to accommodate or provide them with basic supplies such as food, clothes and shoes. Although there was no reliable data regarding the Korean death toll, testimonies and NKVD documents indicate that many of them died from disease, starvation and lack of housing. By 1945, they joined the long list of “special settlers,” among other punished peoples.”

The list grew over the next 15 years, including 250,000 Poles, 1.2 million Russians of German heritage, and many others. When I visited Uzbekistan for a conference in the mid-1990s, I spent an evening speaking with a German Russian in Tashkent, since the rest of the people at my table didn’t know English and my Uzbek was weak. And one of our conference participants, whose paper we published, was a Crimean Tatar. People pointed out Koreans to me. Those people displaced by Stalin were still there in Central Asia all those decades later. It was creepy.

I grew up in an America full of revulsion for Stalinism, and even the few Communists I ever met were critics of it. Now, we have a new American Stalinism, as dismissive of individual and collective rights and liberties as Uncle Joe had been. I feel it as a profound and ominous betrayal that every American is not up in arms at the very idea that we would behave this way.

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

Carter’s Commitment to Arms Control

By JASON SIBERT

Observers as different as Soviet leader Leonid Brezhnev and US National Security Advisor Zbigniew Brzezinski agreed that President Jimmy Carter had a deep personal commitment to arms control to reduce the risk of nuclear war, as stated by writer Walter Slocombe in his story “President Carter’s Admirable Arms Control Legacy.”

His commitment was based on moral principles and religious faith, his experience as an officer in the nuclear navy, and his understanding of nuclear war. He hoped for the ultimate abolition of nuclear weapons but accepted that arms control was a necessary stage toward that end. Carter, who died on Dec. 29 at the age of 100, repeatedly said that arms control was his top priority as president. Slocombe outlined all of the steps Carter took in four years: “The Carter administration launched efforts on multiple

fronts: nuclear proliferation, nuclear weapons testing, arms sales, restraint on technological advances, nuclear-weapon-free zones, pullbacks of some US nuclear deployments around the world, and restrictions on nations from outside the region deploying their military forces to new regions, such as the Indian Ocean. These efforts, including Carter’s attempts to negotiate an expanded ban on nuclear testing and to block a neutron bomb, had various degrees of success and controversy, but his main focus was endeavoring to impose limits on strategic forces, and that was the arms control issue in which he was most involved. Although the treaty that he negotiated under the Strategic Arms Limitation Talks was not ratified, it was, from the perspective of priority and personal involvement, his biggest national security success apart from the Egypt-Israel peace agreement.”

When Carter assumed office in 1977, he hoped to take dramatic steps beyond the initial 1972 agreements on offensive nuclear weapons and missile defenses achieved by President Richard Nixon and the tentative arrangements that his immediate predecessor, President Gerald Ford, and Secretary of

State Henry Kissinger had worked out with the Soviet Union at the Vladivostok arms control summit in 1974. For all their other faults, Carter was convinced that Brezhnev and the rest of the Soviet leadership recognized the essential need to confront the nuclear danger.

Carter believed that a comprehensive US initiative at the start of his administration would appeal to the Kremlin and instructed his new team to develop a proposal to achieve that end. He hoped that the Soviets were open to something big. After all, Kissinger, the architect of the Nixon-Ford arms control agenda, had been briefed on the general thrust of Carter’s initiative and told the President that the Soviets might agree. Carter offered the Soviet leaders a choice. He first sought an agreement on significant cuts below the level that had been decided tentatively at Vladivostok and on constraints on heavy missiles — the weapons having the most dangerous potential for attempting a disarming preemptive strike. He also offered the alternative of a quick agreement along the lines of the US position at Vladivostok.

Slocombe gave us some history on the

arms control negotiations with Soviet Russia: “When Secretary of State Cyrus Vance presented these proposals in Moscow in May 1977, however, the Soviets bluntly rejected both options. The deep cuts apparently were too ambitious, and the limited step was viewed as repudiating a consensus that the Soviets claimed was settled definitively at Vladivostok. Carter decided not to permit his negotiators to advance a fallback position he had approved for use in Moscow if the Soviets had proved ready to engage immediately in serious negotiations.”

It disappointed Carter that the SALT II treaty did not come into legal effect, but that did not mean Carter’s effort failed. The Soviet regime and the Reagan administration voluntarily complied with most SALT II provisions. The treaty’s framework provided the foundation for future agreements over the next several decades. Carter’s dedicated labor for arms control is a proud part of his humanitarian legacy. Can we ever return to a day when arms control is the norm?

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

Black History is Every Day, With or Without the White House

From local school boards to the White House, the right is doubling down on its efforts to erase Black history. They’ll fail.

By TRACEY L. ROGERS

It’s a trend that’s been building for a few years now. Books by predominantly Black authors are being banned around the country. School curricula have been amended to skip the history lesson on slavery and racism. Critical Race Theory (CRT) — and anything that vaguely looks like it — is under attack. And the concept of “wokeness” has been misconstrued and weaponized.

Fast-forward to February 2025 and there’s been a doubling down on these attempts to erase Black history. President

Trump’s anti-DEI, anti-“woke” rhetoric has led major companies and even many federal agencies to avoid observing Black History Month.

As I consider the president’s campaign promise to “make America great again,” I wonder if he means to make America “White” again.

From failing to condemn White supremacists for their violent march in Charlottesville, Virginia during his first term to blaming “diversity hires” for January’s plane crash in Washington, D.C. this year, Trump and his allies seem to have a difficult time acknowledging the diversity that actually makes this country great.

This has been especially true for Black people feeling the brunt of his Executive Orders. These haven’t just eliminated recent diversity and inclusion initiatives — one even rescinded an Executive Order signed by President Lyndon B. Johnson to end discriminatory practices mostly aimed at Black Americans.

During a speech at Howard University in 1965, President Johnson said that Black Americans were “still buried under a blanket of history and circumstance.” Following widespread protests, it was Johnson who

signed the landmark Civil Rights Act and Voting Rights Act into law. Now both historic milestones are under threat by the attempts of Trump and many others to erode the social and economic gains made by Black Americans.

It’s as if we are reliving a time akin to the nadir of race relations in America — the period after Reconstruction, when White supremacists regained power and tried to reverse the progress Black Americans made after the emancipation of enslaved people.

Today, from the U.S. Air Force removing coursework on the Tuskegee Airmen to orders by many federal agencies, including the military, canceling Black History Month celebrations, these extreme rollbacks will set a new precedent impacting all minority groups.

I can’t help but to return to sentiments shared by The 1619 Project founder Nikole Hannah-Jones: “The same instinct that led powerful people to prohibit Black people from being able to read,” she wrote, is also “leading powerful people to try to stop our children from learning histories that would lead them to question the unequal society that we have as well.”

There is nothing comfortable about the

history of Black Americans — it’s a history that shatters the myth of American exceptionalism. Nevertheless, Black history is American history. Instead of banning it, we must teach it.

It would be impossible to erase the legacy of Black people in this country. Ours is a legacy that endures — one that will continue to endure no matter who’s in the White House.

One thing Black people are going to do is to be Black — and proud. We don’t need a month to know that we stand on the shoulders of giants.

Having overcome enslavement, Jim Crow, and more, our striving to thrive in a country with so-called leaders who would prefer to keep us living on the margins only exemplifies the America we aspire to. And it’s a fight that’s made this country better for struggling people of all races.

Like it or not, Black history is every day.

Tracey L. Rogers is an entrepreneur and Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion consultant in Philadelphia. This op-ed was distributed by OtherWords.org.

A Coup by Any Other Name

By JAMIE STIEHM

The president’s war with the nation is well underway.

Shuttering the U.S. Agency for International Development was taking the smallest lamb from the flock. Other vital parts of the government may soon follow in a flash.

At least three departments face a strange Cabinet member in charge: Kash Patel at the FBI, Bobby Kennedy at Health and Human Services, and former Rep. Tulsi Gabbard overseeing national intelligence. Their Senate hearings were not pretty, a three-ring freakshow all in a day.

Patel portends chilling changes straight ahead.

Democrats in Congress watch, wide-eyed, and play defense while they feel “overwhelmed,” one senator said. The press chirps away at bits and pieces, lacking urgency about the full picture.

In the minority, Democrats can’t stop President Donald Trump’s juggernaut. No president has ever tried to seize so much political power.

Trump’s violent takeover of government failed on Jan. 6, 2021; this time, it’s a short, swift murder, causing a constitutional crisis. A coup by any other name.

USAID, our greatest exporter of goodwill, is gone just like that, supposedly swallowed by the State Department. With food and medical programs canceled all over the globe, adversaries will consider that a gift.

Trump and his nefarious accomplice, Elon Musk, the richest man in the world, are doing the dirtiest of work. Musk’s words on USAID: “Time for it to die.”

Musk is let loose to skim — or skin — the skilled and expert federal workforce in medicine, climate, science, law, housing, weather, Treasury and Justice.

Trump and Musk are offering buyouts to all but seeking jagged cuts to the Justice Department.

Musk, an unelected “efficiency” czar, is also worming his way into confidential Treasury systems on aid, payments and financial records for citizens. Just like that. Swaths of federal employees are being locked out of their computers.

Usurping authority, Musk shoved the head of the Federal Aviation Agency out on Jan. 20, nine days before the tragic plane-chopper crash over the Potomac River, claiming 67 lives.

This is a terrible omen of the trouble

Musk causes by applying his ruthless business practices, unchecked, to the public good.

Trump’s ranting about “DEI” — diversity, equity, inclusion — policy causing the crash was throwing stones in the face of grief.

Patel made a name by his public sympathy for the Jan. 6 convicted criminals. He ingratiated himself with Trump by writing a “King Donald” children’s book. He scorned the FBI, suggesting its building should close and become a museum. For now, senior leaders have been ordered to resign or be fired.

Patel may enforce Trump’s vow of “retribution” by a scourge of the law enforcement agency. Trump pardoned 1,500 Jan. 6 criminals, so you might think that was the end of it.

But no, Trump has already urged the FBI to take names and investigate the hundreds of lawyers and agents who worked on the Jan. 6 rioter cases in federal court.

Where I live, Washington, D.C., that amounts to a reign of terror among dedicated public servants.

Kennedy, who made a name with anti-vaccine claims, is, if confirmed, set to rule over the National Institutes of Health. He is seen as responsible for a measles outbreak in Samoa after a visit. In a strangled voice, Kennedy could not agree with Sen. Bill Cassidy (R-La.) that vaccines do not trigger autism.

Cassidy, a doctor, declared he was “struggling” but backed Kennedy.

Gabbard, a Republican and a former Democrat, testified in crisp tones to the Intelligence Committee. She said she’d brief Trump personally every day. A military veteran and former congresswoman, she has contradicted U.S. foreign policy on NATO and Russia, and made an extraordinary visit to Syria.

Most troubling to the panel, Gabbard refused to brand Edward Snowden a “traitor.” He broke the law, she allowed, but in the past she praised his actions in exposing the nation’s vast surveillance system.

The common link between Patel, Kennedy, Gabbard — and Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth, who barely won Senate approval — is clear: They are Trump’s wildly unfit picks for their posts.

But that is precisely the point. Each loyalist would weaken their agency from within — and strengthen Trump’s iron grip on the government. That is their job.

*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.*

Riding With Trump

By BARRY FRIEDMAN

“Sometimes imagine Trump supporters gathered in a living room much like mine — not this year, necessarily, but next year or the year after. In my mind, a Super Bowl party is going on — Coronas are in the fridge, nachos, chips, salsa, enchiladas, and tequila are on the table, and outside, dozens of Brown-skinned people, their hands bound behind their backs with zip ties, being frog-marched down the street by ICE officials. As two of the guests look out the window, we hear one say, “That’s terrible, don’t you think?”

“But they don’t belong here,” says the other.

“Yeah, you’re right,” the first one says.

“Who knew we had so many?” asks a third who has come over.

“Trump is a man of his word,” says a fourth from the kitchen.

“Yep,” they all say in unison.

Someone suggests closing the blinds.

They return to the game.

A beer commercial is on for Modelo — “The Mark of a Fighter.”

Hours after Donald Trump froze trillions of dollars in federal spending for grants and loans, my Facebook feed was flooded with comments from those who believed that Trump’s hardcore base would be furious once it found out the scope of the damage of such an action. Further, these posts predicted that as the new administration marched on, instituting one fakakta policy after another, the regrets and fears and worry of his supporters would mount. After years of being bamboozled, the ignorant and incurious would finally see the results of their sheep-like love for this fraudulent shepherd — this would be the breaking point.

Comeuppance awaited them.

But what if the freeze, like half a dozen Trump absurdities and evils and incomprehensibilities through the years, not only had no lasting political effect, what if it was exactly what the base wanted, what those people at that Super Bowl party wanted?

What if Trump voters were never fooled or bamboozled?

Since Trump rode down the escalator at Trump Tower in NYC in 2015, there was a tendency to look at his sup-

porters and say, “Forgive them, Founding Fathers, they know not what they are doing.”

But what if they did? What if their sense of vengeance, xenophobia, entitlement, and loss was so great, the Trump of Jan. 21, 2025, is the Trump they have always hoped for and dreamed of.

For 10 years, many of us have asked, “What’s it going to take for Americans to see Trump for what he is?” From saying he wouldn’t accept the results of elections unless he won, to plotting a coup, to channeling Nazis at a rally, to injecting bleach, the answer is clear.

Nothing.

Trump supporters are not snapping out of this. Not only don’t they want to, they think there’s nothing to snap out of.

Since 2015, news outlets like *The New York Times* and *Washington Post* have done dozens of stories from bowling alleys, VFW halls, parade routs, factory gates, straining to find out what the Trump supporter wants. What did we learn? The faithful didn’t recognize their country and wanted it back — it was theirs, don’t you know? It was taken from them. They also felt unheard.

As the years went by, we alternately reviled and pitied them.

It was (and is) exhausting.

Mostly because they kept winning.

The Trump voter knew more about Trump than the Clinton voter knew about Clinton, than the Biden voter knew about Biden, than the Harris voter knew about Harris — and they kept liking what they saw. Trump got more votes in 2020 than he did in 2016 and more in 2024 than he did in 2020. Hillary Clinton could have moved to Wisconsin the last two weeks of the 2016 election campaign and it wouldn’t have mattered; Joe Biden could have dropped out of the race in 2022 and been replaced by any Democrat in the country and it wouldn’t have mattered; Kamala Harris could have been a White male and it wouldn’t have mattered.

Trump didn’t win because there were and are flaws in Democratic messaging, even though there have been and are, or because of a lack of cojones from the legacy media, even though it often lacked them. We all saw Trump implore the mob on Jan. 6th to attack the Capitol. We all knew about his bankruptcies. We all saw the check he signed to a porn star when his third wife was nursing his fifth child. We all read the transcript of his call to Zelenskyy. We all learned from him how rich and famous men can treat a women’s vagina.

Better Help, to find someone, anyone, who can feel their pain.

The problem is that Better Help has only 34,000 therapists. How can they add 2 million grieving federal workers to their already-bulging case loads? Better Help is quickly designing a crash course in counseling for those government workers who wish to join the ranks of other therapists in counseling their own desperate peers.

Only one little hitch. Better Help was investigated by the FTC in 2023 for violating the privacy of its customers.

In an action announced in March, “The FTC charged that Better Help used and disclosed consumers’ email addresses, IP addresses, and health questionnaire information to Facebook, Snapchat, Criteo, and Pinterest for advertising purposes despite promising consumers that it would only use or disclose personal health data

for limited purposes.”

The question remains: With no one now left at the FTC to follow up on these scofflaws, the newly fired FTC employees and others will have no one to protect them.

“Those crybabies will just have to suck it up,” says Elon, “just like I do every day when I have to fire a bunch of know-nothings who have been sucking off the government teat for far too long!”

God help us all.

Rosie Sorenson is a humor writer in the San Francisco Bay Area. Her column is satire and, like Fox “News,” cannot be believed as fact. She has a new (serious) book, “If You’d Only Listen: A Medical Memoir of Gaslighting, Grit & Grace,” available on Amazon if you can’t find it at your neighborhood bookstore. Email RosieSorenson29@yahoo.com. See RosieSorenson.com

SATIRE/*Rosie Sorenson*

Hoisted by Musk’s Petard

Elon Musk, the putative President of the United States, has been working overtime wielding a scythe like the Grim Reaper to cut over 2 million federal workers. He’s attempting to do to our government what he did when he took over Twitter—fire in any and all directions to reduce costs, confident he can eventually fix everything he’s just broken.

Which is fine, if it’s your own private business. Not so fine when the business of

government belongs to 330 million others. Now is when we are most in need of empathy, which, as has been noted, is in short supply in the brain of our Dear Leader Elon.

Asperger’s, fueled with Ketamine, doth not a stable genius make. It doth, however, make a super-charged, one-man wrecking ball.

While Democrats prayed for Unicorns and Rainbows, Musk single handedly, with help from some of his employees, sent out memos, telling our federal workers that they are to resign. Oh, sure, they might have a few options, but there’s no mistaking that they are toast, now and forever.

And if any of this is legal, we may never find out.

The distress plaguing the mass of humans who are forced to take their deep knowledge of our democratic structures and shove it, have fled to the therapy behemoth,

Underestimating Americans: A Coming Plunge of Dictator Donald

Convicted felon Donald Trump has declared war on Americans. In less than two weeks, he has become the dictator, a role he celebrated in his campaign. He is using illegal executive orders as poisoned spears against just about every program the federal government administers to advance the health, safety, and economic well-being of all Americans.

Until temporarily enjoined by a federal court, Trump pushed to cut all monies that fund schools, housing, nutrition programs, and health care—especially Medicaid for over 80 million children, women, and men and the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP). Essentially, he and his minions are going berserk, smashing the law, tearing up our Constitution, and inviting lawsuits which they can delay, with your tax dollars, until they reach Trump’s handpicked corrupt U.S. Supreme Court cronies.

The media can scarcely keep up with just listing the vicious cruelty of Der Fuhrer driven by vengeance and greed arising out of his deeply unstable egomania. Trump’s abuses of power can be divided into three categories:

- 1) Driving to destroy the historic safety net leads to a collective homicide. Yes, without food, health care and safety initiatives, Americans will die or get sick, whether they voted for Trump or not;
 - 2) Omnicide coming from directly shutting down federal agencies and their cooperation with other nations (quitting the Paris Climate Accords) from continuing the fight against climate violence and the accelerating intensity of wildfires, floods, droughts, hurricanes, extreme heat waves and rising sea levels, and subordinating renewable energy to greenhouse gas-producing fossil fuels. Trump also quit the World Health Organization and froze federal programs working to foresee and forestall deadly pandemics.
 - (3) Genocide by continuing Joe Biden’s co-belligerency with mass killer Netanyahu and adding support for the expulsion of the remaining survivors in Gaza to their death in the desert. Add these criminal mayhems to the censorship or persecution of anyone who opposes Trump.
- With his fascistic henchmen (assured of Trump’s pardons for any criminal actions) to head the FBI and other crackdown

TED RALL

Democrats Want a Divorce

When a marriage is in crisis, a point often occurs when constant bickering, arguing and fighting yields to detachment and hopelessness. The yelling stops. It’s quiet.

But it’s not peace. Exhausted, dispirited and contemptuous, one or both partners give up trying to convince the other that they’re wrong or ought to change. They accept that improvement is highly unlikely and check out emotionally.

Some psychologists call this uneasy calm a “silent divorce.” Dr. Ridha Rouabhia describes a silent divorce as “a state of being legally married but emotionally disconnected from one another, thus carrying within it a relational breakdown that is very often imperceptible but deeply damaging.” By the time you and your spouse are fighting your own personal cold war, odds of divorce are high.

Couples who fall in love and dedicate themselves to long-term committed relationships tend to fit into one of two categories. There are the soulmates who share important values and personality traits. Then there are the complementary types, a.k.a. “opposites attract,” where—hopefully—one partner’s strengths make up for the other’s weaknesses and vice versa.

Complementary couples can have successful marriages. But these relationships work only if each partner appreciates their partner’s contributions and is cognizant as well as grateful that their own failings are generously overlooked. As time builds familiarity and familiarity breeds contempt over the course of a lifetime, that can be challenging.

Years ago, I was close to a classic complementary couple. The wife, whom I met in college, was married to a man 10 years older than her. A tight-cropped salt-and-brunet WASP from the Midwest, he was politically and temperamentally conservative, preppy and stuffy. A fluffy-blond converted Buddhist from the West Coast, she leaned left and was loud, bubbly and unfiltered. Everyone who met them instantly understood their mutual attraction. Wild, sexual and adventurous, my friend dragged her uptight husband out of his shell. She made his life fun and interesting. Organized and always planning for contingencies, he

bailed her out and cleaned up her frequent messes. He made her feel safe. They were a cute couple.

Over the years, the mutual gratitude that drove my friends’ Lucy-and-Ricardo marriage ceded territory to sneering contempt. She got tired, and then angry, at always having to initiate sex. He grew weary of the drama from her never-ending series of crises. They fought. Then, they didn’t. The had fought to a stalemate.

Their “silent divorce” lasted a few years before giving way to the real thing. Everyone thought it was a shame. They needed one another.

The American political union between partisans of the two major parties is a complementary marriage. Though frequently fractious, for much of the 20th century there was a tacit understanding between Democrats and Republicans that each brought something to the union, to the country, that the other needed even if they weren’t good at verbalizing their appreciation.

Like my friend’s husband, Republicans were America’s stolid, responsible, national caretakers. Based in the countryside (and until recently in the boardroom), they were boring and hated the hippies and their rock ‘n’ roll and never would have supported civil rights and other liberation movements had they not been forced upon them. But conservatives also provided and protected virtues like military strength, national pride and deficit hawkishness that, deep in their pot- and LSD-infused souls, liberals knew were essential to the republic.

And like his wild-and-loopy wife, Democrats were reckless tax-and-spenders who hung out on the coasts and in big cities and tried and failed at social engineering schemes like welfare and affirmative action, but some of those schemes, like Social Security and Medicaid, saved the country, and drove almost all the progress that improved people’s lives and thus staved off revolution. Though they didn’t like to admit it, Republicans knew in their stock-portfolios-for-hearts that liberalism saved them from their rapacious selves and forced them to admit when their wars didn’t work out.

The national marriage started to unravel under Reagan, enjoyed a rapprochement under Bill Clinton and turned ugly under Barack Obama. As with any failed romance, it’s hard to pinpoint a specific moment that marked the beginning of the end. I’d pick 2010, when Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell said, “The single most important thing we want to achieve is for President Obama to be a one-term president.” McConnell’s idea of trying to win back the White House wasn’t wild. His for-

agencies, he is unleashing a police state the likes of which American history has not seen since the days of slavery. The Trumpsters are also enabling expansion of private corporate prisons to incarcerate his enemies.

Together with Elon Musk, the Trump administration is moving to turn the civil service back into the spoils system. Musk is also going berserk, offering out-of-nowhere two million federal employees buyouts with pay until September. This is totally crazy, illegal and dictated by a private mega-billionaire. You may remember the former Musk who warned about global warming and lethally out of control robots (A.I.).

These moves are part of a purge of experienced public servants, who serve people every day, to be replaced by the tribunes and agents of the corporate state or the final takeover of our government, by big business, with Trump at its head.

Right now, Trump, the failed gambling czar in the White House, and his minions think they are invincible. The GOP in Congress is cowed. The courts are Trump’s at the top level, and if they balk, he issues pardons.

Who’s going to stop him and the ram-paging Trumpsters?

In a word, The People. Already his polls are dropping. Under direct threat by Trump, the mass media is not all going to turn into Fox News. The stories of the pain, deprivation, and chaotic sadism imposed on totally innocent American families and workers will generate spontaneous resist-

ance that translates into lower consumer buying amidst higher inflation and the instability that small businesses dread. Even Chambers of Commerce will recoil at yet more tax dollars being unavailable for public infrastructure and instead going for more weapons of mass destruction to enlarge the military state.

All of this is to say that the demented Trump is deeply un-American as he touts America seizing the Panama Canal and Greenland, together with his designs on Canada.

Unless he changes course, he will be brought down by corruption throughout his ranks, plunging polls, resistance by many states and their Attorneys General and finally by a Congressional GOP realizing that it is their political skin or Trump’s. They will choose their own political survival.

Remember, during the Watergate scandal in 1974, a delegation of Republican Senators went to the White House and told Richard Nixon that his time was up and that he had to resign for far, far fewer transgressions.

Trump knows no boundaries, no self-restraint and has often declared that he will do whatever he wants, meaning operating in massive violation of the laws of our land. He is now ruling by dictates that are getting more sweeping and penetrating by the day. He should read a history book.

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

mulation, emboldened by the rise of the proto-MAGA Tea Party, was remarkably contemptuous. As an opposition party, the GOP was expected to articulate its own set of policies while paying lip service to its willingness to work with the president on issues where the two parties had common ground, rather than center its messaging around pig-headed obstructionism.

Republicans, having failed to prevent Obama’s reelection in 2012, doubled down in 2014 when McConnell pledged not only to block Democratic initiatives just because, but to threaten to shut down the federal government every time the other party tried to push through a bill.

Now everything is going their way. White House, Congress, Supreme Court, big tech and a compliant news media—Trump and the Republicans control it all. There was scarcely an echo of the riotous protests in response to Trump’s first inaugural in 2017 in the streets of Washington for the second one last January. Democratic leaders and their allies are despondent, disorganized and silent. “Far from rising up in outrage, the opposition party’s lawmakers have taken a muted wait-and-see approach,” reports *The New York Times*. Liberals are actively tuning out of politics, canceling their subscriptions and turning off MSNBC, televised organ of the DNC.

After sounding Defcon-4 at volume 11 every time Trump issued an obnoxious tweet during his first term, incessantly shrieking about the Jan. 6th Capitol riot, unleashing ferocious partisan legal warfare against him and hysterically characterizing a Trumpian restoration as an existential threat to democracy that would bring about

real and actual fascism, the post-electoral silence of the liberal lambs is deafening.

You may feel good about all this, if you’re a Republican.

Don’t. As the Tacitus quote currently circulating in response to Israel’s flattening of Gaza goes: “They make a desert and call it peace.” The sounds you’re not hearing—leftists marching and chanting down the block, liberals bleating in the comments section, Democratic politicians hollering about Trump’s unprecedented awfulness—is not acquiescence, much less acceptance. It is the disgust of silent divorce.

Democratic voters (of whom I am not one, I am to their Left) have given up on the Republicans with whom they share a country. Democrats still live under the same roof as their Republican spouses—for the time being, there’s no way for them to move out—but their anger has devolved into a cold contempt from which there is rarely any way back. Those people—Republicans—can stay in their Electoral College-inflated flyover states and watch Fox and NASCAR and vote however they want, including against abortion, and we (the smart people) will keep to ourselves in our urban enclaves. They’re not worth yelling at.

They’re not even worth talking to. This marriage is in trouble.

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



The Salton Sea’s Weirdness is What’s Appealing

By DENNIS HINKAMP

Fascinating and fetid, the Salton Sea in southern California lures me back, every year.

Driving south from Utah, I take bits of historic Highway 66 and then skirt Joshua Tree National Park to cruise through little known Box Canyon to Mecca, California. When the landscape opens up, I see the beautiful wreck of the Salton Sea, created by the collision of geology and bad luck.

The sea occupies a much smaller footprint of what used to be Lake Cahuilla, which disappeared in the late 1500s. Then, in a wild spring runoff in 1905, the Colorado River blew out a diversion dam, and for the next three years the mighty Colorado drained into the Salton Sink. Agriculture runoff replenished the shallow lake over the following decades, though recently lined canals in the Imperial Valley have resulted

in diminished flows.

If the lake were to completely dry up there would be a horror to behold. While at shrinking Lake Mead a few gangster cadavers showed up in the mud, the Salton Sea contains crashed planes and practice bombs, the targets simulations during the 1940s for the real atomic bombs dropped on Japan.

The lake is bracketed by opulent Palm Springs to the north and the arty squalor of Slab City to the south, home to about 150 full-time residents but temporary home to as many as 4,000 in the winter. In between there are hot springs RV resorts, date palm groves, geothermal energy plants and the town of Bombay Beach sitting atop the San Andreas fault.

Is the diminished sea worth saving? It’s too late to ask the question because, like the Great Salt Lake, the cost of not saving it is likely higher than the rescue. Like many invasive species around the West, there is no easy way to get rid of it. Yet most of its fish are already dead and migrating birds have little to eat.

Dust is the issue, and most conservation programs attempt to mitigate dust

The 1950s and 60s brought out the excesses of post-war revelers to the Salton Sea. You can see the salt-encrusted remains of former resorts and second homes of the Los Angeles fancy people. You can imagine the ghosts of boat races and cocktails.

Those folks even named the local wildlife refuge after swinging Sony Bono, but what came next was toxic salinity and decay as less water came in and the water that remained increased in salinity.

Still, the sea persists. Its salt-encrusted shores circle about 340 square miles of sea. A silo-full of conspiracy theories features the Salton Sea: The military may have accidentally dropped a real bomb that did not explode. The bomb might even be under the water along with hundreds of other dummy bombs and fallen planes. Bodies may still sit in the planes. We know for certain that Slab City is what’s left of a decommissioned military base built about 70 years ago.

Most of the people I meet around the lake seem happy. The place brings pleasure to pre-apocalyptic people like me and those creating outsider art on the actual beach near Bombay Beach. Thousands of Canadians migrate there each winter because the

highest temperatures rarely top 80 degrees.

I look forward to my week at the hopelessly named Fountain of Youth Spa RV Resort. I joke that I have been coming there since 1906 so it must be working.

It attracts so many Canadians that the resort hosts U.S. vs. Canada Games featuring geezer sports of pickleball, horseshoes, bocce and karaoke. Poutine and box wine flow freely, and people sometimes stay up into the double-digit hours of the evening.

The Salton Sea will likely remain a curiosity and hiding place for the weird until some real monster beneath the sea emerges, which could be a rush to start mining lithium made by the sea.

On the other hand, the San Andreas fault might just swallow the whole thing in one glorious gulp. Meanwhile, it’s my refuge, my winter solace away from anxious headlines, and just strange enough to be hospitable.

Dennis Hinkamp is a contributor to Writers on the Range, writersontherange.org, the independent nonprofit dedicated to spurring lively conversation about the West. He writes in Utah.

When the Village Had a Voice

By ROB PATTERSON

“The Freaks Come Out to Write,” a 500-plus page account of the legendary Village Voice, is the “Op-panheimer” of oral histories – a magnificent landmark achievement. And not just because it details an ongoing proverbial nuclear event, more fusion than fission, from the 1950s into the ’90s.

A pivotal periodical in what was called the “new journalism,” the *Voice* was also the first-stage launch rocket for the alternative newsweeklies that later blossomed in major and mid-sized cities across the nation. A significant part of my journalism career has been with and for such papers, placing me at core of this book’s primary audience. But I urge anyone interested in the earthshaking shifts in journalism and media since the founding of the weekly paper in 1955 as well as the cultural, social and political headwinds, currents and undertows in the many years that follow to savor this historical and cultural treasure.

Author Tricia Romano, a former *Voice* editorial staffer, superbly knits the quotes she

elicited into a seamlessly engaging narrative tale. And does so with what’s largely short yet pithy chapters hopping from one significant and telling beat in the paper’s vivid saga to the next. The many Romano spoke with that worked and wrote for the *Voice* along with some from its surrounding community tell almost all you need to know of each of each account. I’m wowed by her finesse.

For a number of my late teen and college years in upstate New York, I’d seek out the *Village Voice* wherever I could find it, just as a number of the paper’s key players did before they arrived in the city from other locales. Once I was there, it was all but a Manhattan ordinance to get the paper as soon as it hit the stands every Thursday. The *Voice* was an essential source of information, a symphony of tribal drums beating at the heart of the Manhattan zeitgeist as well as snapshots and reports from the world around it.

One of the first places that I was published in 1976 was the upstart rival to the *Voice*, the *Soho Weekly News*. Among those I shared its pages with was Michael Musto, who became a star at the *Voice* with his wickedly arch and delightfully amusing La Dolce Musto gossip/nightlife column, the asymptote of that form. Within the downtown social demimonde, I came to know such *VV* notables as the aptly-anointed Dean of Rock

Critics, Robert Christgau, whose wise comments in this tome befit such stature, and master wordsmith James Wolcott, My best friend, photographer and writer Stephanie Chernikowski, also contributed indelible images and smart, succinct words to the paper.

Hence reading it summons up and interweaves with my rather wondrous years at the center of known universe as a New Yorker. As the book also does with so much of what’s vital and significant that transpired over the *VV*’s decades at the core of the cultural and political conversation. There will never be another publication as vital and rich with truly new and inspiring as well as challenging writing and topics as it was before today’s digital media landscape far lowered the bar.

The *Voice* was where I first learned about the striving, scams and psychopathic self-aggrandizement of the now (finally!) convicted felon tRump. It was dead center at the Stonewall Riots that sparked gay liberation. It was on the front lines of feminism, fostered Off Broadway theatre and New York Bohemian’s creative explosion from the ‘70s into the ‘80s, and touted hip-hop music from its South Bronx birth. And quite notably, the *Voice* served as an essential informational nexus when the mysterious AIDS virus began scythe its deadly way through NYC’s gay community, even though, as the book

details, AIDS activists loudly denounced the paper for not doing enough.

That’s only some of the paper’s influence that made it a cultural and journalism monument. “The Freaks Come Out to Write” brings alive the people, place and stories of a newspaper and the times it documented as well as being well worth remembering itself.

Populist Picks

SUBSTACK: “And It Don’t Stop” by Robert Christgau – The longtime *Voice* music editor continues to to apply his keen ears and canny analysis to a wide range of popular music in his subscriber-only newsletter. All but required reading for any serious music buff.

BOOK: “My Greenwich Village: Dave, Bob and Me” by Teri Thal – This delightful memoir by 1960s NYC folk scene stalwart Thal – mate of legend Dave Van Ronk and Dylan’s first manager, is as significant an account of her pioneering independent womanhood as it is the 1960s Village folk community that changed popular music.

Rob Patterson is a music and entertainment writer in Austin, Texas.

Tariffs are Just Taxes By Another Name

By MARK ANDERSON

The tariff debate, if approached academically in order to reduce partisan-fed and mainstream media-abetted emotional reactions, can reach a level of clarity that helps us understand the real picture.

Regardless of what one might think of President Trump, it’s clear that the media is hyper-fixated on the claim that tariffs will make many imported things cost more for the average consumer.

But what is consistently neglected is that the federal income tax, state income taxes, property taxes, in some cases local income taxes, etc. all can accurately be called domestic tariffs.

And all taxes, not just import tariffs, can make things cost more.

The main driver of higher prices is “cost-push” inflation, wherein the costs of doing business—income, inventory and property taxes, plus leasing, utility, raw-material, labor, loan-interest and various other costs—are partly or largely “pushed” to the end consumer. Businesses must recover costs plus make a profit to survive.

While tariffs on imports into the U.S. from Canada, China and possibly Mexico and other nations likely will make certain durable and perishable goods cost more (but not necessarily a great deal more and not necessarily all goods) the U.S. has been burdened with a seemingly permanent federal income tax/tariff ever since 1913—the very year that the notorious, private Federal Reserve central-banking system was birthed with the express help of Sen. Nelson Aldrich, whose daughter, Abby, married John D. Rockefeller Jr.

They sired David, Nelson, Winthrop, Lawrence and John D. III.

Interestingly, Trump’s suggestion to create a new External Revenue Service to replace the Internal Revenue Service

is an exact reversal of what happened just after the 16th Amendment for a federal income tax was ratified.

As Wikipedia summarized: “Democratic leaders agreed to attach an income tax provision to their tariff reduction bill, partly to make up for lost revenue, and partly to shift the burden of funding the government towards the high earners that would be subject to the income tax.”

So, when tariffs were reduced, income taxes were introduced. Nowadays, the counter-proposal is to reduce income taxes and increase tariffs. Tariff revenues feed the U.S. Treasury, as do income-tax revenues.

But the “income tariff” via the 16th Amendment was retrofitted to apply to virtually every working American, while people with surnames like Morgan, Rockefeller, Carnegie, and other financial barons created the tax-exempt foundation into which they stashed much of their immense fortunes, as documented by the late, great liberal author, Ferdinand Lundberg, in his stellar books, “America’s 60 Families,” and, among others, “The Rockefeller Syndrome.”

Those tax shelters, by denying revenue to the government, enlarged tax burdens for the middle and lower classes and funded think tanks that still pummel Congress and the media with their plutocratic ideas on foreign and domestic policies—including proposals to cut or end Social Security and Medicare.

The ultimate outcome of raising import tariffs remains to be seen. Trump sometimes invokes tariffs simply for leverage—as he did with Mexico to get their cooperation on the U.S. southern border. When Mexico concurred, Trump backed down on tariffs. But during his first term, Trump “tariffed” scores of China’s imports and put the revenues in the U.S. Treasury.

Tariffs over the long run will either encourage U.S. manufacturers to keep their production and jobs in the U.S. to avoid import tariffs, or motivate U.S.-domiciled firms that outsourced their production overseas to return to U.S. soil, creating a domestic manufacturing boom, as the theory goes.

Meanwhile, Trump’s cuts to various federal agencies, es-

pecially if they’re done too bluntly, could harm the economy by overlooking the fact that much of the deficit spending to fund such agencies, while some may be “wasteful,” becomes salaries to hundreds of thousands of federal personnel who spend that money into the economy.

The ripple effect of such purchasing-power cuts could be enormous. Trump apparently wants less federal spending, concurrent with shifting the revenue-generation burden to import tariffs, and seeks to reduce the budget deficit which feeds the national debt.

But, as Fed Chairman Marriner Eccles told Congressman Wright Patman in the 1930s, “If there’s no debts in our money system, there wouldn’t be any money.” Thus, monetary reform, toward a non-debt U.S. currency, a new “greenback,” is the missing link.

Mark Anderson is a veteran journalist who divides his time between Texas and Michigan. Email him at truthhound2@yahoo.com.



‘The Bibi Files’ Nails Netanyahu

On Feb. 4, convicted felon Pres. Donald Trump held a joint press conference in the White House with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, the first foreign head of state to meet with Trump since his reelection – and who has been internationally charged to be a war criminal and domestically indicted on corruption charges. Talk about birds of a feather flocking together.

On Dec. 11, “The Bibi Files” was released – as it turns out, this was fateful, as Benjamin “Bibi” Netanyahu took the witness stand in a Tel Aviv court on Dec. 10, for the first time in his trial on corruption charges. This must-see documentary, which features leaked footage of the police interrogations of Netanyahu and other witnesses – the titular “files” – is co-produced by Alex Gibney, and one of the best, most powerful nonfiction films that I have seen in years.

On Nov. 21, the International Criminal Court issued a warrant for Netanyahu’s arrest “for crimes against humanity and war crimes.” “The Bibi Files” makes a compelling case that Israel has committed atrocities in Gaza, the West Bank and Lebanon. Onscreen, Israeli journalist Raviv Drucker asserts, “I’m sure he’s afraid he’ll go to jail.” The film insists that avoiding incarceration is driving Netanyahu’s devastating response to the brutal attack by Hamas on Oct. 7, 2023.

As one of the many interviewees in “The Bibi Files” contends: “Everything he’s done in the past five years is focused on that [prison] gate slamming at his back.” In another segment, Israeli author Nimrod Novik claims “the war became another instrument for Netanyahu to stay in power.”

The opening montage shows the horrific carnage wrought by war in Gaza, where more than 44,000 people

have died with countless more maimed, as a Palestinian woman screams in Arabic her outrage at Netanyahu. It then cuts to scenes of domestic mass protests against the prime minister’s Machiavellian maneuvers to reform the Supreme Court in 2023, as a young Israeli female demonstrator states “Forever war helps him remain prime minister.”

The star witness in “The Bibi Files” may be the documentary’s eponymous suspect himself, but this never-before-publicly-seen leaked footage also includes the videotaped police questioning of Netanyahu’s wife Sara and his son Yair (both of whom visited with Donald Trump—that other leader dogged by criminal convictions and indictments—at Mar-a-Lago on Dec. 1). The film also includes other witnesses for the prosecution: telecom mogul Shaul Elovitch; two-time Oscar nominated Hollywood producer Arnon Milchan and his employees, including a housekeeper; and Netanyahu’s childhood friend Uzi Beller.

In addition to interrogation tapes, “The Bibi Files” incorporates interviews, some shot for this documentary, others from sources such as *60 Minutes*. Drucker, who is interviewed throughout the production, is a co-producer of the film and political analyst for Israeli television’s Channel 13. He has been hot on Netanyahu’s trail for years, and has been sued three times by Bibi.

“The Bibi Files” exposes Netanyahu’s alleged pay-for-play, quid-pro-quo corrupt business practices. When Elovitch got in over his head with loans, according to the film, Netanyahu helped arrange government financing for the indebted telecommunications magnate. In exchange, the prime minister received extremely favorable treatment from the widely viewed Walla website, which Elovitch owned.

Drucker also purports that Bibi pulled strings to extend a 10-year tax law that would benefit Milchan, the movie mogul. Former Finance Minister Yair Lapid states onscreen that this was “the only tax regulation Netanyahu ever approached me about.”

In interviews and interrogation scenes, witnesses divulge that Bibi’s favoritism was in exchange for lavish gifts, including a \$450,000 diamond bracelet, cigars costing more than \$1,000 per box, and expensive bottles of champagne. As Drucker says in the film, the Netanyahus “love the good life.”

In 115-minutes, “The Bibi Files” covers a lot of territory. The film cogently chronicles Netanyahu’s Faustian pact with Israel’s far right, and how his personal interests—staying in power and out of jail—coincide with those of the “messianic expansionists” led by extremist cabinet members.

It also explores Bibi’s shady arrangements to arm and finance Hamas in Gaza for the purpose of keeping the occupied residents divided by preventing Hamas and the Palestinian Authority from uniting. The film contends that this policy led to the biggest security breakdown in Israeli history, enabling Hamas to plan and carry out the Oct. 7 invasion right under the nose of Netanyahu, who had been called “Mr. Security.”

The interrogation tapes and interviews are skillfully interwoven with montages of the anti-Netanyahu demonstrations in Israel, the “beeper bombings” in Lebanon, and above all, the murderous mayhem wreaked upon the besieged Palestinians. In the West Bank, a Palestinian paramedic in an ambulance heartbreakingly laments “every imaginable atrocity under Gvir, Smotrich and Netanyahu,” including settlers burning down homes and the fatal shooting of his ambulance driver.

The documentary’s coproducer, Gibney, won the Best Documentary Oscar for 2007’s “Taxi to the Dark Side” about U.S. torture and interrogation techniques in Afghanistan. The film’s co-producer and director Alexis Bloom has been nominated for three Emmy Awards, including for 2018’s Roger Ailes exposé “Divide and Conquer.” Bloom also produced Gibney’s 2013 “We Steal Secrets, The Story of Wikileaks.”

The case and evidence laid out in “The Bibi Files” seems irrefutable and insurmountable. Its inescapable conclusion is cinematically encapsulated with a shadow of Netanyahu’s profile superimposed over aerial footage of Gaza’s bombed out buildings, reduced to rubble.

The Bib Files is available to view at www.jolt.film.

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

EDGE OF SPORTS

Trump’s Presence at the Super Bowl was an Affront to Every NFL Player

From his position on Colin Kaepernick, to his slanders about players concerned about brain injury, the sitting president has demonstrated how much he disrespects the NFL.

By DAVE ZIRIN

Donald Trump was the first sitting president to attend a Super Bowl, and his presence was a gob of spit in the face of every NFL player, whether they voted for him or not. Trump’s plan to attend the game was made even more egregious by commissioner Roger Goodell’s ostentatious decision to remove the words “End Racism” from the end zone for the first time in four Super Bowls. There are those in the NFL offices, according to long-time football scribe Michael Silver, who think that this decision was a sop to Trump, lest his fragile self would have to see words he is trying to blot out of existence. To put a point on it, they know Trump is a racist—he’s canceling Black History Month FFS—and they wouldn’t want to offend their honored guest.

I asked NFL VP of communications Brian McCarthy about this and he said the narrative that the NFL switched out the slogan to please Trump was “total bullsh*t.” They went instead with the previously used “Choose Love” in order to “lift the imagination” after recent horrors like the Cali-

formia wildfires and the plane crash at DC National Airport. But, as former president of the Pro Football Writers of America Jim Trotter pointed out, why doesn’t the league think that ending racism “lifts the imagination”? Especially when we consider that the California wildfires destroyed historic Black communities like Altadena. And especially when we realize that Trump turned the fires and the DC plane crash into a racist whip against DEI. As Trotter said to me archly, “Seems to me that, in a moment like this, ‘end racism’ would be a more powerful statement than ‘choose love.’” One might even call it uplifting.

There are those who will say that the NFL, which has had a long history of racial inequity, was just engaging in the performative spewing of hot air by having “end racism” stenciled on the field in the first place. But as irksome as performative anti-racism is, what we have now is far worse: the performative silencing of the aspiration so as not to offend a racist. I’ve heard from Capitol Hill folk here in D.C. that Trump’s minions are bragging that they have brought the mighty NFL to heel, and created what Elon Musk gleefully calls “a vibe change.” They believe that the all-powerful league is engaging in a voluntary surrender. Others angry at the decision, like late Hall of Famer Reggie White’s son, Jeremy White, who took to social media to call it “cowardly,” believe it to be intentional. The NFL and Roger Goodell can say this had nothing to do with Trump, but if people on both sides feel that way and the league sticks with the switch, that speaks for itself. The Super Bowl started—and I gave Goodell credit earlier in the week for this in the current climate—with Grammy award winner Ledesi singing “Lift Every Voice and Sing,” otherwise known as “The Black National Anthem.” There was a less than zero chance (it would be a million to one on FanDuel) that Trump would stand when Ledesi performed this civil rights anthem, insulting his hosts and daring them to do something about it, knowing they’d do nothing.

The fact that this song is played at all is a product of the anti-racist struggles of NFL players from 2016–20. Here we get to an even more fundamental reason why Trump’s Super Bowl appearance was so randic: It was Trump during the 2016 campaign, in an on-the-nose preview of what was to come, who said he wanted 49ers quarterback Colin Kaepernick to be kicked out of the country for taking a knee during

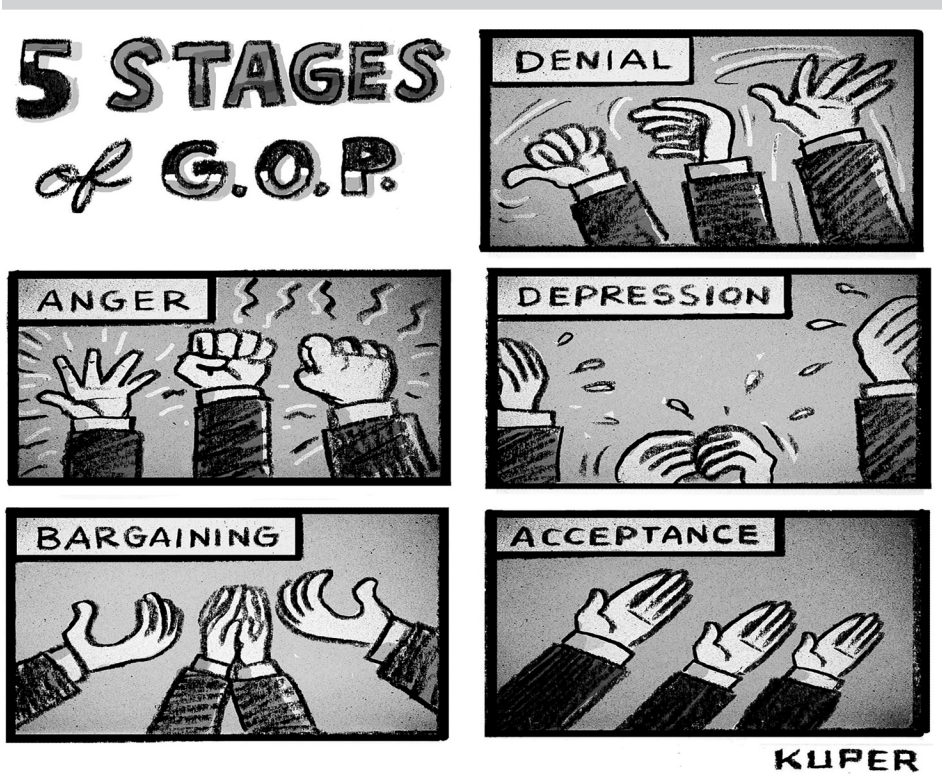
the national anthem to protest police violence. In 2017, Trump infamously called all protesting players “sons of bitches,” and whined that they should be fired. In response to his abusive rant, the entire league stood together the following Sunday and knelt in protest. There was so much boiling rage among players that even franchise owners – many of whom are major bankrollers of Trump – joined the protest. Hell, even Dallas Cowboys franchise owner Jerry Jones took a knee. This fight continued, as Trump attacked Black NFL players relentlessly at rallies and many players, including Tom Brady, refused to show up at the White House after winning a Super Bowl, so toxic was Trump’s name in the football world.

Trump has also routinely slandered players as “soft” for being more conscientious about concussions and tackling rules after a mass class-action lawsuit by players. He would mince around on stage, with blaring homophobia, mocking players as “unmanly” due to their concern about traumatic brain injuries. Trump never played football. But he loves the sport as long as Black athletes are seen and not heard and they do as much physical damage to each other as possible. This is what sports were like in the 19th century, a place

Trump seems determined to drag us to.

Trump has never apologized for any of this, of course. That’s why his presence at the Super Bowl was not an act of reconciliation by the NFL but a surrender. We have seen players in the lead-up to the game tread extremely carefully when asked about Trump’s presence. If football players were to stand up to Trump in front of the world on Sunday, that’s great, but waiting for them to step out alone in the absence of a movement is a fool’s errand. It’s our job to build that movement, just as Colin Kaepernick would never have taken that knee without the context of Black Lives Matter. As for Trump, his presence was an affront. It’s an affront to anti-racist athletes. It was an affront to any player that has suffered from the violence of the sport. And it was an affront to every fan who doesn’t think someone currently acting outside the law should be on a pedestal at the most widely viewed event of the year. I’ll say it again to Roger Goodell and the NFL: Performative anti-racism isn’t worth much. But performative erasure is far, far worse.

Dave Zirin is the sports editor for *The Nation* and author of “The Kaepernick Effect: Taking a Knee, Changing the World.” Email edgeofsports@gmail.com.



AMY GOODMAN



“Everybody I’ve spoken to loves the idea of the United States owning [Gaza], Trump said. But Arab governments were quick to reject it.”

Trump Proposes Ethnic Cleansing of Gaza to Build ‘Riviera of the Middle East’

“We’ll own it,” President Donald Trump announced at a news conference last month, speaking about Gaza, standing next to Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu in the White House.

Trump’s stunning declaration, that “the U.S. will take over the Gaza Strip,” was not off the cuff, but read from prepared notes. Palestinians who live there would have to leave, Trump said, seemingly unconcerned that he was proposing ethnic cleansing on a massive scale, in clear violation of international law.

“Everybody I’ve spoken to loves the idea of the United States owning that piece of land,” he continued. “I don’t want to be cute. I don’t want to be a wise guy. But the Riviera of the Middle East, this could be something that could be so—this could be so magnificent.”

Trump’s son-in-law and former White House advisor Jared Kushner, also a real estate developer, made similar comments a year ago, at a Harvard panel on the Middle East. Kushner said, “Gaza’s waterfront property, it could be very valuable.”

President Trump foreshadowed the proposal while speaking to the press aboard Air Force One on Jan. 25: “I’d like Egypt to take people, and I’d like Jordan to take people. You’re talking about probably a million and a half people, we just clean out that whole thing.”

While hard-right Israelis are thrilled with Trump’s proposed ethnic cleansing, Arab governments were quick to reject it. Saudi Arabia released a statement saying it “will continue its relentless efforts to establish an independent Palestinian State with East Jerusalem as its capital, and will not establish diplomatic relations with Israel without that.” Egypt and Jordan also flatly rejected the plan, at least for now. Trump invited King Abdullah of Jordan to visit Washington and earlier in February the Pentagon approved a \$300 million weapons sale to Egypt.

Perhaps most adamant are the Palestinians in Gaza themselves. More than 75 years after the Nakba, when many Palestinians were driven from their homes into Gaza, and for more than a half-century, since 1967, of

direct Israeli occupation, siege and its repeated assaults, Palestinians in Gaza still demand control of their land. Standing before a mountain of rubble in Khan Younis, a young Palestinian named Yasser Safi said,

“We got out of wreckage, destruction and a war of attrition, a genocide, in which we don’t know when death will come to us from all directions. But we stayed, held on and remained until the last breath. This president Donald Trump comes to us with a new method to displace us from our country where we are rooted. This is our land. We will not get out of it ... Here, we set up a tent on the rubble.”

It is unclear if Trump really means to perpetrate this crime, or is simply deploying the “madman theory.” That was a negotiating tactic used by President Richard Nixon during the Vietnam war, in an attempt to convince the North Vietnamese that he might in fact be so crazy as to use nuclear weapons, thus forcing them to a peace settlement. It didn’t work for Nixon, and it has scant chance of working for Trump.

But many who worked in Trump’s first administration have warned, we should take Trump at his word. He might very well try to drive two million Palestinians from Gaza into Egypt’s Sinai Desert, or to Jordan, to “clean out” Gaza to build the “magnificent” “Riviera” he imagines (and that he, no doubt, would personally profit from as well).

Trump’s zealous lawbreaking is now on full display domestically, in his unprecedented assault on the very structures of the U.S. government, ordering mass retaliatory firings, shutdowns of entire departments, orchestrat-

ing an abhorrent attack on trans people, and more.

Another president who had profoundly more experience with and insight into the Israel-Palestine conflict than Trump was Jimmy Carter, who brokered the 1978 Camp David Accords, establishing peace between Israel and Egypt. In his 2006 book, “Palestine: Peace, Not Apartheid,” Carter wrote, of Israel’s oppression of Palestinians,

“Utilizing their political and military dominance, they are imposing a system of partial withdrawal, encapsulation, and apartheid on the Muslim and Christian citizens of the occupied territories. The driving purpose for the forced separation of the two peoples is unlike that in South Africa— not racism, but the acquisition of land.”

President Carter, who died at 100 on Dec. 29, took enormous heat in 2006 for using the word “apartheid” in reference to Israel, but never backed down. Twenty years later, Israel is widely condemned as an apartheid state.

With Trump in the White House, Israel no doubt sees a rare opportunity to grab the entire Gaza Strip. It will take a mass movement, global in scale, to stop this crime before it happens.

*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.”*

This Tennis Club Shows Why DEI Is Here To Stay

By BONNIE JEAN FELDKAMP

While President Donald Trump signed executive orders to strip diversity, equity, inclusion and accessibility programs from the federal government, Aretha Fuqua traveled to Atlanta to accept the Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Champion award on behalf of the West Louisville Tennis Club at the United States Tennis Association Southern Division awards presentation.

USTA Southern considers diversity, equity and inclusion efforts essential to the sport’s growth. “We are committed to ensuring that people of all backgrounds have access to and feel authentically welcome in the game and business of tennis,” it reads on their website.

Fuqua, who has a doctorate in education, is the president of the West Louisville Tennis Club — a more than 100-year-old organization whose home is the historic Chickasaw Park in Louisville, Kentucky. Frederick Law Olmsted designed Chicka-

saw Park in 1923, and it is believed to be the only park designed by the Olmsted firm specifically for the Black community during segregation. Chickasaw Park is also where the young Louisville native Muhammad Ali trained, and the park even has a dedicated butterfly and bee pollinator meadow in Ali’s honor.

Because West Louisville Tennis Club’s history was rooted in segregation, they became known as “the Black club,” Fuqua said, but that was a title they didn’t want to carry. The club wanted to be more inclusive, so they set a mission to welcome people from all walks of life who were interested in the sport. They also developed youth programming to focus on “character development of our youth,” Fuqua said.

Summer clinics for kids are free with West Louisville Tennis Club. No equipment is necessary. The club provides kids with rackets, balls and whatever else they might need to participate. Kids can even play in the junior tennis league and compete in tournaments.

“We don’t really care where the kids come from,” Fuqua said. “We’re going to love them anyway.”

Chickasaw Park has 12 tennis courts, six of which need repair. Working with Olmsted Park Conservancy, they are raising funds for those repairs so they can continue

to maximize the efforts of the tennis club for the benefit of the community.

“The West Louisville Tennis Club members are our eyes and ears of Chickasaw Park,” said Jesse Hendrix-Inman, director of communications for Olmsted Parks Conservancy, which was established to restore, enhance and protect Louisville’s Olmsted Park System. “The West Louisville Tennis Club is one of our most vital partner organizations,” she added. “They have shaped the history of the park and we consult with the club’s leadership to ensure that our park stewardship and improvements honor that history.”

Fuqua says that intergenerational relationships in the community have been lost over time. So through tennis, the club connects kids with community elders. “It’s got to be bigger than us,” she said of the club’s DEI efforts. “We want to be able to pull in these kids from everywhere, while we have the resources, so that we can get them started on a good path.” Kids getting to communicate with older club members is beneficial for everyone.

Fuqua is on to something. Marc Freedman writes of his research for *Greater Good Magazine* that “when younger and older connect, the intergenerational relationships built are a route to success in early life and a key to happiness and well-being in our

later years.”

The outreach and connection happening in Louisville’s historic Chickasaw Park matters not just for the West Louisville Tennis Club, but for the community and the future of the kids who participate.

The irony of the timing of the West Louisville Tennis Club’s Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Champion award is not lost on Fuqua. In her acceptance speech, she noted Trump’s attempt to mandate the elimination of DEI: “You can’t legislate or mandate morality.” Fuqua said, “Just do the right thing, because that’s simply what it’s all about. It’s treating people the way that you want to be treated. So you can call it ‘tomato,’ you can call it ‘tomahto,’ but we’re still going to be doing it here in Chickasaw Park.”

To support the restoration of the tennis courts in historic Chickasaw Park, make a donation at www.olmstedparks.org/donate/.

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, or email her at Bonnie@WriterBonnie.com. Check out her weekly Youtube videos online at <https://www.youtube.com/bonniejeanfeldkamp>.

Dispatches ...

Continued from page 5

funding violate the plain text of the TRO.”

McConnell—the first judge to accuse the second Trump administration of violating a court order—issued six clear directives to the Trump administration:

- restore frozen funding;
- end any funding pause;
- take every step necessary to effectuate the temporary restraining order;
- comply with the plain text of the TRO not to pause any funds based on pronouncements incorporated in a now-rescinded Office of Management and Budget memo;
- restore withheld funds—including those appropriated in the Inflation Reduction Act and the 2021 bipartisan infrastructure law; and
- resume funding agencies such as the National Institute for Health.

Welcoming the new order in a Monday statement, Rhode Island Attorney General Peter Neronha said that “Judge McConnell’s ruling in our favor was swift, and unsurprising.”

“Judge McConnell’s order confirmed what we have been saying from the beginning. It is now time for the administration to come into

full compliance,” Neronha continued. “This is a country of laws. We expect the administration to follow the law. Our office and attorneys general across the country stand ready to keep careful watch on the actions of this administration that follow, and we will not hesitate to go back to court if they don’t comply.”

The Associated Press reported that the White House did not immediately respond to a message seeking comment, but the U.S. Department of Justice appealed the ruling to the 1st Circuit Court of Appeals.

CONFIRMATION OF PROJECT 2025 ARCHITECT RUSS VOUGHT EXPECTED TO INTENSIFY LAWLESS TRUMP RAMPAGE. In a party-line vote late Feb. 6, the U.S. Senate confirmed right-wing extremist and Project 2025 architect Russell Vought to lead the White House budget office as the Trump administration works to unilaterally dismantle entire federal agencies and choke off funding already approved by Congress, Jake Johnson noted at Common Dreams (2/7).

Vought’s confirmation, backed only by Republican votes in the Senate, comes after the chamber’s Democrats used up all 30 hours of debate on his nomination to warn of the damage he could inflict as director of the Office of Management and Budget.

Lawmakers and progressive activists echoed those warnings in the wake of his confirmation. Alex Jacquez, chief of policy and advocacy at the Groundwork Collaborative, said in a statement that “Vought’s fingerprints are all over last week’s illegal funding freeze.”

“Halting funding for Americans’ health-care, childcare, and food assistance wasn’t a bug,” said Jacquez. “It was by design, and Project 2025 is the blueprint. Now that Vought is officially running the show, he’ll be able to unleash his radical agenda across the federal government. And if the courts stop him, he’s got a billionaire friend with the government’s keys and checkbook: Elon Musk.”

During his confirmation process, Vought expressed agreement with Trump’s view that the 1974 Congressional Budget and Impoundment Control Act (ICA)—a law passed in response to former President Richard Nixon’s refusal to spend congressionally approved funds on programs he opposed—is unconstitutional, a view that Musk has also expressed.

Politico reported Feb. 6 that Vought “is expected to soon press his theory on impoundments, the idea that the president can ignore congressional spending edicts.” Analysts have argued that even without the ICA, unilateral impoundments of the kind the Trump White

House is expected to pursue in the coming months and years would still be unconstitutional.

Rep. Rosa DeLauro (D-Conn.), the top Democrat on the House Appropriations Committee, said that “in confirming Vought, Republicans have put their stamp of approval on ending American democracy—built on three co-equal branches of government—and on creating a government of billionaires, by billionaires.”

“Our nation is facing an extraordinary crisis,” said DeLauro. “Donald Trump is attempting to claim absolute power for the presidency. The chaos, confusion, and flagrantly unconstitutional actions of the early days of this administration are largely of Vought’s design and doing. With Vought’s encouragement, the administration has taken the groundless position—and demonstrated—that they believe the White House has the absolute power to determine spending, and that they can choose to simply not fund programs and services that Congress has promised to the American people. This could not be further from the truth.”

“The Constitution empowers Congress, not the president, with the power of the purse,” DeLauro continued. “The president is *Continued on next page*

Trump Is In It Only for Himself

The president’s ugly hijacking of a plane crash adds to a pattern emerging from his administration.

By DANA MILBANK

“Kamala is for they/them,” went Donald Trump’s notorious TV ad during the 2024 campaign. “President Trump is for you.”

But not quite two weeks into President Trump’s second term, we already know that to be false. Trump is for I/me/mine.

“In moments like this,” Trump said in the White House briefing room on the morning after the Jan. 29 crash at Reagan National Airport, “the differences between Americans fade to nothing compared to the bonds of affection and loyalty that unite us.”

In the next breath, he used the tragedy to pursue his usual political vendettas — against Democrats, against civil servants and against diversity programs.

No one yet knew what caused the crash, but Trump didn’t hesitate to blame what he said were Joe Biden’s and Barack Obama’s “mediocre” and “lower” standards for air traffic controllers. He blamed Biden’s transportation secretary, Pete Buttigieg, for offering nothing but “a good line of bulls—” as he oversaw the Federal Aviation Administration. And Trump blamed the FAA itself for deciding that “the work force was too White” — and pursuing diversity in hiring rather than “people that are competent.”

A reporter asked whether he was really blaming the crash on DEI.

“It just could have been,” Trump said.

Wasn’t he premature to be casting blame before there’s an investigation?

“No, I don’t think so at all,” Trump replied.

How can he conclude that diversity was to blame?

“Because I have common sense.”

In fact, as NBC News’s Peter Alexander informed Trump, the same diversity policy the president now blames for the tragedy was on the FAA’s website throughout Trump’s first term.

If we’re recklessly assigning blame, we might just as easily point out that, before Trump took office, there hadn’t been a major commercial plane crash in the United States in the previous 16 years; that, in the week before the crash, Trump sacked the head of the Transportation Security Administration, disbanded the Aviation Security Advisory Committee, failed to name an acting head of the FAA, and imposed a hiring freeze that apparently includes air traffic controllers; and that Sen. Ted Cruz (R-Texas) last year celebrated his “landmark victory” in expanding the number of flights out of National — over the protest of aviation safety experts and senators from Maryland and Virginia, who warned that Cruz and friends “decided to ignore the flashing red warning light of the recent near-collision of two aircraft at [National] and jam even more flights onto the busiest runway in America.”

Or can we agree to pause the baseless speculation and wait for the facts?

Later, asked about visiting the crash site, he replied: “You want me to go swimming?” Yet his decision to dive into the tragedy to further his political vendettas adds to a clear and familiar pattern emerging from his nascent administration: No matter the subject, Trump is in it only for himself. Instead of addressing Americans’ cost of living, as voters wanted him to do, Trump has devoted his early days in office to his own quality of living — by using the powers of the presidency to nurse his personal grievances and to seek vengeance against political foes.

He hasn’t done a thing to lower prices for the average American; the Federal Reserve announced a pause in its plans for interest-rate cuts, in part because it’s waiting to assess Trump’s tariffs and other policies that would increase inflation. Instead, his administration’s early actions and

appointments show he is resolutely focused on his own imagined victimhood. Even as Trump was blaming the air tragedy on his foes in the Democratic Party and the “deep state,” his nominee to run the FBI was having his confirmation hearing before the Senate Judiciary Committee. It turned out to be a grievance recital.

Kash Patel and his Republican questioners talked about the Steele dossier. They talked about Peter Strzok and his girlfriend. They talked about Crossfire Hurricane and the Durham report. They complained about critical race theory and COVID-19 face masks and the FBI’s supposed responsibility for the Jan. 6, 2021, attack on the Capitol. They claimed the FBI was spying on churches and treating parents as terrorists. And they talked about Hunter Biden — ad nauseam. Sen. Lindsey Graham (R-South Carolina) talked about Biden’s laptop. Then Sen Josh Hawley (R-Missouri) did. Then Sen. Eric Schmitt (R-Missouri) did.

“Mr. Hunter Biden cheated on his income taxes,” observed Sen. John Neely Kennedy (R-Louisiana). “He tried to deduct his hookers as a business expense.”

Will they ever move on?

“The reason you’re here,” Graham told Patel, “is because most of the public, almost every Republican, believes that the FBI has been used continuously in a political fashion ... to get Donald Trump.”

It was a candid admission. The nominee to head the FBI should have been there because he was the best person to protect the country from terrorists, or Chinese espionage, or Russian election interference. But Patel was there for one thing only: to exact revenge on those who, in Republicans’ view, wanted to “get Donald Trump.”

Under the new administration, avenging Trump’s perceived slights requires a whole-of-government approach.

Newly confirmed Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth made his first major move in late January. Fortifying the nuclear triad? Nope. He moved to strip Gen. Mark Milley, former chairman of the Joint Chiefs and a Trump critic, of his security detail — protection made all the more necessary by Trump’s frequent attacks against him. Trump had previously revoked Milley’s security clearance and had his portrait removed from the Pentagon, and Hegseth ordered an investigation aimed at taking away one of Milley’s stars.

Trump had already taken away protection from Anthony Fauci, recipient of ferocious MAGA criticism and frequent death threats, and from advisers-turned-critics John Bolton and Mike Pompeo, both targets of Iranian assassination plots because of their previous service to Trump. Even Republicans such as Graham and Sen. Tom Cotton (Arkansas) raised objections — but Trump doesn’t care.

“Would you feel partially responsible if something were to happen to, say, Dr. Fauci or John Bolton?” a reporter asked Trump.

“I think that, certainly, I would not take responsibility,” Trump replied.

Trump has already sacked Justice Department career lawyers who worked for special counsel Jack Smith on his Trump investigation. The Trump-appointed interim U.S. attorney in Washington launched an investigation of the Jan. 6 prosecutions. Trump pardoned the “patriots” and “hostages” involved in the attempt to overthrow the 2020 election, including one man who was later killed in a scuffle with police and another who is being sought by police on previous charges of soliciting a minor. In a further indication of Trump’s vengeful intentions, he posted an article recommending “turning lawfare on its creators” and prosecuting the federal, state and local prosecutors who brought cases against Trump.

Trump’s Justice Department has moved to drop the prosecution of former Republican congressman Jeff Fortenberry, which Trump said was a “Witch Hunt” undertaken because of the “illegal Weaponization of our Justice System by the Radical Left Democrats.” (Trump was unconcerned about the Jan. 29 sentencing of former Democratic senator Bob Menendez, prosecuted by the Biden administration, to more than a decade in prison.)

And Trump continues to nurse his grievances wherever he goes. Addressing House Republicans at his Doral resort in Miami, Trump railed against the “rigged election” (yes, he’s still

talking about 2020), “impeachment hoax No. 1,” “impeachment hoax No. 2” and his belief that he “was investigated more than any human being in history,” including Al Capone.

At the heart of Trump’s reign of vengeance so far has been his demonization and discrediting of federal workers, who in his fantasy are part of a “deep state” that persecutes him. His administration offered an extra seven months of pay to federal workers who quit now. (Caveat emptor: He frequently reneges.) He ousted Democratic commissioners from the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission and a Democratic board member of the National Labor Relations Board, put about 60 senior officials on leave at the U.S. Agency for International Development and canned inspectors general across the federal government. Most of these moves are illegal, but they fit with the administration’s desire, articulated by incoming Office of Management and Budget director Russell Vought, for federal workers to be “viewed as the villains. ... We want to put them in trauma.”

It’s early, but the second Trump administration already looks a lot like the first.

There’s the familiar incompetence. After sending the country into chaos with the announcement on Jan. 27 that it was suspending some \$3 trillion in federal grants and loans — an echo of the mayhem caused in 2017 by the so-called Muslim ban — the White House rescinded the policy on Jan. 29.

There’s the country’s fast return to pariah status (latest foe: Colombia). A halt in foreign aid has endangered counterterrorism and counternarcotics efforts. And, on the eve of ceremonies marking 80 years since the liberation of Auschwitz, Trump sidekick Elon Musk advised a far-right German party that flirts with Nazism to not “focus on past guilt.”

There’s the routine cruelty. After the U.S. Catholic bishops complained about a Trump order allowing immigration raids in churches and schools, Vice President JD Vance alleged that the bishops are “worried about their bottom line,” not “humanitarian concerns.”

There’s the casual subversion of reality. The White House made the ludicrous claim that \$50 million of U.S. funding paid for “condoms for Hamas.” (He seems to have confused the Palestinian Gaza for a similarly named province in Mozambique.)

Above all, there’s the all-pervasive obsession with victimhood. “Having been the victim of government overreach and a weaponized system of justice and law enforcement, I know what it feels like to have the full weight of the United States government barreling down on you,” Patel said at his confirmation hearing on Jan. 29. “I will make sure that no American is subjected to death threats like I was, and subjected to moving their residences like I was.”

Democrats pointed out that the longtime Trump hatchet man isn’t quite the innocent he fancies himself to be. He published a list of Trump’s deep-state foes and has suggested that the administration should prosecute Trump critics and “go after” the news media. He has called federal investigators “criminal gangsters” and sympathized with Jan. 6 prisoners, even producing and marketing a musical recording they made. He has proposed turning FBI headquarters into a “museum of the deep state.” And he has hawked Trump-themed merchandise and a dubious medical supplement.

“All of those statements are taken out of grotesque context,” Patel protested at one point. The “grotesque context”: his own writings and interviews.

Patel distanced himself from Trump’s pardons and commutations of violent Jan. 6 prisoners. But the man who would lead the FBI testified under oath that “violent crime is exploding” — though he surely must know that it has been falling for years and is below where it was when Trump left office. As for his plans to go after Trump’s imagined deep-state enemies, Patel said, “No one that did not break the law will be investigated.” So Trump’s FBI director, in addition to inventing his own crime statistics, will determine a target’s guilt before he launches an investigation.

For a president obsessed with retribution above all else, Patel is going to be perfect.

*Dana Milbank is a political columnist for the **Washington Post**, where this appeared. Follow him on Twitter @Milbank. Email dana.milbank@washpost.com*

Dispatches ...

Continued from previous page

not a king who can pick and choose which laws to follow and which laws to ignore. But the president is relying on the guidance and counsel of Russ Vought to do just that.”

In one of his appearances before the Senate in January, Vought told lawmakers that he views the Clinton-era welfare reform law that doubled extreme poverty as a crowning achievement and declared that “we need to go after the mandatory programs,” which include Social Security, Medicare, and Medicaid.

“Vought is an extremist who has made clear he’ll ignore our nation’s laws, cut funding that helps people across the country, and give Trump unprecedented and unconstitutional power,” warned Sen. Patty Murray (D-Wash.), the top Democrat on the Senate Appropriations Committee, following Vought’s confirmation. “There will be consequences.”

TRUMP AND MUSK GUTTING CONSUMER FINANCIAL PROTECTION BUREAU IS A ‘PAYOFF TO THE RICH GUYS,’ SEN. WARREN SAYS. As the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau’s website went dark and its offices were shuttered on Feb. 10, with the agency’s chief operating officer telling staff it would be shut down for the week, U.S. Sen. Elizabeth Warren was among the progressive leaders calling out the attack on the CFPB as one whose real target is working families across the country, Julia Conley noted at Common Dreams (4/10).

Chief Operating Officer Adam Martinez’s message to staffers followed a weekend directive from Office of Management and Budget (OMB) Director Russell Vought, which ordered the agency to “cease all supervision and examination activity.”

As Common Dreams reported Feb. 8, President Trump’s multibillionaire backer, Elon Musk, posted the words “RIP CFPB” on his social media platform X, the week before. Musk has a vested interest in shutting down

the agency due to his plan to partner with Visa on a peer-to-peer payment system on X—the kind of financial venture that CFPB would oversee as it fights to ensure Americans aren’t overcharged and scammed by big businesses.

Trump is intent on securing “a payoff to the rich guys who invested in his campaign and who want to cheat families and not have anybody around to stop them,” Warren (D-MA) said.

“If you have a bank account or a credit card or a mortgage or student loan, this is code red. I am ringing the alarm bell,” said Warren in a video posted to social media. “If they succeed, CEOs and Wall Street will once again be free to trick, trap, and cheat you.”

The agency shut down as the National Treasury Employees Union, which represents CFPB workers, filed two lawsuits against Vought in the U.S. District Court for the District of Columbia over the Trump administration’s takeover of the agency.

The union is seeking to block the Department of Government Efficiency(DOGE),

the advisory body led by Musk, from gaining access to CFPB employee data.

It also alleges that Vought’s halting of the agency’s operations “reflects an unlawful attempt to thwart Congress’ decision to create the CFPB to protect American consumers.”

Trump’s attempt to shut down the agency is “another scam,” said Warren—a former law professor who proposed and then helped build the CFPB before joining Congress.

“For years, Republicans have tried and tried again to repeal it in Congress and they have failed every single time,” said the senator. “Congress built the CFPB, and no one other than Congress—not the president, not Musk, not Vought—can shut it down.”

Trump, Musk, and other powerful CEOs want the CFPB shut down, Warren said, because “this little agency has forced giant banks and corporations to give back more than \$21 billion directly to families they cheated.”

See more Dispatches at [Populist.com](https://populist.com).

If you are a progressive populist...
Don't miss an issue!

Subscribe to **The Progressive Populist**

Progressive populists believe that people are more important than corporations, and that government should be of the people, by the people and for the people. Nowadays, we hear, that's a pretty radical notion.

The corporate media failed to report on the Republican attempts to sabotage the economic recovery after Barack Obama took office in 2009. When Donald Trump emerged to lead the MAGAs to the White House, the infotainment channels that replaced network news became even less reliable. An informed citizenry needs the independent and adversary media that was envisioned when the Founders framed the First Amendment in the Bill of Rights. *The Progressive Populist* aims to be a witness for folks on Main Street.

A handful of corporations are consolidating their grip on the nation's primary information sources. Megacorporations and hedge funds already own the major radio and TV networks, newspapers, magazines, book publishers and movie studios. Now they're moving to control the Internet. Is it any surprise that editors and news directors reflect the concerns of their corporate bosses?

Little wonder that populism — the theory that people are more important than corporations, and government needs to be strong enough to keep corporations in line — gets short shrift in public policy discussions, and politicians and journalists who question the power of corporate barons are dismissed as radicals. Well, there are a few of us in the Heartland of America armed with the First Amendment, access to a printing press and a newspaper with a mission: to tell the stories of working people and how we can regain control of the United States.

We hope you enjoy this issue. If you are not already a subscriber and would like to receive *The Progressive Populist* twice monthly, simply return the coupon below with your payment of \$45 for a full year (22 issues), or only \$80 if you want to subscribe for two years. If you prefer, **we offer a PDF version** delivered by email as a paper-free alternative. And for \$10 more, we also offer **The Daily Progressive Populist** five days a week, delivered by email, featuring columns we don't have the space to run in our twice-monthly edition, as well as breaking news and analysis.

Try our Spread-the-Word discount: If you subscribe or renew your subscription, you can also buy a gift subscription for only \$20 for six months. Help us spread the word about *The Progressive Populist*.

Help us make *The Progressive Populist* the antidote to the monopoly daily news, as we deflate pompous plutocrats and throw a lifeline to progressives who feel stranded in a sea of mossbacks and right-wingers. Get your twice-monthly dose of Jim Hightower, Amy Goodman and other plutocrat pluckers, such as Sarah Anderson, Juan Cole, Joe Conason, Hal Crowther, Bonnie Jean Feldkamp, Barry Friedman, Alan Guebert, Froma Harrop, Thom Hartmann, Sonali Kolhatkar, Robert Kuttner, Margot McMillen, Dana Milbank, Ralph Nader, Wayne O'Leary, Clarence Page, Rob Patterson, Alexandra Petri, Dick Polman, Ted Rall, Ed Rampell, Robert Reich, Joan Retsinas, Don Rollins, Mary Sanchez, Jen Sorensen, Rosie Sorensen, Jamie Stiehm, Tom Tomorrow, Sam Uretsky, Katrina vanden Heuvel, John Young, Dave Zirin and others you won't find in the "mainstream" press.

SUBSCRIBE TODAY! DON'T DELAY! Thanks.



Send me The Progressive Populist!

The Journal from America's Heartland.

Enclosed is:

___ **\$45 for a 1-year subscription. Add ___ \$10 for the Daily email**
___ **\$80 for 2 years. Add ___ \$20 for the Daily supplement**
___ **\$20 for 6-month introductory subscription (\$24 to renew).**

My Name _____

Address _____

City/State/Zip _____

Email / Phone _____

Send Gift Subscription to:

Name _____

Address _____

City/State/Zip _____

(attach another page if necessary and note email address for PDF and/or Daily Progressive Populist)

Send to:

The Progressive Populist

P.O. Box 15786

North Hollywood, CA 91606-5786

Subscribe via our website: prg.magserv.com.

E-mail: prgcs@magserv.com

or call

1-818-286-3104

(9 a.m. to 6 p.m. Central Time, Monday-Friday)

**and CHARGE IT to
Visa, MasterCard,
Discover or American Express**

*Our subscription and fulfillment services are provided by Stark Services of North Hollywood, Calif. **The Progressive Populist** is still based in Storm Lake, Iowa, with editorial office in Manchaca, Texas.*