

# Public Lands Jobs Are Being Axed and We'll All Suffer For It

**Mass layoffs in the National Park Service and U.S. Forest Service threaten public safety, rural economies, and wildfire prevention.**

By CLAIRE CARLSON / The Daily Yonder

*This story was originally published in The Daily Yonder. For more rural reporting and small-town stories visit [dailyyonder.com](http://dailyyonder.com).*

In mid-February, thousands of jobs in the National Park Service and U.S. Forest Service were axed as part of President Donald Trump's push to cut government spending and improve efficiency.

Trail crew members, park rangers, EMTs, and other essential public lands workers received soulless termination letters on Valentine's Day, stating "the Agency finds, based on your performance, that you have not demonstrated that your further employment at the Agency would be in the public interest."

When I visited the Grand Canyon a few years ago, I walked a half-mile down Bright Angel trail in the middle of the afternoon when I was stopped by a park ranger. "Do you have water? Do you have a plan?" she pressed me, urging that I turn around rather than get stuck at the bottom of the Grand Canyon with no water, no tent, and a ratty pair of Tevas.

That happens all the time at the Grand Canyon where it's easy to walk miles downhill before realizing that you do, indeed, need to get yourself back up to the rim. In the summer, when temperatures reach triple-digits, this can be a deadly adventure. The Park Service is often on high alert for foolish tourists like me who are wandering the canyon without a plan. They're the ones who keep people safe. And they're part of the workforce that was fired last week.

Many Park Service and Forest Service employees live in rural communities where the federal government is the primary employer and the only housing comes from these agencies. Not only have people lost their jobs, but their homes, too. This move, in the name of government efficiency, completely disrupts real people's lives.

One fired park ranger wrote on Instagram that he and his wife had just moved their two daughters to a small town in northern Wisconsin for his job. They bought a house, enrolled their kids in the local schools. "This is the particularly cruel part of firing federal workers who are just beginning in new communities," he wrote.

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Illustration by DOLORES CULLEN

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AN EDITORIAL

The Lyin' King Sets Rules

When he was campaigning last year for a return to the White House, Donald Trump said he would be a dictator on Day One, and after his inauguration he made a show of signing 28 executive orders that stretched his authority. But it took him a month before he actually declared himself a monarch.

The first-day edicts included pardons for 1,500 people convicted of crimes, including violence that injured police officers, and commuting the sentences of 14 others involved in the Jan. 6, 2021, riot at the U.S. Capitol. Trump called the convicts "hostages." Another executive order aimed to cut off birthright citizenship, which is guaranteed by the 14th Amendment, for children of undocumented aliens. Five federal lawsuits were filed the first week challenging Trump's birthright citizenship executive order.

But Trump really hit his stride on Jan. 24, when he fired 17 inspectors general, who are responsible for investigating waste, fraud and abuse, and instead put Elon Musk's Department of Govern Efficiency in charge of those tasks. Eight of those inspectors general, with oversight of the departments of Defense, Veterans Affairs, Health and Human Services, State, Agriculture, Education, Labor and the Small Business Administration, filed suit Feb. 12, charging their terminations were unlawful and seeking reinstatement.

Then, on Feb. 19, Trump declared himself "king" as he announced his decision to rescind approval of New York's "congestion pricing" — an auto toll instituted by the state in January to raise money for the region's aging mass transit system and cut traffic in the city.

"CONGESTION PRICING IS DEAD. Manhattan, and all of New York, is SAVED. LONG LIVE THE KING!" the Trump proclaimed on social media.

Soon after, an official White House account not only echoed the president's online statement, it also released a portrait showing a grinning Trump wearing a crown.

Two days later, at a National Governors Association session at the White House, Trump referenced his recent executive order forbidding transgender student-athletes and said he had learned that Maine intended to ignore his directive. He then asked if Maine's governor was in the room.

When Maine Gov. Janet Mills spoke up, he asked her whether her state would comply with his demands. The two-term Democratic governor — who also had served as Maine's attorney general for several years — told the president she would comply with state and federal laws.

Trump replied, "Well, we are the federal law." He added, "You better do it, because you're not going to get federal funding." "See you in court," the governor replied.

Republican members of Congress have bent the knee to the mango majesty, and have threatened to impeach federal judges who dare to undermine Trump's decrees. Elon Musk stated on his X site that it is "time to impeach judges who violate the law."

Republicans have no chance of removing the judges from office. Even if they pass impeachment articles in the House, they are dead letters in the Senate, where 67 votes are needed to remove the judges.

The Trump regime represents the opportunity for the Heritage Foundation to achieve their goal of dismantling the vestiges of the New Deal. Heritage is a right-wing think tank that has led the oligarch movement in the U.S. since the 1970s, when it was founded during Richard Nixon's administration by Paul Weyrich, Edwin Feulner, and beer magnate Joseph Coors. Heritage grew

from the new business activist movement inspired by the Powell Memorandum, written by Lewis Powell in 1971 when he was a consultant for the US Chamber of Commerce.

Powell, who later was appointed to the Supreme Court by Nixon, offered a plan for conservative business interests to dismantle New Deal programs, such as Social Security, Medicare and government regulation of businesses, which Powell considered socialist. Heritage advocated for pro-business policies and anti-communism in its early years, but also advocated cultural issues that were important to Christian conservatives.

Heritage's influence grew with the ascent of Ronald Reagan in 1980, and the Heritage Foundation in January 1981 published "Mandate for Leadership," a plan to reduce the size of the federal government that provided guidance to the incoming Reagan administration, with more than 2,000 policy recommendations on how the Reagan administration could use the federal government to advance conservative policies. Several of its authors went on to take positions in the Reagan administration and Reagan later called the Heritage Foundation a "vital force" during his presidency. The Heritage Foundation remained an influential voice during the administrations of presidents George H. W. Bush and George W. Bush.

Heritage discounted the candidacy of Trump in 2015. "Donald Trump's a clown," said Michael Needham, leader of Heritage Action, which handled political activism. Needham argued that Trump was riding the same wave of establishment disaffection that was floating Sen. Bernie Sanders' campaign for the Democratic nomination. "He [Trump] needs to be out of the race."

But once Trump secured the Republican nomination, Heritage changed its tune and obtained influence in Trump's presidential transition and administration. After the 2016 election, Trump's team was unprepared to staff the new administration, but Heritage stepped up with its 3,000-name searchable database of trusted movement conservatives who were eager to serve in a post-Obama government. The New York Times in 2018 reported that several hundred people from Heritage ultimately received jobs in government agencies, including Betsy DeVos, Mick Mulvaney, Rick Perry, Scott Pruitt, Jeff Sessions, and others who became members of Trump's cabinet.

Now, in Trump's reincarnation, Heritage produced Project 25 to give Trump a running start in recreating U.S. government as an oligarchy. The GOP is going ahead with a budget reconciliation power play that makes severe cuts in federal services to allow more tax cuts for billionaires. There is a relatively minor amount of "waste, fraud and abuse" in Social Security, Medicare or Medicaid — mainly in the eye of the beholder — but greedy oligarchs demand a piece of the action.

Medicaid and the related Children's Health Insurance Program provide health care for more than 79 million Americans in low-income families, at a cost of \$880 billion a year. If the poor don't get health care through Medicaid, they are likely to end up relying on local charities to cover health care costs.

Trump said cuts to Medicare and Social Security are "off the table," but so was Medicaid until Republicans lined up enough votes to put it back on the table. They have proposed increasing the age to qualify for Medicare, cuts in coverage and moving remaining Medicare recipients to privatized Medicare Advantage, where insurance companies increase profits by denying medical procedures.

Social Security would be fiscally solid for the foreseeable future if Congress would increase the cap on taxable income from the current limit of \$176,000, after which the wealthy pay nothing. Democrats must stand firm against the Greedy Oligarchs Party. —JMC

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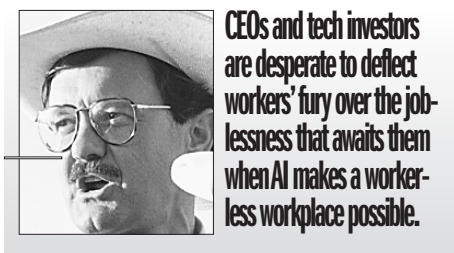
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JIM HIGHTOWER



An AI Bot Won't Take Your Job. Will It?

Corporate powers are telling us not to worry our little heads about the humanoid robotics they're increasingly employing in America's workplaces. Yes, they concede, AI's new generation of "thinking robots" will transform many jobs, but — like magic — they'll also create better career opportunities for "the human element." Really ... like what? Well, like taking care of all those machines! But wait — can't a robot do that, too?

What's playing out here is corporate hide-and-seek from the public. Having poured hundreds of billions into developing the technology for their dream of a workerless workforce, CEOs and tech investors are now desperate to deflect workers' fury over the joblessness that awaits them. Thus, moneyed elites have mounted a soothing PR campaign, asserting that the AI bots will only replace repetitive, drudge jobs, "liberating" those human employees to do higher-value work.

That bubble of lies, however, is already being popped by reality. Many renegade CEOs and profiteers brag that their advanced bots are taking over sophisticated thinking jobs and doing top-level creative tasks. For example, *The New York Times* reports that Klarna, a multibillion-dollar company, is replacing more than half of its 5,000 employees with new robotics. Its CEO is not coy about the future of work, declaring "AI can already do all of the jobs that we, as humans, do."

The designers of this Brave New World bluntly say their AI creatures are fast-coming for a wide variety of our jobs — and big investors are betting billions on them. Yet, both politicians and the media blithely accept the corporate deception that there is no need to talk about it — much less consider what to do about it.

Trump's Thought Police are Stomping on Freedom of Speech

In "Alice's Adventures in Wonderland," Humpty Dumpty autocratically declares that "When I use a word, it means what I choose it to mean — neither more nor less." But, says Alice: "The question is whether you can make words mean so many different things." Humpty retorts: "The question is which is to be master — that's all."

Now comes Trumpy Dumpty, asserting that he and his government rethinkers are our linguistic masters. For starters, they unilaterally axed out three hallowed words that have historically expressed our people's proud democratic purpose — diversity, equity, and inclusion.

This month, investigative journalist Judd Legum uncovered dozens of words that partisan Trump functionaries are perverting and purging in a bizarre authoritarian frenzy. Legum even found that NSA, a non-partisan security agency, has now banned its staff from using 27 common words, including bias and injustice. It's as though Trump's word police think censoring language will hide the ugly realities the words express.

Yet, the control of language is central to the entrenchment of totalitarian regimes, as George Orwell laid out in his bleak novel "1984." He wrote about "newspeak," "doublethink," and other linguistic twists as mass propaganda tools that eliminated inconvenient ideas and provided new "truth" for the

party faithful to spread. Such manipulation, Orwell says, creates "loyal willingness to say black is white." Thus, we see the spectacle of Trump blindly signing an executive order titled "Restoring Freedom of Speech and Ending Federal Censorship" — even as he blatantly censors speech and stomps on our freedoms.

So come on — speak up against such thuggish Orwellian tyranny! For information, go to National Coalition Against Censorship: NCAC.org.

**Let's Fight this 5-Alarm Monopoly Fire**

Here's something I had never given any thought to: the price of fire trucks. Plus, a worrisome fire truck shortage!

Huh? What would cause any town or city to run short of this essential piece of its community infrastructure? Answer: old-fashioned greed, coming from a modern-day monopolistic construct called "private equity."

Essentially, this is a fast-money Wall Street scheme, encouraging very wealthy investors to buy up established businesses and either plunder their assets or consolidate several of them into a monopoly. It has targeted everything from health care to newspapers — and now, your local fire department.

Until recently, making and selling fire trucks was a competitive business, with family-owned manufacturers operating in every region of America. However, (as detailed by BIG, a unique newsletter investigating monopolies) about a decade ago a private equity outfit began an industry "roll up," consolidating independent truck companies into a national conglomerate named REV Group. It now controls nearly half of U.S. fire truck sales.

What REV mainly revved up was its profits by doubling the sticker price for trucks to more than a million dollars each. Worse, REV increased delivery time for a local department's order from about a year to as long as four years, meaning old trucks break down and can't respond to catastrophes. For example, the Los Angeles fire chief reports that in last month's horrific wildfires, more than 100 of the city's 183 fire trucks were out of service!

Fires are inevitable. Letting a handful of private equity speculators profit from fires is *not*. National and state antitrust laws already prohibit such greedheaded monopolization. So, here's an idea: Enforce those laws! Learn more at the American Antitrust Institute: AntitrustInstitute.org.

**Big News: Grassroots Democrats are Pulling the Party Back to the Grassroots**

Early in the Civil War, Gen. George McClellan's Union Army was poised for a decisive victory over Confederate forces. But, inexplicably, McClellan wouldn't attack! For days, President Lincoln ordered and even begged the general to move. But nothing — so the Confederates slipped away. In firing McClellan, Lincoln wrote: "If you don't want to use the army, I should like to borrow it for a while."

That's what today's grassroots Democratic Party activists are saying to their aloof campaign generals, who stay ensconced in Washington, refusing to deploy their ground troops in the field of battle.

The great strength of the Democratic Party is its army of volunteer door-knockers across the country who have the local knowledge, connections and lingo to relate to local voters. Yet, in the past 30 years, fat-cat donors and high-dollar consultants have taken over the "People's Party" and abandoned *high-touch* organizing for *high-tech* "digital outreach."

Thus, the Democrats' passionate army of local campaigners is unused, only called on by emails to send more donations to fund Beltway consultants and negative political ads. As a friend of mine recently said in exasperation: "I wish the Democratic Party would stop asking for money and *start asking me for ACTION.*"

Well, change is coming, for the grassroots Democratic army has been taking charge in many areas and mobilizing itself! And in a huge advance, the party's new national chair and its new chair of State Democratic Committees were both elected Feb. 1 on a bold program to move the party's focus back to year-round, grassroots activism. After all, voters aren't mere consumers of politics; they should be valued as the whole

National Nature Assessment Cancelled

By FRANK LINGO

A first-of-its-kind report on the state of nature in the United States authorized by President Joe Biden has been canceled by order of President Donald Trump. A Feb. 10 *New York Times* article covered the coverup.

The "National Nature Assessment," is the work of over 150 scientists and other experts - both government and private sector — who had spent thousands of hours working on the report. Now some members of the team are intent on finishing and publishing the work outside the government.

The project's director, environmental scientist Dr. Phil Levin, wrote in an email to the report's authors, "This work is too important to die. The country needs what we are producing."

Non-partisan Congressional journal *The Hill* quoted a co-author of the report: "This is really not a political or ideological topic," said Howard Frumkin, a University of Washington emeritus professor of environmental science. "We know that across the country in red states and blue states, in red counties and blue counties, people love the nation's natural heritage."

The study is intended to measure how America's land, water and wildlife are faring, how they are expected to change, and what that means for people. There has never before been such a comprehensive evaluation on the state of nature within our borders.

Some authors have known for a long time that we are headed in the wrong direction in our management of nature. Almost half a century ago, Herman Daly wrote that "The economy is a wholly owned subsidiary of the environment, not the reverse." Daly also noted that "There is something fundamentally wrong in treating the Earth as if it were a business in liquidation."

Given that Trump's economic expertise is embarrassingly limited to declaring bank-

purpose of politics and its primary producers.

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ruptcy, it's no surprise that he wants to squelch the truth about our selling off the Earth for parts.

That theme is echoed now in a chapter of the new report. Dr. Rajat Panwar, a professor of responsible and sustainable business at Oregon State University said, "The dependence of the economy on nature is understated and understudied and underappreciated."

Gratitude has become a rare trait in our attitude toward nature. It has become the vogue to express our good fortune to have our health, our friends and family, but where is the gratitude for the Earth which has provided us with every cell in our bodies? Not to mention every cell in our cell phones, which we're far more focused on than taking a walk in the woods.

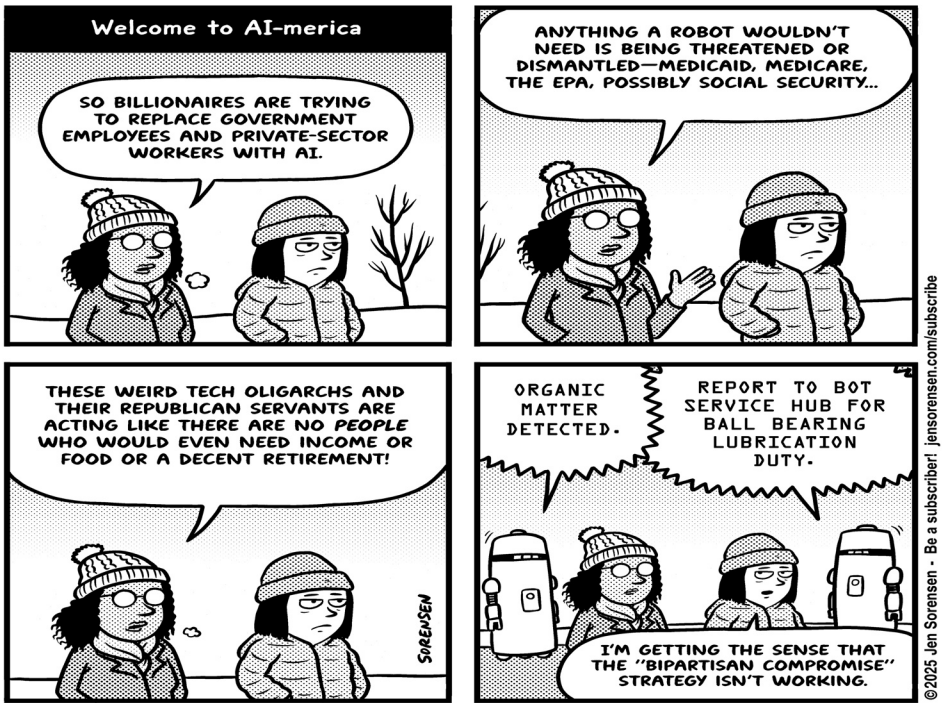
Of course, these problems aren't limited to the United States. Worldwide biodiversity, the variety of life on Earth, is declining faster than at any time in human history, according to a monumental United Nations study back in 2019. The National Nature Assessment is intended to provide a much more thorough update on the state of nature in the U.S.

Danielle Ignace, an associate professor of forest resources at the University of Minnesota, is a lead author on the chapter of drivers of change in nature. She said her team felt the importance of the work more strongly than ever.

"It's a calling to this cause to see this through," said Dr. Ignace. "We're not going to stop."

So it looks like the National Nature Assessment will be published with public access somehow without the auspices of government sponsorship, as originally intended. The question is, will we take heed from its warnings about the dangers of extending our extractive economy, or will we make use of already available sustainable solutions that can both protect the planet and preserve our prosperity?

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## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

# Racism and Hatred On the Loose

We are living in darkly historic times and it is no exaggeration to say that the evil forces of racism and hatred have been unleashed in a calculated, premeditated and predatory fashion. And these forces masquerade under the illusion that their intent is to make “America great” — implying that the nation has lost its purity and essence by catering to minorities, the LGBTQ community, and those dirty and wily foreigners. The prerequisite for a successful fascist state is establishing the other — the enemy — the “out group” — a readily identifiable segment of the population that can be ostracized, ridiculed and systematically targeted. This wholesale assault on human decency is happening right before our eyes with legislation and presidential directives that echo some of the world’s darkest times, such as the ascension of Adolf Hitler and the Third Reich. Long-established programs that support diversity, equity and racial equality have been and are currently being gutted and destroyed. And this is happening on a daily basis — this part of a coordinated effort to re-establish the United States as a global White supremacist stronghold.

I am no conspiracy theorist, and am about as radical as Norman Rockwell’s sock drawer. However, American democracy is now on life support as we have elected a man who has catered to, legitimized, and opened the doors for the darkest and most dangerous elements of society. The only thing that can turn back this historic descent into fascism is the unrelenting grass roots activism of organized and committed Americans. This effort will take a level of commitment that is perhaps unrivaled in US history. However, the cost and effort and sacrifice to maintain a healthy and vibrant democracy that honors and safeguards all people pales when contrasted with the unspeakable alternative that Donald Trump is imposing on the citizens of the United States.

**JIM SAWYER**, *Edmonds, Wash.*

## Protecting Our Money

As W.C.Fields one said, “It’s time to take the bull by the horns and face the situation.” Now that most of the dust has settled over the election, the pearl-clutching, bed-wetting and Monday-morning-quarterbacking closes around the conclusion that the election was lost due to 1) the price of groceries, and 2) the 40% approval rating (Meaning that 60% of the people are not likely to vote for you) of the President (and, by extension, the Vice President. In other words, Democrats didn’t do anything wrong. The campaign fell, as did the Carter campaign, to high prices, low president ratings and a problem in the Middle East that seemed intractable.

“Prices,” that is what it is about, Money, our money. Now the Republicans have taken off the velvet glove that has hidden their Iron Fist. They showed us who they were on inauguration day, the Billionaire Boys Club standing in front of everyone else on the platform. What do they want? They want more. Someone went around asking billionaires if the “had enough.” Their answers were telling. If they had \$10 billion, they thought \$15 billion. If they had \$30 billion, they thought \$45 billion would be sufficient. And so on. Fifty percent more, that’s what they want. And they have been getting more ever since Reagan dropped the highest marginal income tax rate from 70% on highest earners to 28% and stopped enforcing the antitrust laws.

Where the richest 1% used to take 12% of GDP (all of the money everybody earned) in 1980, by 2020 they were taking almost 20% of all money earned. Now they want more and they are coming after OUR money. Trump and

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

# Ramiswamy and the Myth of Moderation

By **DON ROLLINS**

Ohio’s status as the bellwether for presidential elections is long retired, but not the myth that it’s citizens go for “moderate” Republicans when choosing their governor. In reality, modern-era Republican candidates-cum-governors have thrown progressives a few campaign trail bones, then ignored having made any such promises once ensconced in Columbus.

This is a slick and proven strategy whereby Republican governors cast themselves as roundly fair public servants, meanwhile advancing conservative agendas at almost every turn. Consider some recent history, wherein allegedly moderate Republi-

cans:

- Indiscriminately scoured public assistance rolls, leaving hundreds of thousands Ohioans without feasible alternatives (George Voinovich, 1991-1998);
- Decimated under-resourced schools by imposing rigid, standardized testing known as universal “benchmarks for success” (Bob Taft, 1999-2007);
- Sought to gut multiple labor unions, and imposed “merit-based” systems for educators, social workers and key government employees (John Kasich, (2011-2019);
- Refused \$9B in no-strings-attached federal funding to assist Ohioans who maxed out their credit cards at the peak of the COVID pandemic (Mike DeWine, 2019-present).

Squarely in this line of Republican wolves in sheep’s clothing, DeWine will conclude his second and final term this fall. The short queue of GOP candidates set to

Musk are rummaging through the government, money-grubbing to show huge savings in order to justify an enormous tax cut for the rich and powerful. They propose to do this by defunding us and putting the rest on the national debt. They are coming after Our Money. Well, it’s time we go after theirs.

Democrats, it’s all about the money! In this age of increasing income and wealth equality we need a program which calls for:

- A 3% wealth tax on all fortunes over ... (fill in the blank)
  - Raise the top marginal tax rate back to 70%
  - Set a reasonable minimum wage.
  - Take the cap off of Social Security.
  - Restore historical inheritance tax rates
  - Cap individual inheritance to one billion dollars per individual
  - Repeal Citizens United so that every dollar that ends up in a politicians pocket has an individual donor’ name on it.
- Add to this list and “flood the zone” with messaging such as this. They either get our money or we get them paying their fair share.

**KEN ARMSTRONG**, *Campbell, Ga.*

## The Trump Takeover

If Sinclair Lewis were alive today, its easy to believe that the title of his book, “It Can’t Happen Here,” would change to “It Has Happened Here”: If this isn’t a dictatorship, it sure walks and talks like one. That term is used intentionally, because it describes the current “cult of personality” style of authoritarianism; after the demise of Trump, no spring chicken, we can talk about oligarchy, plutocracy, or even, God help us, a Trump dynasty.

Quoting the historian Enzo Collotti, “On 24 March 1933, with only the Social Democratic representatives still present to oppose the motion, the Reichstag voted for its own political suicide by handing over full powers to Hitler.” (i.e., the Enabling Act) Combined with the earlier Supreme Court ruling to grant Trump presidential immunity for virtually anything he does while in office, the Republican Senate’s mindless approval of all the Trump nominees for Cabinet posts is a giant goose-step in the same direction. What a rogue’s gallery is now in place! The kind of people you might expect a convicted criminal to choose: poorly qualified ideologues determined, like their boss, not to guide the ship of state around an iceberg, but to crash directly into it for blocking the way. As others have noted, the only credentials that matter to Trump are unquestioned fealty and obedience; a willingness to cross legal and ethical lines as required; being filthy rich helps, too — witness Elon Musk, shadow President. How screwed we are.

Too early to impeach Trump, for the third time? Mere weeks into his Presidency, he’s already violated his oath of office to “faithfully execute the Office of President of the United States, and will to the best of my ability, preserve, protect and defend the Constitution of the United States,” in both letter and spirit, in ways that should be obvious to anyone with a pulse (and a brain). Political reality means that a new impeachment effort is doomed from the start, at present, but it’s arguably necessary for the Democrats to make such a demonstration of resistance before it’s too late; to educate the uniformed about what is really happening to their country. Forget bipartisanship: The Democratic Party is the opposition party and needs to oppose in a loud, vigorous way to give concerned citizens something to rally around.

The Americans who participated in World War II to preserve democracy, among other things, are often referred to as the Greatest Generation: what is posterity going to call our own, who allowed such a disreputable, unscrupulous lunatic to ascend to the Presidency and proceed to end our democracy, imperfect as it is?

**MICHAEL McCARTY**, *Nashua, NH*

## Waste of Tax Money at the White House

President Trump has signed many executive orders this past month to allegedly eliminate fraud, waste and abuse in the Federal government. He appears to have appointed Elon Musk to head this project. He also appears to

be seriously considering ripping up the grass in the White House Rose Garden and paving over it to create something similar to his patio in Mar-a-Lago. I believe the Mar-a-Lago project would be a most blatant unnecessary waste of taxpayer dollars.

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

## Aye on the Ball

Thank you for Wayne O’Leary’s excellent column “Billionaire’s Ball” [2/15/25 *TPP*] on Donald’s coterie of billionaires and their retrograde agenda for the non-billionaires among us. You can’t fit every nuance into a limited space and I would like to add that their obscene and socially destructive wealth (How many hospitals, medical research facilities, schools, and decent affordable homes can Elon Musk’s \$450 billion build?) flows from the labor, intelligence, skill, self discipline, honesty, decency, willingness to work together, social spirit, and sense of community of the rest of us. And especially in the case of tech billionaires from the legacy of centuries of collectively supported public education and research.

Most of these billionaire guys and ladies don’t know the first thing about how to make what they sell. Capitalist property relations and laws have allowed them to appropriate what only the collective can produce. And the collective draws its strength, even its very existence, from the dignity, belief in mutual support and co-operative spirit of the great majority. A society made up of Donald Trumps and Elon Musks wouldn’t last a week. A nest of vampires, by definition, can’t survive.

Thank you,  
**ED BELLER**, *The Bronx, N.Y.*

## Trump’s Task Force to Protect Christians

Donald Trump is creating a task force to eradicate anti-Christian bias in government. The first order of business of this task force should be to defend and protect Right Reverend Mariann Budde, the Episcopal Bishop of the Diocese of Washington, D.C. Consistent with a Christian precept that she and millions of Christians affirm, she publicly called on Trump to “have mercy upon the people in our country who are scared now.”

For this widely accepted interpretation of the teachings of Jesus, she has been viciously attacked. She is a “mental rapist” and an “instrument of the devil.” One critic claimed that there was a “special place in hell” for her. Trump himself labeled her “nasty,” one of his favorite terms of derision directed to women. Speaker of the House of Representatives Michael Johnson called her message of mercy “shameful.” A Congressman claimed that she should be deported. The House is considering a resolution to condemn her heartfelt Christian message. We’ve clearly reached a sad state when elected officials denounce a call for mercy from a religious leader.

Many of Budde’s most ferocious critics purport to be “Christian.” The task force should certainly target a serious threat to Christianity: the rigid intolerance of those who wield their religion as a cudgel to impose conformity, stifle dissent, and promote hatred.

**ROBIN BLAKE**, *Columbia, Mo.*



would be read as weakness, even infidelity.

Pundits here in the Buckeye State predict that with Trump’s almost certain endorsement, Ramaswamy will handily take the GOP nomination. And the early money has Ramaswamy winning the general election by at least 12 points no matter the Democratic opponent. If so, the statehouse is his for the taking.

To date, Ohio’s recently serving Republican governors have at least applied a patina of reserve when advancing otherwise conservative ends. It’s not that every policy enacted, or every position taken was without merit; it’s just that they sooner or later, they returned to being Republicans.

This time, their candidate can just skip all that.

*Don Rollins is a retired Unitarian Universalist minister in Jackson, Ohio.  
Email [donaldrollins@gmail.com](mailto:donaldrollins@gmail.com).*



RURAL ROUTES/ *Margot Ford McMillen*

Don't Stay Down. Stand Up and Win!

The latest polls show that spirit among the Democrats is at an all-time low. "Demoralized," "despondent," "exhausted" are some of the words the media is using to describe the Ds. When I ask a progressive friend how things are going, I'm likely to hear they're depressed. Folks are mourning the loss of democracy, even if they have never really participated in democracy. Maybe they voted but they've never written a letter, attended a lobby day, marched in a protest. And, never having tried, it's easy to assume it doesn't work.

Can we continue our citizen activism? Of course. When we know what we believe in, it's easy to continue the fight. And, don't forget ... we've been here before, and even worse. As one that cut her activism teeth in the Vietnam era, I remember when government behaved more badly. The draft. The lies that said we were beating the Vietcong. The dearth of women in government (or anywhere else but the home). We marched, we sang, we wrote letters, we created "underground" newspapers.



When we know what we believe in, it's easy to continue the fight. And don't forget, we've been here before ... in the Vietnam era, we stopped a war.

And I remember exactly where I was and what I was doing the day I heard the radio say that the U.S. was pulling out of Vietnam. I actually pinched myself. "We won ..." I said to my empty house, "we stopped a war." At the time, it felt like we could go forward with anything and win.

But, today, depression and loneliness have become a way of life, especially among Ds. Pundits are kicking themselves for not reading the Project 25 manifesto, which is easy to find on-line. As I've said before in this column, you don't have to read the whole thing. Just look for the parts that interest you—education, media, agriculture, whatever. But instead of getting informed there's some kind of mass hypnosis preventing us.

OK. The other side won. What we aren't daring to say is that with some of the principles of their agenda ... we agree! We agree that government is wasteful. We hate the deficit. We hate that our military stum-

bles in to wars almost whimsically. And stumbles out again. According to a House Budget Committee, in Afghanistan, the Department of Defense "confirmed that over \$7 billion worth of military equipment remained in the Taliban's possession ..."

But even when we agree with their goals, we hate the way they do things. We hate mass firings. We want the rich, with money in the stock exchange, to pay their fair share of taxes. We grasp at labels—oligarchy, plutocracy, fascism. All of them fit, a little bit. Words have lost meaning anyway in the mouths of compulsive liars. We blame Elon, who actually seems to bore POTUS even when he brings his cute little four-year-old to the office.

The kid, by the way, called "X," is just another distraction as Musk taps the government coffers for himself. According to ABC News, "Federal contracts to SpaceX doubled at the beginning of the Biden administration, going from \$1.1 billion in the 2020 fiscal year to \$2.2 billion in the 2021 fiscal year. The contracts continued to grow under Joe Biden, reaching \$3.7 billion during the 2024 fiscal year." From the government to Wall Street.

With E and X in the room, POTUS is mostly there to sign papers. "You've got the ideas," he seems to tell the camera, "But I've got the Sharpee." They are like the guys in the bar down the street, bullying, trying to outdo. What name will they change next? Gulf of Mexico. Gulf of America. Gulf of Covfefe. Why not? If they would only do things in a more—what's the word? —sensi-

tive? Legitimate? Small d-democratic? way. We agree that the deficit is too high and still growing. But we don't think mass firings are how to fix it. We agree that American corporations should do business here and build our workforce but we don't think tariffs are the way to go. We agree that the health system is a mess but the next pandemic, with a financially-stressed CDC, withdrawal from international agencies and denunciation of vaccines won't make America healthy.

Which brings us to the food system, my particular hot-button. Living on the cusp of row-crop land and rolling pasture, I know who gets the big subsidies. If you wonder who the winners in your state are, check out EWG.org. You'll find that commodity farmers, growing corn and beans for ethanol plants, biodiesel facilities, industrial animal factories, also called Concentrated Animal Feeding Operations or CAFOs, are reaping the benefits of USDA largesse. And where do the profits for all these handouts end up? Not in rural America but on Wall Street.

It's time, dear ones, to get busy. Write your lawmakers, join a march, sing a protest song. Don't complain that democracy is dead. Find its tools and win!

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

DISPATCHES

ONE MONTH INTO TRUMP'S SECOND TERM, MANY FEEL BUYER'S REMORSE.

One month into Donald Trump's second term, as he goes about remaking the presidency, the nation and even the nature of American democracy, those dealing with his efforts must be both marathon runners and sprinters simultaneously, planning for both a long race and the immediate effects of a White House pursuing radical, fast and potentially dangerous changes, Steve Benen noted at Maddowblog (2/20).

"There's little point in trying to present a comprehensive chronicle of the past month; it would be far too long for a single blog post. That said, the developments are likely familiar to Americans who keep up on current events. The scandalous pardons. The hostility toward the rule of law. The corruption. The power grabs. The incompetence. The damaging policies and personnel. The international incidents. The revenge tour. The callousness. The billionaires. The rapid dismantling of the federal government. The pettiness, the trivialities, the finger-pointing and the overt references to an authoritarian vision for the nation's future.

"As we pause at the one-month mark to take stock, the question isn't whether Trump is engaging in maximalist radicalism. The question is whether it's working.

"As a policy matter, it will take time before a reliable answer comes into focus. After one month, for example, the public does not yet know how much of the White House's agenda, if any, will pass legal muster in the courts, or what the practical effects of the administration's goals will be.

"But as a political matter, Americans wondering whether they're the only ones recoiling in fear and disgust from the events of the last month, desperate to know whether there are voters feeling buyer's remorse, can take some solace in the latest evidence."

The *Wall Street Journal* published a report Feb. 17 on a variety of Trump voters who watched recent events and are left with feelings of regret.

"When we said safer borders, I thought he was thinking 'Let's stop the drugs from coming into the country,'" [a Trump voter in Nebraska] said. "I didn't know he was going to start raiding places." She said she didn't believe he would actually follow through on some of the more hard-line policies he touted during the campaign. "Now I'm like: 'Dang, why didn't I just pick Kamala?'" said the 49-year-old Omaha, Neb., resident, referring to the former vice president and last-minute Democratic nominee.

The same report quoted a Trump voter in Minnesota who said she considers her support for the president as the "biggest mistake of my life."

She is horrified by Trump's focus on deportations and use of Guantanamo Bay to hold migrants. She alleged that Trump has been too focused on "ridiculous" flashy moves, such as banning paper straws and renaming the Gulf of Mexico the "Gulf of America." Her daughter's occupational therapist has stopped taking new patients over fears that the practice will have its federal funding dry up.

The voter added, "I feel so stupid, guilty, regretful — embarrassed is a huge one. I am absolutely embarrassed that I voted for Trump."

"Obviously, it's best not to draw sweeping conclusions from anecdotal evidence, but there's plenty of quantifiable evidence to consider, too," Benen noted.

The latest national poll from the Pew Research Center found Trump "underwater," with 47% approving of the president and 51% disapproving.

- The latest national poll from Quinnipiac University pointed in a similar direction: 45% approve, 49% disapprove.
- The latest national poll from Gallup also pointed in a similar direction: 45% approve, 51% disapprove. The report on the results added, "Trump's job approval rating is 15 points below the historical average for all other elected presidents in mid-February since 1953."

- The latest national *Washington Post-Ipsos* poll also pointed in a similar direction: 43% approve, 48% disapprove.
- The latest national poll from CNN also pointed in a similar direction: 47% approve, 52% disapprove.
- The latest national Reuters/Ipsos poll also pointed in a similar direction: 44% approve, 51% disapprove.

"To be sure, an approval rating in the mid-40s is not terrible, especially for a president who, in three tries, never received 50% of the vote," Benen wrote. "What's more, given that the Republican can't seek a third term, Trump might very well not care whether he enjoys public support or not. ...

"But there's also something to be said for the public consciousness. Many have likely watched the last month and felt a combination of dread and horror. For them, I have news one month into the new Trump era: This president, more than any of his modern predecessors, has more national opponents than supporters, and given the recent trajectories, his support isn't likely to recover any time soon."

TRUMP FIRES JOINT CHIEFS CHAIR, NAVAL CHIEF AND JAG CHIEFS IN DEFENSE SHAKEUP.

President Trump abruptly fired Air Force Gen. Charles Q. Brown as chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, sidelining a history-making fighter pilot and respected officer as part of a campaign to rid the military of leaders who support diversity and equity in the ranks, CBS News reported (2/21).

The ouster of Brown, only the second Black general to serve as chairman, sent shock waves through the Pentagon. His 16 months on the job were consumed with the war in Ukraine and the expanded conflict in the Middle East.

Trump said he is nominating retired Air Force Lt. Gen. Dan "Razin" Caine to be the next chairman.

Caine was sworn in as associate director for Military Affairs at the Central Intelligence Agency in November 2021, according to his biography on the Air Force's website, and his most recent post was as director of special programs for the Defense Department's Special Access Program Central Office at the Pentagon. As a command pilot, he has logged more than 2,800 hours in an F-16, including more than 150 combat hours.

Caine is a three-star general. Traditionally, four-star generals are nominated to chair the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth said Caine "embodies the warfighter ethos and is exactly the leader we need to meet the moment. I look forward to working with him."

Hegseth also announced that Chief of Naval Operations Lisa Franchetti and Vice Chief of Staff of the Air Force James Slife were also being fired. Admiral James W. Kilby, Vice Chief of Naval Operations, was appointed Acting Chief of Naval Operations.

Franchetti made history in 2023 when she became the first woman to lead the Navy.

Judge advocates general for the Army, Navy and Air Force were also being replaced, Hegseth said. A source familiar with the matter told CBS News Lt. Gen. Jennifer Short, who was the senior military assistant to the defense secretary, was also let go from her position over the weekend.

PATEL TAPS FAR-RIGHT MISINFO PEDDLER DAN BONGINO FOR DEPUTY FBI DIRECTOR.

In a move cheered by the MAGA faithful but derided by critics, FBI Director Kash Patel picked Dan Bongino—a former New York City police officer and Secret Service agent turned Fox News and podcast host known for spreading right-wing conspiracy theories—as the agency's deputy director, Brett Wilkins noted at Common Dreams (2/24).

In what he called "great news for Law Enforcement and American Justice," President Trump took to his Truth Social site to announce Patel's selection of Bongino for the number two FBI post.

On Feb. 24, Bongino said: "My career has always been about service. I'm here to work. I'm here to lead. And I'm here to ensure that America's law enforcement institutions uphold

*Continued on page 22*

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NEWS EDITORIAL COLUMNISTS RURAL ROUTES DISPATCHES E-EDITION HEALTH CARE HYPOCRISY WATCH SATIRE

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# FROMA HARROP



Farm country provided Trump with some of his most fervent support. Farmers are now being tossed aside by Trump's policies, such as trade war.

## Trump Clearly Prefers Billionaires to His Base

Will the MAGA base ever figure out they've been played?

Farm country provided Donald Trump with some of his most fervent support. Farmers are now being tossed aside by Trump policies, none of which he seems interested in dialing back.

A trade war would be disastrous. Farm

products are a major U.S. export. Last year, the U.S. exported more than \$30 billion in farm products to Mexico, \$29 billion to Canada and \$25 billion to China.

When a country slaps big tariffs on products from another country, that country can be expected to hit back with its own punishing tariffs. Trump's insults also add focus to the revenge: Offended nations are targeting products coming from Trump country.

American farmers rightly worry that a trade war would incentivize other countries to find more reliable suppliers of corn, wheat and whatever else they grow. As a soybean grower in Iowa told the *Financial Times*, "Farmers understand that trading relationships go up on a stairway, where you work hard to build them up, but go down on an elevator — very, very fast."

Trump's mania for tariffs was no secret during the campaign, nor were his deportation plans that are going to ravage rural workforces. What were U.S. farmers thinking when they voted for Trump? That he really loved them?

Trump is working on a plan to take away added funding from the Internal Revenue Service and use it for securing the southern border — as if the U.S. can't afford two important government functions at the

same time. If anything, weakening the IRS's ability to collect taxes owed would deprive government of the money that could be used to defend the border.

Eroding the IRS's ability to enforce the tax laws is a gift to rich tax cheats. They have all sorts of tricks to hide income. The working stiff's do not. Their taxes get taken right out of their paychecks.

Medicaid buys health care for Americans who typically make less than \$50,000. These low earners gave most of their votes to Trump. Republicans are now circling Medicaid as a fat target for spending cuts.

Their Project 2025 blueprint clearly states, "The dramatic increase in Medicaid expenditures is due in large part to the ACA (Obamacare), which mandates that states must expand their Medicaid eligibility standards."

During the campaign, Trump insisted he was "not running to terminate" the Affordable Care Act. But that wouldn't preclude stripping it of so many benefits and slashing so many beneficiaries that a walking corpse would be all that's left. And Trump will call it Obamacare.

Trump has named the mastermind behind Project 2025, Russell Vought, his budget director. In addition to Medicaid, Vought has it in for Head Start, veterans

benefits and medical research.

Republicans vow not to touch a hair on Medicare, which covers the elderly, but that too is not entirely off the table. "In essence, our deficit problem is a Medicare and Medicaid problem," Project 2025 laments. It calls these programs "runaway entitlements."

The Department of Health and Human Services is home to both Medicare and Medicaid. How do you all feel about the crackpot Bobby Kennedy Jr. being put in charge?

Don't expect Republicans in Washington to publicly oppose Trump, even at the expense of their voters' health care. But some are quietly worried.

"If you cut Medicaid, you're, like, pissing off the people who put you in office — who Trump resonates with, right?" one House Republican (who did not share his name) told the *Wall Street Journal*.

But it's pretty naive to think that Trump cares about the people who put him in office. All he wanted was their votes. He got them.

Now scoot.

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

## We Are Stooges for a Bamboozler

By ART CULLEN

Donald Trump pledged repeatedly that he would lower food costs on Day One — Jan. 20. Instead, egg prices shot up 15% last month. Since Trump was sworn in as president, Waffle House added an egg surcharge. Some grocery stores are rationing eggs. The Easter Bunny is bummed.

When will Trump make good on his promise?

"I don't have a timeline on that," his press secretary said.

"Rome wasn't built in a day," Vice President JD Vance said.

"It's very hard," Trump admitted.

Now they tell us. Another case of bird flu hit a Buena Vista County turkey barn last week. You might have to take out a second mortgage for a club sandwich.

RFK2 is large and in charge. Avian flu continues to spread unchecked. Veterinarians are coming down with it now. Kennedy might know a way to goose a hen to lay more eggs faster, perhaps through acupuncture. Vaccinating layers, broilers, turkeys or dairies appears to be verboten. The vaccine

exists, and in fact was developed in Ames, and deploying it would benefit Iowa, but it ain't gonna happen because the big meat players don't want the extra burden.

Trump promised. He said he keeps his promises. Prices keep rising. It was all, to use a polite term, bogus. A substantial majority of local voters swallowed it whole.

Trump could no more control egg prices than he could end the attack on Ukraine on Day One, as he said he would.

Is he lying? Are his lips moving? Yes. Are we stupid? Well ...

He threatened 25% tariffs on Mexico and Canada until someone explained to him that it would tank the economy. So he paused those tariffs for 30 days. He has since ordered a 10% tariff on all imports. Sen. Chuck Grassley begged him to exempt potash — the K in NPK vital to corn fertilization. Ninety percent of it comes from Canada, which is not yet our 51st state. Trump responded: No exceptions, now go get back to your plow.

Trump has frozen \$10 million in conservation payments to Iowa farmers. Grassley said he is not worried. Why would he be, when his salary is \$174,000 and the perks are endless? Better than working in a chicken barn. Everything is on the butcher block, except payments to Elon Musk, so you should not bank on getting paid.

Trump said he would beat food costs

on Day One. No modifiers or caveats. Done deal.

Okay, so Trump lies. And we are suckers. At least he isn't a lib.

The fact is that we have been ignoring avian flu since the first big outbreak hit BV County in 2015. Research funding was frozen in the Grand Bargain between House Speaker John Boehner and President Barack Obama.

We have been publishing editorials about it for a decade and nobody listened.

Mind you, research also was stunted all those years into various swine diseases that can jump to humans like meningitis or ebola, and we live in Swine Central. So it is not Trump's fault. It is the voter's fault for believing that he would do a damn thing about it.

The Trump Administration is trying to cut funds for the National Institutes of Health to eliminate overhead in medical research grants at places like the University of Iowa Hospitals and Clinics — \$33 million gone from Iowa City. UIHC employs 4,200 people. They are the overhead. Who will answer the phone at the Holden Cancer Center for your question about whether you may continue your clinical trial? Kim Reynolds? No, she says she wants to gut services, too, in order to Make America Healthy Again. By reducing Medicaid benefits to the elderly, for example, such that the nursing home at

Newell or Albert City shuts down. The residents should get a job. They will need one after Musk gets his hands on Social Security.

Okay, so Trump backpedaled off his pledge to Whip Inflation Now in December, after he won the election, by saying it would be difficult to cut food costs. The good news is that no queers will play girls basketball. He made good on that. I was sweating that one.

His new and improved EPA seeks to immunize chemical companies from lawsuits over chemicals — and so is the Iowa Legislature. The Meat Institute has moved to throw off restrictions on line speeds with less inspection, and probably will get its way. That should make your bacon fry.

It's hard to admit when you have been bamboozled. To distract, he renamed the Gulf of Mexico and barred the Associated Press from the White House, and Iowa is okay with it. Except for the tariff on potash, of course. We Iowans are a bunch of stooges. We got so used to bending over and taking it that we think it feels good.

*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.*

## We're About to Find Out

By ALAN GUEBERT

During the final stages of building the world's first atomic bomb, scientists at the secret New Mexico research site worried that the initial test of their new weapon might ignite the atmosphere and wipe out every living thing.

The project's anxious physicists, however, considered it "extremely unlikely and ultimately downplayed the possibility as a realistic threat" but "not an unreasonable concern."

Farmers, ranchers, and rural communities are experiencing similar anxieties as the White House and Congressional Republicans rev up their efforts to slash federal spending. Unlike the nuclear pioneers, however, neither GOP group has produced quantifiable numbers to support their views.

Moreover, any voter with an internet connection can quickly disprove key claims the budgeteers are using to underwrite their claims.

For example, in the attention-grabbing Jan. 27 White House directive labeled "Temporary Pause of Agency Grant, Loan, and other Financial Assistance Programs," the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) predicated its spending cuts on this hardworking phrase: "In the Fiscal Year

2024, of the nearly \$10 trillion that the Federal Government spent..."

There's a problem with that case-building opener; it's simply not true. Indeed, "according to the June 2024 estimate by the Congressional Budget Office. 'In fiscal 2024, the federal government spent \$6.9 trillion..."

So 2024 spending by the federal government—as reported by the federal government—was about 30% smaller than what the Administration's current budget office used to justify its government-wide spending "pause."

What happens when deep spending cuts and future government budgets are based on numbers that are at least 30% out of line with reality? We're about to find out.

In the meantime, mandated federal spending cuts are coming to rural America with or without the White House working with honest numbers. For example, the University of Illinois (UI) recently reported its College of Agriculture, Consumer and Environmental Sciences received "\$61 million in direct federal funding last year."

How does folding up federal programs at a Land Grant university's ag teaching and research umbrella affect that state's farmers and rural communities? We'll soon know.

Caught in the Washington, D.C. crossfire is the university's Soybean Innovation Lab that receives vital funding from the U.S. Agency for International Development, or

USAID. That agency was one of the first targets for deep cuts and dramatic overhaul by the Trump White House team.

After USAID's mid-February gutting, "Peter Goldsmith, the executive director" of the Illinois soybean research facility, "announced the lab will shut down in April as [USAID] terminated its funding ... Thirty soybean experts working in the local lab were let go last Friday [Feb. 14]."

What happens to those experts and their work—described as "one of U.S. farmers' best tools to expand their markets ... globally" — when it is dismantled without thought, understanding or appeal?

The United States' more than 500,000 soybean growers in nearly 30 states are about to find out.

And what about trade dependent American farmers; how will the recently advanced Trump trade policy of "reciprocity" — essentially a country-by-country, eye-for-an-eye mashup of arcane, trade-killing rules — reverse U.S. ag's fast growing trade deficit?

Even more worrisome, can the pared back and still-being pared USDA handle today's fast-moving avian flu outbreak before the disease discovers a pathway to a COVID-like pandemic as the White House continues to cut, freeze or eliminate funding and jobs at USDA testing facilities and National Institutes of Health research programs?

And what impact will Robert F. Kennedy, Jr., the Trump Administration's newly approved secretary of health and human services, have in upcoming food debates as the boss over the Food and Drug Administration?

No one knows but we're about to find out.

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

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# How JD Vance Betrayed Our Values in Munich

By JOE CONASON

Few Americans would welcome an elected leader from Germany or France who gave a speech on our soil, urging politicians here to stop shunning the Ku Klux Klan. Yet that isn’t so far from the message delivered to European officials by Vice President JD Vance at the Munich Security Conference on Feb. 14 — which understandably provoked outrage among our allies, just as Vance and his boss, President Donald Trump, must have intended.

Instead of addressing Europe’s security concerns, such as Trump’s impending abandonment of Ukraine to Russian aggression, Vance lectured his audience on domestic issues such as “free speech,” immigration and the rejection of ultra-right extremism.

Nobody familiar with Vance, a man known for spreading false stories about migrants eating pets in his home state, could have been surprised to learn that he uttered numerous falsehoods in Munich. In warning against infringements on religious speech, for instance, he claimed that Scotland had intimidated its citizens from privately praying in their own homes. Scottish officials instantly rebutted that absurd lie, which referred to a carefully drafted law creating small “buffer zones” for protesters at abortion clinics.

But the thrust of Vance’s remarks represented a brazen attempt to interfere in the German national elections that occurred Feb. 23, signaling Trump administration support for the far-right Alternative for Germany, or AfD, party.

“Democracy rests on the sacred principle that the voice of the people matters,” Vance intoned. “There’s no room for firewalls. You either uphold the principle or you don’t.” Al-

though he didn’t mention the AfD by name, his inference couldn’t have been clearer. Every mainstream political party in Germany has quarantined that party’s antisemites and Nazi apologists behind a political firewall for decades, symbolizing their nation’s commitment to prevent any resurgence of fascism before it can occur.

And immediately after his appearance, greeted with stony silence from the Munich conference delegates, Vance met with AfD leader Alice Weidel. A banker who has defended her party’s worst racists and bigots, while pretending that the Nazi dictator Adolf Hitler was “a communist,” Weidel then praised Vance’s speech as “excellent.”

The comparison between the KKK and the AfD is all too appropriate, and not only because the German party echoes the racist rhetoric of thugs in white hoods. Back when Nazi spies in this country spent millions to subvert the United States during the years before World War II, their “German American Bund” forged a secret alliance with the Klan. It was a time when many American politicians, especially in the South, openly described the KKK as a legitimate expression of “the voice of the people.” No doubt Vance would have been among them.

Today, the AfD members elected to public office in Germany don’t hesitate to exploit anti-immigrant hatred and racial bigotry against both Muslims and Jews. No less an authority than the U.S. State Department — during the first Trump administration — repeatedly reprimanded the vile racism of AfD figures in its annual reports on human rights in Germany.

“While senior government leaders continued to condemn anti-Semitism and anti-Muslim sentiment,” the State Department noted in 2018, “some members of the federal parliament and state assemblies from the Alternative for Germany (AfD) Party again made anti-Semitic and anti-Muslim statements.”

So typical were the poisonous outbursts from AfD offi-

cials that they drew the attention of the Anti-Defamation League in the United States, which has described the party as a “radicalized” entity “whose leaders have made antisemitic, anti-Muslim and anti-democratic” statements.

The European leaders offended by Vance reiterated their determination to defend their continent against totalitarians of all varieties — as did Chancellor Olaf Scholz, whose rebuke reminded everyone why most Germans will have nothing to do with the AfD. “Never again fascism, never again racism, never again aggressive war,” he said. “That is why an overwhelming majority in our country opposes anyone who glorifies or justifies criminal National Socialism.”

Glorifying Nazism doesn’t seem to trouble Vance, Trump or their designated hitman Elon Musk, who has publicly endorsed an AfD victory as “the only hope for Germany.” But Vance’s interference in German politics is more than a token of the Trump administration’s fascist inclinations, as if any more were needed.

Like Trump’s urge to back Russian aggression against Ukraine in his “peace” initiative, the White House embrace of German fascists again shows the American president promoting the interests of a foreign power hostile to the United States and the West. What Vance said and did enraged our longtime allies in Europe, but his words aligned perfectly with Russian President Vladimir Putin’s Kremlin — whose assistance to German fascism defiles the sacrifice of all the Russians and Americans who died to defeat Hitler.

*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.*

## America Can’t Afford Trump’s Mass Deportations

*For the cost of mass deportations, we could instead erase medical debt, provide universal school lunches, and end homelessness.*

By ALLIYAH LUSUEGRO

President Trump has made it clear that he’s dead set on attacking our immigrant friends, families, and neighbors — and that the only people he’ll protect are his loyalists and billionaires.

Since Day One, Trump has launched a blatantly hateful agenda against immigrants. He’s issued executive orders that would unlawfully shut down asylum at the U.S. southern border, use the military to separate families, and make it easier to detain and deport migrants — including detaining them at the notorious Guantanamo Bay prison.

Meanwhile, anti-immigrant lawmakers in Congress gave Trump a helping hand by pass-

ing a law punishing undocumented people, including minors, with deportation for minor offenses — even if they’re not convicted.

These attacks come at an enormous cost to the entire country. The American Immigration Council estimates that mass deportations will cost \$88 billion per year over the course of a decade.

My colleagues and I calculated that this \$88 billion could instead erase medical debt for 40 million Americans. Even just a fraction of it — \$11 billion — could provide free lunch to all school children in the United States.

There are already 40,000 people locked up in detention centers — and Trump’s detention expansion plan would triple that capacity. Republicans in the House and Senate are proposing plans of an eye-popping \$175 billion or more to detain and deport undocumented people.

That’s enough to fund affordable housing for every unhoused person and household facing eviction in this country for several years — with about enough left over to make sure uninsured people with opioid use disorder can get treatment.

Nor are these the only costs. Undocumented people contributed \$96.7 billion in federal, state, and local taxes in 2022 — just one tax year, according to the Institute on Taxation and Economic Policy. That’s nearly

\$100 billion in lost revenue a year that everyone else would end up having to cover.

But these attacks aren’t going unopposed. People are showing up for their immigrant neighbors and loved ones, making clear they simply won’t accept the nightmare of mass deportations and detentions.

The groups United We Dream, CASA, Make the Road States, and Action Lab recently pledged to build “a strong and sustainable movement to defend ourselves and our neighbors.” With their #Communities-NotCages campaign, Detention Watch Network is working with local communities to protest ICE actions and shut down detention centers.

And the list goes on. On Feb. 1, thousands of people blocked a highway in Los Angeles to protest against ICE raids. Just two days later, many gathered in solidarity for a Day Without Immigrants. On this day, students stayed home from school, employees didn’t show up to work, and over 250 businesses closed nationwide to show how important immigrants are to everyone’s day-to-day lives.

Others are using lawsuits to fight back. Five pregnant women, with the help of immigrant rights groups, sued the Trump administration’s attempt to end birthright citizenship. Agreeing with the mothers, three

federal judges just blocked this unconstitutional order.

Meanwhile, the American Civil Liberties Union and other major legal organizations sued the administration for seeking to shut down asylum at the border — on the grounds that it’s a violation of long-time international and domestic law.

Finally, my fellow immigrants and I are also standing our ground. We’re stating the facts: Immigration is good for our country, our economy, and our culture — something 68 percent of Americans agree with. And we’re here to stay.

Immigrants are essential to this country. We bring opportunity and possibility to the United States. And not only do we contribute as students and professionals, business owners, and essential workers — we’re also human beings trying to live good and successful lives like anyone else. We’re a part of the American story.

Now and more than ever, we’ll continue to show up for each other — and we hope you will, too. Our lives and families depend on it.

*Alliyah Lusuegro is the Outreach Coordinator for the National Priorities Project at the Institute for Policy Studies. This op-ed was distributed by OtherWords.org.*

## Dumb Governing By Street-Corner Man

By JOHN YOUNG

Back when I ran a small-town paper, for a short time we had a feature popular in the era, the “man on the street” interview.

Beside six pictures of locals, mouths agape, we’d have their takes — with very few words, and even less insight — on an issue of the day.

Once as I made my “man on the street” assignment, a reporter reacted with, “You mean ‘ignoramus on the street?’”

Every day under the new administration in the nation’s capital is that.

Sidewalk know-it-alls who have window-shopped their way around governing are doing the thing now, flipping switches and turning spigots.

It’s open house for crackpots and know-everythings, with unvetted job offers at the welcome table along with the pastries.

Elon Musk has brought a seasoned group of hungry gawkers.

Kash Patel, having converted podcasting stardom into an actual job, gets to run the FBI.

Why the heck not? Job 1: “Guard photocopier against wokeness.”

Former Fox Spews hair model Pete Hegseth, our new secretary of defense, will “restore lethality” to the military, or at least say that 30 times per minute, teeth gleaming.

Comes a cavalcade of MAGA ideologues, mega donors and favor-mongers who served a leader whose most recent occupation was full-time criminal defendant:

It’s Amateur Hour. “Government is the problem.” Brace for dumb policy that meets the motto.

As swaths of Los Angeles burned recently, jumping to any conclusion that would win him airtime on Fox before his inauguration, the greatest pretender of all made the unfounded case that a lack of water was to blame.

So, when he became president again, the Orange Flame ordered the release of billions of gallons of water from two key reservoirs under control of the Corps of Engineers.

Problem: those reservoirs are nowhere near where they might have helped. The releases ended up flooding fields at the worst possible time or flowing to the sea. Most seriously, they will deprive farms for which the water was being stored.

A Day 1 debate for a Day 1 dictator. Came Day 2. As if Musk’s Team DOGE

had any authority at all, it fired a whole bunch of people at the National Nuclear Security Station. It turned out that many of those pink-slipped were assigned to monitor our nukes. The Oops Patrol rescinded the order.

You see, guys, it’s one thing to push all the buttons on the elevator. It’s another to push all buttons connected to the nuclear arsenal.

“They’re pulling levers without knowing what’s at the other end.”

That quote comes from Jeremy Konyndyk, president of Refugees International and former high official in the U.S. Agency for International Development, where Musk first trained his fiscal shotgun blast.

Unlike the man on the street, Konyndyk knows what he’s talking about.

USAID is the most vital player in U.S. foreign aid, going where it’s needed the most. It addresses the toughest situations like starvation in war-torn Sudan and struggling-to-survive Ukraine.

Foreign aid, important to know, takes up less than 1% of federal spending, though Street-Corner Man is certain it’s the key reason for the nation’s deficit. Just ask him.

It’s all so clear-cut for people who don’t get governing anyway — whether it be public health, public schools, public libraries, national parks or diplomacy around the world.

President Blob’s shoot-first gesture in in-

ternational relations is a trade war that will cost American consumers immeasurably.

He lied over and over on the campaign trail that foreign competitors would pay for this. Nope. Tariffs are de facto sales taxes. And whom do sales taxes hurt most? Those people who have the least.

I’m not sure how any of the Big Guy’s enablers — er, advisers — didn’t point out the role tariffs played in the Great Depression. It was bigly.

One must wonder why, after he decided Mexico and Canada were sufficiently brow-beaten, he pulled back from threatened trade sanctions against them for now.

If tariffs are so good for us, why not just go full bore? Damn the concessions. Stick it to our neighbors.

These things hardly matter to those who know the least and are most tickled by culture-war gestures to “own the libs.”

To them, dark-skinned intruders are eating our pets. And drag queens are running our universities.

At least that’s the view from the ignoramus on the street.

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



## Cover Story...

Continued from page one

These small towns face the very real possibility of losing a significant chunk of their population as federal employees move away for new opportunities, or simply because they can't afford to live there without those jobs.

For communities at the edge of na-

tional parks and highly-trafficked wilderness areas, this summer could be a nightmare for them — and everyone else. Toilets won't be cleaned, trails will be overgrown, ranger stations and parks offices will be understaffed, and emergency services to rescue people from places like the bottom of the Grand Canyon will likely be slow. During the 2018 government shutdown, the parks saw vandalism and intentional damage to facilities;

former Park Service employees are warning that this could happen again.

Wildfire risk is another huge concern. A ProPublica investigation into the funding freezes on Forest Service spending (that have evolved into mass firings) found that wildland firefighter trainings have been postponed and fuel-reduction projects slowed, paving the way for what could be a highly flammable summer.

By cutting spending now, the Trump administration is setting itself up for a very expensive future if it has to put out fires, literally and figuratively, on public lands across the country.

*Claire Carlson is staff correspondent of The Daily Yonder, where this article was originally published in its email newsletter, Keep It Rural. See [DailyYonder.com](#).*

# Trump Vowed to Clean Up Washington, Then His Team Hired a Man Who Pushed a Scam the IRS Called the 'Worst of the Worst'

**Frank Schuler was a leading promoter of a tax deduction derided as a scam by prosecutors, senators and the IRS. Now he's a senior adviser to the General Services Administration, which manages the federal government's property.**

By PETER ELKIND, ProPublica

Even as he has vowed to eliminate “every dollar of waste, fraud, and abuse across the federal budget and operations,” the new acting administrator of the General Services Administration, Stephen Ehlkian, has appointed a senior adviser whose firm used to specialize in tax transactions that a bipartisan Senate committee excoriated and that the IRS branded as “abusive” and among “the worst of the worst tax scams.” The adviser has been battling the tax agency in court over \$4 billion in disallowed deductions for thousands of his clients.

The GSA, the federal agency responsible for managing the government's land and property, will now be taking advice from Frank Schuler IV, the 57-year-old co-founder and longtime president of Ornstein-Schuler, an Atlanta-based real estate investment company. Schuler's firm was for years among the most prolific promoters of tax-shelter deals known as “syndicated conservation easements.”

Schuler and his colleagues exploited a tax deduction that was created to reward landowners who give up development rights for their acreage, usually by donating those rights to a nonprofit land trust. When used as intended, conservation easements can preserve pristine land, sometimes as a park that the public can use, and reward the land donor with a charitable tax deduction.

But middlemen like Schuler's firm turned the tax provision into a highly profitable business, packaging easements into what were essentially outsized tax deductions

for purchase. After snatching up a cheap piece of vacant land, Schuler and others typically hired a private appraiser willing to declare that the property had huge untapped development value — that it was suited to become anything from a gravel mine to a luxury resort — and was worth many times its purchase price. They then sold stakes in the easement donation to rich individuals, who claimed wildly inflated tax deductions based on the appraisal, cutting their taxes by twice as much as they'd invested. ProPublica first began investigating the syndicated easement business, which has cost the government tens of billions in tax revenue, back in 2017.

The IRS, the Justice Department and Congress struggled for years, through public warnings, hundreds of audits, tax court cases and criminal prosecutions, to shut down the scheme. Those efforts were countered by \$11 million in lobbying expenditures from the promoters and the creation of a Washington-based trade group, called Partnership for Conservation, which Schuler founded. Syndication advocates pressed Congress to defund the IRS crackdown.

In 2020, the Senate Finance Committee released a bipartisan investigative report on the transactions. (Schuler was one of six people subpoenaed by the committee to provide information.) The report, which detailed Ornstein-Schuler's practices, described syndicated easements as a “dollar machine” for wealthy taxpayers, saving them two dollars in taxes for every dollar they put in, “with promoters pocketing millions of dollars in fees for organizing the deals.” The practice was finally curbed through legislation passed in late 2022, but it remains on the IRS' “Dirty Dozen” list of “bogus tax avoidance strategies.”

“This is someone who made his money by ripping off American taxpayers and who shouldn't come anywhere near a position of authority over tax dollars,” commented Sen. Ron Wyden, the Oregon Democrat who helped oversee the Senate investigation, in a written statement after being told about Schuler's appointment. “He'll fit right in with the Trump administration.”

Schuler's exact role in the government is unclear. A GSA staffer said that he was present on a recent 15-minute video “check-in” conducted by Nate Cavanaugh, a 28-year-old who ProPublica has identified as being part of Elon Musk's DOGE team. Cavanaugh introduced Schuler, who said little, as “my colleague Frank.”

Schuler's photo and contact information were also listed in early February in the agency's internal staff directory shortly after his profile disappeared from the Ornstein-Schuler website. But it's unknown whether he's a paid government employee or a vol-

unteer associated with Elon Musk's DOGE effort. Schuler and Matt Ornstein did not respond to calls, messages and emails seeking comment. The GSA and Ehlkian did not respond to emails sent to the agency's press office.

In the past, Schuler has described his tax transactions as legitimate and well intentioned. In a 2017 interview with ProPublica, he said his entry into the business of syndicating easements was the result of a personal epiphany sparked when his toddler son compared the paving of a residential development to pollution. As Schuler described it, “The importance of conserving land for him and future generations really pushed me to this point. ... That's why today I'm so passionate about conservation.”

Ornstein-Schuler dropped out of the syndicated-easement business in 2019, citing “recent developments and the uncertainty related to the conservation and gifting of property.” The firm turned to other real estate and tax realms, including launching a new division to buy and sell Georgia state film tax credits. Schuler also reportedly earned a credit as an executive producer on a film in which Mira Sorvino played an AI home security system. (Ornstein, who's still CEO of Ornstein-Schuler, also co-founded a private equity firm, whose holdings include a chain of dental offices and a chain of car washes.)

But the legal warfare over Ornstein-Schuler's tax-avoidance business continues today. According to a recent IRS filing, the firm has filed more than 100 tax court cases involving its transactions, contesting more than \$4 billion in disallowed charitable deductions from some 2,000 investors. Many of the cases are still pending. Ornstein-Schuler has made long-running efforts to reach a global settlement with the IRS; another filing includes an August 2022 letter from one of its law firms asserting that such an agreement would clear the way for collection of \$1.5 billion in taxes and would personally cost Schuler and his partner approximately \$150 million in additional taxes, interest and penalties.

A tax court decision handed down last year resolved the first of Schuler's cases to actually go to trial, involving multiple conservation easements from 2014 on 4,607 acres in rural Alabama. The promoters claimed that the potential for sand and gravel mining justified a total of \$187 million in charitable deductions. Investor promotional materials, evidence showed, projected \$200,000 in tax savings for every \$100,000 invested. The decision, which resolved 13 linked cases involving the property, backed the IRS, disallowing about \$180 million of the \$187 million in write-offs and imposing

40% “gross valuation misstatement” penalties on most of the disallowed amounts. The judge found that partnerships promoted by Schuler had claimed deductions as high as \$50,000 an acre on land that had been purchased less than a year earlier for \$2,200 an acre.

In his opinion, Albert Lauber, a senior judge in U.S. Tax Court, pointedly noted how Ornstein-Schuler's standard pitch of promising investors \$2 in tax savings for every \$1 they invested assumed he'd obtain a sky-high property appraisal, generating a profitable investor write-off. “When asked at trial how he could have posited in advance a deduction-to-investment ratio of \$4.389 to \$1, before any appraisals had been performed, Mr. Schuler said that appraisals were basically irrelevant to the tax write-off they were offering,” the judge wrote. He called the land values Schuler's firm had claimed “wholly implausible.”

“We were making plenty of money,” Schuler testified during the case. “The investors were doing well. And we felt that it was great that land was being conserved.”

Ornstein-Schuler is also among the defendants in a federal class-action suit in Georgia filed by three investors. The suit claims Ornstein-Schuler collaborated with lawyers, accountants, appraisers and others to collect millions in fees through a “fraudulent scheme” that deployed “a mountain of misrepresentations and omissions” to promote invalid easement deductions based on “egregiously inflated appraisals.” Ornstein-Schuler and other defendants have filed a joint motion to dismiss the case, asserting that the risks of the easement investments were fully disclosed and they misled no one.

Ornstein-Schuler has also gone on the attack. In December 2023, it sued the IRS, claiming that the agency had failed to respond to a Freedom of Information Act request for an array of agency documents. The firm complained of “IRS abuses relating to its targeting of conservation easement transactions,” which it said were part of a “well-publicized campaign.” Among the requested documents: “all records of communications between IRS employees and members of the news media,” including ProPublica reporter Peter Elkind, *Wall Street Journal* reporter Richard Rubin and *Forbes* reporter Peter Reilly, regarding conservation easements. Rod Rosenstein, a deputy U.S. attorney general during the first Trump administration, is representing Ornstein-Schuler in the case.

*Peter Elkind reports for ProPublica on government and business, and the compelling stories behind the intersection of the two. Doris Burke contributed research. Avi Asher-Schapiro contributed reporting.*

# Republicans Are Eyeing Cuts to Medicaid. What's Medicaid, Again?

By RENUKA RAYASAM and SAM WHITEHEAD / KFF Health News

In January, during a congressional hearing on his way to becoming secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services, Robert F. Kennedy Jr. got basic details wrong about Medicaid — a program he now oversees.

He said that Medicaid is fully funded by the federal government (it's not) and that many enrollees are unsatisfied with high out-of-pocket costs (enrollees pay limited, if any, out-of-pocket costs).

Medicaid is complex. The \$880 billion-a-year state-federal program offers health

coverage to millions of disabled and low-income Americans. The program covers different services for different people in different parts of the country — and enrollees may interact with private insurance companies without “Medicaid” in their names, leaving some unaware that they're on the program at all.

Although President Donald Trump promised to “love and cherish” Medicaid, Republicans in Congress in February announced federal budget proposals that could dramatically curtail the program. As that debate begins, here is what you need to know about Medicaid.

## What is Medicaid, and how is it different from Medicare?

Medicaid and Medicare were created by the same legislation — an addition to the Social Security Act — that was signed into law by President Lyn-

don B. Johnson in 1965.

Medicaid is a government health insurance program for people with low incomes and adults and children with disabilities.

Medicare, by contrast, generally covers those 65 or older.

For older Americans with low incomes, Medicaid covers out-of-pocket costs for Medicare. Such people are commonly called “dual eligibles,” because they qualify for both programs.

## Who is on Medicaid?

More than 79 million people receive services from Medicaid or the closely related Children's Health Insurance Program. That represents about 20% of the total population of the United States. Most enrollees qualify because of low incomes.

About 40% of all children in the country are covered by Medicaid or CHIP, cre-

ated in 1997. Both pay for services such as routine checkups, vaccinations, and hospital stays. Medicaid also covers pregnant people before and after they give birth and pays for more than 40% of all births.

Medicaid also covers people with disabilities or complex medical needs and helps them afford services that allow them to live independently in community settings, outside of institutions such as nursing homes and state-run hospitals.

The program serves a diverse cross section of the country. About 40% of people under 65 who use Medicaid are White, 30% are Hispanic, 19% are Black, and 1% are Indigenous people.

Federal Medicaid dollars cannot be used to cover immigrants who are in the U.S. without legal permission, though some states, as well as Washington, D.C., have used their own funds to extend Medicaid coverage to such individuals. California was the first state to do so.

*Continued on next page*



# How Can We Best Live in the World Mitch McConnell has Bequeathed Us?

*There's no ignoring the damage wrought by this hack. But I so want to.*

By DICK POLMAN

I was blissfully surfing through YouTube the other night — seeking to anesthetize myself with videos of purring cats and ocean idylls (surefire ways to keep Trump tyranny at bay) — when, alas, I chanced upon the face that buzz-killed my bid for escape.

Mitch McConnell, whose craven Senate machinations nudged us, goosestep by goosestep, toward our fascist future, was featured Feb. 2 on CBS News' *60 Minutes*, and I felt compelled to click on the interview, to view it much the way we rubberneck car accidents — except for the fact that, this time, we're the ones who've been totaled for the junkyard.

Why did I volunteer to ruin my night by watching a guy who's done so much to ruin our lives? I'd need a shrink to help me answer that. But, in the absence of therapy, I know full well that my quest to unplug from the MAGA madness is sometimes foiled by the fury I still harbor: I have yet to determine when to ignore and when to engage. I suspect that many of you oscillate in similar fashion.

So I watched and seethed. McConnell told Leslie Stahl that he's oh so very concerned about the global spread of autocracy: "This is a huge threat, a fight between the autocrats and the democracies, and when it comes to the democratic world, only one country can lead. That's us."

Does this hack even hear what he's saying? This is the same guy who has put us on a glide path to autocracy. If I were a kinder soul, maybe I'd give him a pass; maybe his brain has been addled by his recent infirmities to the point where he's now deaf to the import of his spoken mumblings. But in truth he has long been the consummate cynic (10 years ago, a McConnell biography was titled, "The Cynic"), and we Boomers know that the habits of a lifetime are often augmented in older age.

He furrowed his brow on *60 Minutes* and tut-tutted that it's wrong for us to cozy up to foreign thugs ("it's dangerous to assume that by speaking to autocrats, they will somehow treat you better"), and he said it's wrong to slap tariffs on our allies' products ("It will drive up the cost of everything...it'll be paid for by American consumers"), and he said it's wrong to put nutcase quacks in charge of our life-and-death agencies ("vaccines are critically important to health, to having normal lives"). But he's the big reason we're stuck with those wrongs - not that he would ever acknowledge it. Wringing an ounce of regret from McConnell is like trying to wrestle an eel.

By now you may wonder I'm even bothering to revisit the past. I'll answer with William Faulkner: "The past is never dead. It's not even past."

As the Senate Republican boss in 2021, McConnell led the crusade to acquit Trump during his Jan. 6 insurrection trial; had he and his GOP minions voted to convict, Trump would've been barred from seeking the presidency in '24 (Article 1 Section 3 of the Constitution specifies "disqualification to hold and enjoy any office"). McConnell's fall-

back was to kick the can to the courts — "We have a criminal justice system in this country" — but it turns out there was a hitch, a Catch-22 worthy of Joseph Heller:

He had already rigged the criminal justice system to fail, thanks to the U.S. Supreme Court he'd crafted.

He stonewalled Obama's 2016 nomination of Merrick Garland for a year, refusing to even schedule a hearing, thus paving the way for MAGA nominee Neil Gorsuch in 2017, and he rammed through Amy Coney Barrett's nomination with lightning speed in 2020. The result: A MAGA doormat court, which last year decreed that a president can basically do whatever the hell he wants. As Michael Tackett, McConnell's newest biographer (and a campaign trail pal of mine back in the day), told *60 Minutes*: "The court he created ended up being the court that helped to enable Donald Trump to not eventually face prosecution. It was the biggest miscalculation of his political career, and no doubt will be a stain on his legacy."

McConnell has no regrets about what he did: "I feel fine about it." And even though he still says that Trump's insurrection was wrong and that Trump's Jan. 6 pardons were wrong, "What happened in the past is irrelevant to me."

That's easy for him to say. He's still shuffling around the Senate (when he's not falling), his mind cleansed of anything that resembles a conscience. But past and present have collided and we're fated to live with the wreckage. Thanks to McConnell's servitude in Impeachment II, and his crafting of the MAGA high court, Trump has been freed up to launch his all-out assault on the judiciary - the last institution that's been willing, these last few weeks, to throw sand in the gears of his fascist bulldozer.

I oscillate, as well, between optimism and pessimism. It's heartening that a string of federal judges have blocked Trump's attempts to freeze appropriated spending on federal grants and loans, dismantle the U.S. Agency on International Development, ban birthright citizenship (which is guaranteed in the Constitution), and give Elon Musk full access to the Treasury Department's financial data on millions of Americans. But the grinding sound you're hearing are those judicial pillars tottering on their plinths. How long can they hold out? What happens to the rule of law if or when Der Leader decides to ignore all the rulings that stand in his way?

McConnell seems unperturbed about that; in fact, he told *60 Minutes* that he's still cool with Trump's agenda because "I'm a Republican." Now there's a word that has been rendered worthless. A word that used to mean something — like small government and conservative moral values. A word that has been squashed under the jackboot of a lawless cultist.

I'll tell you a story about when the word meant something. Flash back with me to 1985, when McConnell was a newly elected lawmaker. He reportedly stood at the podium in a Washington ballroom and told this joke: "I read about a Paris newspaper that conducted a major survey and asked French men what they did after making love. The results were indeed startling. Ten percent said they made love again. Fifteen percent smoked a cigarette. And 75 percent said they went home to their wives."

From pro-family conservative to water boy for a serial adulterer/predator, Mitch's journey to the heart of darkness is now complete. And we're the collateral damage.

*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 distributed by Cagle Cartoons newspaper syndicate. Email dickpolman7@gmail.com.*



## KFF Health News...

*Continued from previous page*

### What are the income qualifications?

Eligibility generally depends on whether a person is low income, and states have different ways of defining that. For a four-adult household without dependent children, the current national median coverage level is \$44,367.

The Affordable Care Act, often called Obamacare, which passed in 2010, allowed more people to qualify for Medicaid on the basis of income. This is what is known as "Medicaid expansion."

The law offered states a sizable incentive to add more people to their programs: The federal government would pitch in more money per enrollee to help cover them.

The intention behind the expansion was to close gaps in health insurance programs for the millions of Americans who don't get coverage through an employer. Medicaid would cover people with extremely low incomes, and as their incomes rose, they could move to subsidized health plans sold through the Affordable Care Act's exchanges.

In 2012, the U.S. Supreme Court said the decision of whether to expand the program would be left up to individual states. Today, 40 states and the District of Columbia — led by Democrats and Republicans alike — have opted in.

In the 10 states that haven't expanded Medicaid to more low-income adults, the median earnings qualification level is \$5,947 a year for a single-person household in 2025. Those who make more are not eligible.

Adults in those states who make too much for Medicaid can also make too little to qualify for help buying plans on the Affordable Care Act exchanges, leaving some unable to afford coverage. An estimated 1.5 million fall into this coverage gap.

### Where does the money to pay for it come from?

The federal government pays most of the cost of Medicaid by matching a portion of what states spend.

Currently, the federal government matches at least 50% of state spending and offers states more money for some services and enrollees — for instance, for children and pregnant women.

Less wealthy states — determined by considering residents' per capita incomes — receive a higher match, translating to a higher percentage of federal dollars. In Mississippi, for instance, the federal government picks up 77% of the cost of Medicaid.

States also receive a 90% match from the federal government for enrollees eligible for Medicaid under the ACA's expansion.

There is no limit on how much states can spend on the program, and hundreds of billions of federal dollars flow into states each year. In 2023, states spent about 15% of their own budgets on Medicaid.

### What does that money pay for?

Federal law requires all state Medicaid programs to cover certain services, including emergency medical transportation, X-rays and lab work, family planning, and medication-assisted treatment

for people with opioid use disorder. The program also covers many nursing and home health services, though federal law allows those benefits to be clawed back after an enrollee's death.

Beyond that, states have the flexibility to choose the services their Medicaid programs cover. All states cover prescription drugs, and most cover eyeglasses, some dental care, and physical therapy.

Medicaid covers more mental health and long-term care services than any other type of insurance, public or private.

### What is Medicaid called in my state?

Medicaid programs can go by many different names, even within the same state, in part because most states use private insurance companies to run them. This can be confusing for consumers who may not realize they are actually enrolled in Medicaid.

In New York, for instance, Medicaid plans are offered by major companies, such as Anthem Blue Cross Blue Shield and UnitedHealthcare — and some you may not have heard of, such as Amida Care and MetroPlusHealth. In Wisconsin, enrollees may be in BadgerCare Plus; in Connecticut, Husky Health; in Texas, STAR; and in California, Medi-Cal.

### How does Medicaid affect hospitals and doctors in my state?

Medicaid generally pays health care providers such as doctors and hospitals less money for services than Medicare or private insurance does. But it can be more money than they'd get caring for people who are uninsured — and without Medicaid, many more Americans would be uninsured.

Like states, providers and hospitals have come to rely on this money and express concerns that even phasing it out over time would require major adjustments.

### What's going to happen to Medicaid?

It's not clear. Republicans in Washington are again pushing for major changes, which could take the form of cuts to federal funding. That could reduce the number of people who qualify, the services available, or both. A similar push focused on repealing and replacing Obamacare in 2017, during Trump's first term, was unsuccessful.

Perhaps one of the biggest obstacles to changing Medicaid is its popularity: 77% of Americans — and majorities of Democrats, independents, and Republicans — view the program favorably.

At the heart of it all are key questions about the role of government in people's health: How big should the U.S. medical insurance safety net be? Who deserves government assistance? And how will enrollees, states, providers, and the health care system at large absorb major changes to Medicaid, even if a rollout were staggered?

*Renuka Rayasam and Sam Whitehead are writers for KFF Health News, a national newsroom that produces in-depth journalism about health issues and is one of the core operating programs at KFF—an independent source of health policy research, polling, and journalism. This story also ran on CBS News.*





## THE BIG PICTURE/*Glynn Wilson*

### Who Will Write and Sing the New American Pie?

MUSCLE SHOALS, Ala. – Who will write the new American Pie for this tumultuous time in history?

Camping for a few days down by the Tennessee River and contemplating our future – or if we even have one – I doubt it will be Taylor Swift and her A.I. song writing machine, or even Miley Cyrus, as much as I like her sometimes. Where are the protest songs? For that matter, where are the protests?

Even Saturday Night Live at 50 seemed as lame as ever, although there were a few funny lines and potshots at the new dick in the White House. I think they could have done better. Heck, I could have done better – if anyone had bothered to call.

Do you think bots understand protest songs or even the concept of protesting injustice? I doubt it.

As much as I try to escape the divisive politics of our time, seeking refuge in rock and roll history, it's hard to look away as

America's first dictator turns Elon Musk loose to run rampant over our government like he destroyed Twitter and turned it into black X. It's mostly irrelevant now, as are the newspapers and cable news talk outlets that still post their headlines and links there.

Musk's Tesla cars are no longer selling, and celebrities are donating them to fund NPR, including Sheryl Crow. NASA has turned over our exploration of space to Musk's Space X in an experiment in privatization guaranteed to fail to reach Mars and kill people even trying to make it back to the Moon, like the U.S. government accomplished in 1969.

Unfortunately, Woody Guthrie and Pete Seeger are dead and gone, and Bob Dylan is apparently too old and rich to get it up for a comeback, although the new film about him, a misnomer called "A Complete Unknown," is out and making the rounds. I haven't seen it yet. But I can't help wondering if it does anymore than entertain a new

generation. Some young people may be interested in what all the hubbub is about while they still listen to the music from the era. Nothing has come along to match it since that time when freedom seemed to be unleashed.

It is being destroyed again, more than ever, so what's this generation going to do? Embrace authoritarianism as if that would solve our problems? It won't do anything but make matters much worse, and everyone will know that in a few months, whether they like it or not.

"American Pie," you may recall, at least you Baby Boomers, was a song written and performed by singer-songwriter Don McLean, recorded and released in 1971 on the album of the same name. The single was the number-one hit in the U.S. for four weeks in 1972, about the time I got my first drum set and started playing the music for myself.

The repeated phrase "the day the music died," which often echos around in my head these days like a melody you can't get out of your mind, refers to a plane crash in 1959 that killed early rock and roll stars Buddy Holly, The Big Bopper and Ritchie Valens, supposedly ending the era of early rock and roll. Although Chuck Berry just kept on reelin' and rockin' 'til the break of dawn.

The theme of McLean's song goes beyond mourning his childhood music heroes, however, reflecting the deep cultural changes and profound disillusion and loss of innocence of his generation, which some called "the rock and roll generation." Yep, that was me. And probably you too. Some of us still read more than memes on social media. Not sure about this generation.

The meaning of the other lyrics cryptically allude to the jarring events and social changes experienced during that period, and have been debated for decades. McLean repeatedly declined to explain the symbolism behind the many characters and events, like any artist, although he eventually released his songwriting notes to accompany the original manuscript when it was sold at auction in 2015. He found out about the plane crash as a 13-year-old newspaper delivery boy in New Rochelle, New York. Talk about the end of an era.

You can still listen to the song on YouTube for yourself.

<https://youtu.be/PRpiBpDy7MQ?si=VrgRY9LMMic7oZ4p>

And read the lyrics online too. <https://genius.com/Don-mclean-american-pie-lyrics>

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

## BOOK REVIEW/*Roger Bybee*

### Closing the Gap Between Poor Whites and Poor Blacks Can Go a Long Way Toward Restoring Democracy

The nightmare of Donald Trump's victory on Nov. 5 exposed all sorts of problems facing the Democratic Party and progressives.

However, in his impassioned and compelling new book released just weeks before the election, Rev. William Barber, one of Black America's most visionary leaders, boldly lays out one direction for the future.

In "White Poverty: How Exposing Myths About Race and Class Can Reconstruct American Democracy" (Hartgrove, Liveright Publishing), Rev. Barber and Jonathan Wilson-Hartgrove lay out a clear central message about winning economic and social justice in America.

Building a powerful coalition for economic justice, they say, demands a concentrated effort by Democrats and progressives to reach and engage the 66 million poor Whites of America for both action in the streets and at the voting booth.

More and more Whites are becoming open to a progressive moral vision as they face increasing precarity and poverty, the authors contend. About 140 million people meet Barber's definition of poor: those Americans unable to cope with a \$400 financial emergency. Under that standard, 40% of Americans are mired in poverty and insecurity. That includes tens of millions of Whites essential to form a winning coalition.

"In different ways, both parties reinforce the story that only Black people and others want change," say the authors. The mass of poor and low-wealth Whites, defined as those lacking the resources to cope with a \$400 emergency, are truly an indispensable part of any successful social movement seeking changes benefitting the vast majority.

"As long as poor White people continue to believe that protest is for Black people only, they remain isolated and susceptible to blame someone of a different race who is in more of less the predicament as they are," the authors assert.

For Barber, that means a strategic focus on attracting millions of Whites, along with people of color, aligned together in "moral fusion" coalitions. By "moral fusion," Barber points to coalitions which bring together diverse groups who accept the moral basis of each other's concerns, going beyond the lowest-common-denominator basis of most coalitions.

In explaining what he advocates for building moral fusion coalitions, Barber cites a "packed to the rafters" meeting in deeply-impooverished Harlan County in heavily-White and Trump-supporting eastern Kentucky. The local people are being bombarded with messages on talk radio and gospel shows "crafted in neoliberal think tanks" to divert their anger at those even poorer and more marginalized, Barber observes.

Yet in Harlan County, Barber and his colleagues found a receptive audience among people unaccustomed to hav-

ing their grievances taken seriously and being presented with forceful, clear information on their situation. Some former miners remarkably saw a connection between the anti-gay propaganda coming from right-wing media and global corporations' aim of distracting the community from the ongoing power of mining companies to deny workers their pensions and healthcare, while devastating the beautiful countryside.

"The key [to organizing] was to get past the wedge issues that people so often end up fighting about and get this information directly to the people," Barber relates. "A room full of white people in Harlan County were going home to tell their families and neighbors, that together with their Black and brown neighbors, they can become something better," Barber asserts.

These Whites are the sort of people that progressives must seriously approach and engage, even if initial efforts fall short. Activists must learn to tap into progressive ideas like opposition to corporate abuses that co-exist with retrograde beliefs like support for Trump, and reinforce the progressive stream of ideas.

Racism will, of course, remain a persistent and daunting barrier to involving larger numbers of whites in progressive social movements. Too often, Whites see any gains by Blacks as a loss for them, even when social protections fought for by Black people would bring them the very same benefits.

But the racism co-exists with a strong impulse among poor Whites to see a common fate with poor people of color. "The more financially precarious a White person felt, [an authoritative 2020] survey suggests, the more empathy they express for Black people, together in a shaky boat," writes sociologist Arlie Russell Hochschild in her powerful new book on Appalachian poverty, "Stolen Pride."

However, in 2024, a critical opportunity to reach out and engage the White poor was forfeited due to strategic choices made by the Kamala Harris campaign. Instead of targeting the poor to bring them out to vote, the Wall Street-filtered campaign of Kamala Harris focused almost exclusively on "the middle class" and reached out pleadingly to small business owners and "moderate" Republican White suburban women—to little avail.

A particularly glaring failure was the unwillingness to mention a hugely popular raise in lifting the minimum wage to a livable level—until there was just two weeks before Election Day.

"Raising ... the minimum wage, that would affect 32 million people who live every day for less than a living wage," Barber stressed in a recent interview.

The absence of the poor from Harris's speeches was not lost on poor people during the campaign. At an October election rally in Milwaukee, a woman complained to Sen. Bernie Sanders, "Kamala has been talking about the middle class. But she has not addressed the poor or the working poor."

Experiences like that led Sen. Sanders to declare, "It should come as no great surprise that a Democratic Party which has abandoned working-class people would find that the working class has abandoned them."

Rev. Barber, co-chair of the Poor People's Campaign, was similarly frustrated that the urgent economic needs of the poor and working class were not stressed in 2024. In 2020, "Biden and Harris focused on living wages and voting rights out front, [and] they got 56% of the votes of those that make less than \$50,000 a year in a family of four. But this year, the exit polls show that it was even, 49-49."

"Why? Did we adequately focus [in 2024] on the poor, low-wage, infrequent voters that held the key to the largest swing vote in the country?" he demanded.

Undeterred by the election of Donald Trump, Rev. Bar-

ber deeply believes that setbacks are inevitable on the march toward justice, and can be overcome with relentless organizing and a commitment to moral fusion. Trump and Co. will soon face an enormous conflict between their plans for brutally maximizing inequality, and the deep and sweeping unpopularity of their economic program, which until now has been kept in the shadows. Trump's first set of tax cuts in 2017, which bestowed 82% of its benefits on the top 1% and Corporate America, resulted in a sudden and sharp drop in his popularity.

So this time around, when Trump advances his plans in 2025 to shower the super-rich and huge corporations with as much as \$4 trillion in tax cuts, he is certain to ignite a major clash which may splinter his electoral coalition as well as the larger public. Rev. Barber will surely be in front lines of the forces challenging Trump, spreading the notion of moral fusion.

"White Poverty: How Exposing Myths About Race and Class Can Reconstruct American Democracy," by Rev. William J. Barber II with Jonathan Wilson-(Hartgrove, Liveright Publishing, New York 2024, 270 pp.)

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### Christian Congregations are Standing Up to Cruelty. Why Won't Politicians?

***The Trump team has attacked bishops, Lutheran social service organizations, and other faith communities simply for following their social gospel.***

By PETER MONTGOMERY

Here's a strange question: Why is Elon Musk lying about Lutherans?

The richest man on earth recently forced good people across the country to interrupt their community work to respond to his lies and threats.

Lutheran social service agencies offer crucial assistance related to adoption, foster care, domestic violence, and more. They also support immigrants and refugees, helping new Americans learn English, find homes and jobs, and settle into their new communities.

Like many nonprofits, they often get federal support to offer this help.

But in early February, as Musk's "Department of Government Efficiency" was forcing its way into government, right-wing activist Michael Flynn posted on social media that federal contracts with Lutheran social services organizations amounted to "money laundering."

Musk responded that DOGE was "rapidly shutting down these illegal payments."

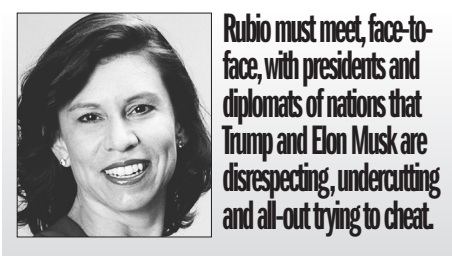
Neither Flynn nor Musk offered any evidence against these experienced and reputable social service providers. Instead, smearing Lutheran social services was seemingly just a tactic to justify massive cuts Musk wants to impose on social spending.

Already the administration's spending freeze has disrupted these agencies' work, causing "considerable harm to people who rely on critical services for shelter, food, and

*Continued on page 17*



MARY SANCHEZ



Rubio must meet, face-to-face, with presidents and diplomats of nations that Trump and Elon Musk are disrespecting, undercutting and all-out trying to cheat.

A Reason to Cheer ‘Little Marco’ Rubio’s First Steps Onto the Global Stage

America’s yearning for an inkling of sanity to prevail within the Trump administration might be soothed from an unlikely, even unwilling, actor. It’s Marco Rubio himself, the newly minted U.S. Secretary of State.

Rubio must maintain one foot in reality, unlike others who President Donald Trump has chosen to surround himself with. It’s his job description as Secretary of State.

Rubio must meet, face-to-face, with the presidents and diplomats of nations that Trump and Elon Musk are disrespecting, undercutting, and in some instances, all-out trying to cheat.

There’s no room in Rubio’s packed schedule for sequestering in Washington

D.C., surrounded by genuflecting aides, lobbyists, and the group-think of congressional Republicans these days.

The role separates him a bit from the handmaidens in the president’s in-coming cabinet and unelected players, like Musk.

Rubio’s recent whirlwind trip through Latin America is an example. In a span of a week, he visited five countries: Panama, El Salvador, Guatemala, Costa Rica and the Dominican Republic.

In Panama, he had to maneuver around Trump’s boasts of taking over the canal. In Guatemala, he had to dance around the dismantling of the humanitarian relief from the U.S. Agency for International Development, claiming that “it is not our intention” to yank the agency’s staff back from global outposts.

Yes, he said that, even though that is exactly what Musk has called for – nothing like being abroad in countries benefiting from U.S. foreign aid, while your nation is gutting the programs.

A few days later, a federal judge temporarily barred the administration from ordering 2,700 USAID workers to go on paid leave. A few days after that, Rubio insisted “we’re not walking away from foreign aid” in an interview with Scott Jennings on SiriusXM Patriot 125. He specifically pointed out aid that he believes is “done right.”

He discussed funds to Guatemala to help that nation’s police stop the flow of fentanyl, aid that can avert famine, and a program to stem the spread of HIV globally.

Maybe Rubio secretly prayed the courts would save the day, at least temporarily.

Consider also Rubio’s exchange with Alicia Ortega, an investigative journalist in the Dominican Republic.

“You have described Venezuela, Nicaragua, and Cuba as enemies of humanity,” Ortega said, questioning why the U.S. had just seized a plane belonging to

Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro.

Ortega continued, “What message is the United States sending to these undemocratic countries under this administration?”

The explanation Rubio gave was that the plane had been used in violation of sanctions, including traveling to Iran. That began a back and forth about whether sanctions had been aggressive enough in the past for results, a good question for Rubio, who is of Cuban descent.

The State Department sends out vetted scripts of what is said during these visits. But it’s difficult to know the full scope.

But the countries that Rubio faced in his first official visit are ones that Trump routinely defames – like Trump’s constant lie that Latin American countries have emptied their jails of violent murderers, sending them to the U.S. to cause carnage.

There’s no truth to the contention. But Rubio was able to arrange some agreements about future deportations. His fluency in Spanish, no doubt, helped.

Meanwhile, the rest of Trump’s cabinet and his many defenders in Congress twist and turn facts to stay in the White House’s good graces. Rubio did this too, but he’s less able to get away with it while acting as the president’s chief foreign affairs adviser.

He does not exhibit the intellect of someone like Henry Kissinger, Hillary Clinton, or Madeleine Albright. However, some of his attributes make him distinctive, if he’ll lean into them.

For one, he is bi-cultural and a student of life in ways that most members of Congress are not. It’s a gift. For all the striving to erase any mention of “diversity,” Rubio knows the necessity of honoring it. Again, he’s Cuban, born in Miami.

But he spent his teenage years in Las Vegas, when the family uprooted to find work. His father, a bartender, was part of a union in Vegas that went on strike.

There, Rubio was exposed to anti-Black racism, and became close to Mexican-American and Black schoolmates. So much so, that when the Rubio family returned to Miami, he didn’t fit in at one school. The other students called him a “gringo.”

Later, he attended college at a tiny rural campus in Northwest Missouri.

Those early memories, told by a reflective Rubio, are part of many revealing anecdotes in his 2012 memoir, “An American Son.”

Rubio dedicated it, “To the memory of my father and grandfather, whom I wish were here to read this book.”

Respect for one’s elders, and a bit of what some mindsets might sniff at as over-the-top sentimentality, are explained as a part of who Rubio is, in his soul.

In Latino culture there is an imperative to honor one’s ancestors, as a way of remaining grounded. Respect for them is displayed by seeing yourself as one rung, the present generation’s addition, in a long chain of related people moving forward.

Rubio writes of this, of his own gradual acceptance of the concept.

The Americas – North, South and Central – are anxiously awaiting signs that a responsible adult is present in the Trump White House.

Rubio has been routinely pilloried by critics for his baby face, even though he’s 53. A common theme in social media posts is of “little Marco,” followed by a taunt.

And yet, just maybe, he’ll be the one – forced out of necessity – to represent the White House globally and while doing so, maintain a sense of dignity for our nation.

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

The People, Yes

What happens when democracy so badly fails to deliver the goods that the citizenry freely chooses dictatorship?

By ROBERT KUTTNER

In early February, Trump’s Justice Department and Securities and Exchange Commission stopped enforcing the Foreign Corrupt Practices Act of 1977. This statute makes it a crime under U.S. law to bribe a foreign official in order to get a contract.

I have a certain fondness for this law, since I was one of its authors. The law was enacted after an extensive investigation of bribery in foreign contracting that I helped lead when I was working as chief investigator for Sen. William Proxmire, then the chair of the Senate Banking Committee.

The law has been enforced by seven administrations since it was enacted, and it has succeeded in reducing corrupt deals between U.S. corporations and foreign nations, democracies as well as dictatorships. In the 1970s, hundreds of cases of bribery came to light. The most notorious was Lockheed, which bribed officials of Japan, West Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, and Saudi Arabia to buy its planes. Since 1977, there have been hundreds of convictions and negotiated fines, including of marquee companies such as Alcoa, Bristol Myers Squibb, Hewlett-Packard, Goodyear, and Walmart.

The decision not to enforce the law reflects three things: Trump’s desire to help corporate America profit by gaming the rules; his diversion of enforcement resources into activities like tracking down undocumented immigrants; and his affinity for crooks everywhere. (On the same day, the Justice Department dropped the prosecution for bribery and corruption of New York Mayor Eric Adams.)

But the non-prosecution of corrupt corporations that bribe corrupt foreign officials is inside baseball at its finest. Does the general public care?

Feb. 9, CBS and YouGov released a poll that showed Trump’s approval rating, for the first time ever, in positive territory, 53-47, just about the margin by which Trump won the election. And when you drill down and look at the questions the pollsters asked, it’s even more disconcerting.

At least 60% of those polled agreed that he was “Tough,” “Focused,” and “Energetic.” Fully 70% felt that he was carrying out his campaign promises. And 59% supported his program to deport migrants in the country illegally.

However, by a margin of more than 2 to 1, respondents said that Trump was not doing enough to lower prices. The latest inflation numbers came out today, and they are bad news for Trump. In January, inflation rose to an annual rate of 3%.

But it’s as if popular support for constitutional democracy and the rule of law is contingent, instrumental, transactional. If the rule of law delivers low-priced eggs, great, we support it. If not, let’s give dictatorship a try.

WHEN THE FOUNDERS OF THIS REPUBLIC carefully designed their checks and balances, complemented by the individual rights guaranteed in the first 10 amendments that were ratified as part of the 1789 Constitution, they had three distinct threats in mind.

One was to avoid a monarchy or an overly powerful executive. The Congress was given very substantial power, complemented by a Supreme Court, further checked by federalism.

But the Founders also worried about corruption. Many of the discussions in the Federalist Papers address the dangers of corruption, which was rampant in King George’s court and in many of the colonies. The Constitution addressed the risk of corrupt officials profiting from high office with several provisions, including the remedy of impeachment and the emoluments clause.

The Founders were further concerned about the tyranny of the majority—Caesarism—in which a mob allied with a strong president might trample the rights of others. So the various checks and balances, as well as the Bill of Rights, were designed to limit the power of temporary majorities.

In Federalist 55, James Madison wrote,

“Had every Athenian citizen been a Socrates, every Athenian assembly would still have been a mob.” This was emphatically to be a republic, not a democracy, in which a natural aristocracy of the educated and the principled, like the Founders themselves, would govern.

Monarchy, corruption, Caesarism coupled with mob rule. Have you noticed that Trump epitomizes all three?

ULTIMATELY, THE FOUNDERS KNEW that the ultimate safeguard was the hearts of the people. Abraham Lincoln also understood that. “Public sentiment is everything,” he said in 1858. “With public sentiment, nothing can fail; without it nothing can succeed.”

Today, we are losing public sentiment for the rule of law.

The German ironist Bertolt Brecht, in 1953, made fun of a communist functionary’s complaint that the citizens of East Germany were insufficiently appreciative of the party program. Brecht suggested firing the people and getting a new one.

That remedy is not available to us. Winning back popular support for constitutional government will take a long time. Which brings me back to the price of eggs.

To the extent that support for democracy is merely contingent and instrumental, Democratic presidents lost that support by ceasing to champion the pocketbook needs of ordinary people. For 40 years, they opted

to support corporate globalization and privileges for Wall Street over the needs of working families, who found themselves without reliable jobs, secure health care, pensions, affordable homes, or affordable college.

No wonder a demagogue promising to make America great again looked good. Biden began a long-overdue shift back toward FDR, but he was too old to be a credible tribune, and Kamala Harris’s campaign was a mess of mixed messages.

Trump’s vulnerability on inflation is only the beginning of a long road back. But it’s a start.

In his celebrated 1936 book-length poem, “The People, Yes,” Carl Sandburg wrote:

The people will live on.  
The learning and blundering people will live on.  
They will be tricked and sold and again sold.

In the American experience, it has taken great and honorable leadership to overcome cheap trickery and genuinely serve the people. As Sandburg also wrote, writing in the third year of Roosevelt’s New Deal, Brother may yet line up with brother.

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.





# See No Nazis, Hear No Nazis: Is the Media Covering for Trump's Fascist Base?

*Why are Republican leaders echoing Hitler's symbology and rhetoric — and getting away with it?*

By THOM HARTMANN

One of the enduring mysteries in today's American political life is why so many Republican politicians and their friends are adopting or promoting openly Nazi symbols, iconography, and slogans.

Is it a shout-out to the hardcore racists and haters that make up the GOP's base, all just a performance to get enough votes to win elections? Or a proclamation that the end-goal of Republican governance is the destruction of American democracy, perhaps in deference to Vladimir Putin? How about it's being a bizarre attempt at trolling people old or well-educated enough to remember or know what Nazism inevitably leads to?

And why are America's mainstream media so unwilling to even report on, much less discuss, all the Nazi and neo-Nazi references surrounding Trump and today's captive Republicans?

Elon Musk, Trump's #1 campaign donor and co-president, threw two Nazi "Sieg Heil" salutes following Trump's inauguration, causing the media to fall all over itself trying to make excuses for his behavior. Actual, declared Nazis and White supremacists were thrown into an ecstatic tizzy, however, with the Ohio Proud Boys posting the clip with the words, "Heil Trump!"

The neo-Nazi group Blood Tribe posted the Musk clip

with the Waffen SS lightning-bolt emoji; their leader, Christopher Pohlhaus, wrote: "I don't care if this was a mistake. I'm going to enjoy the tears over it." Other neo-Nazi, Nazi, and white supremacist groups across the web jumped in to celebrate the salute, as Rolling Stone extensively documented.

It all seems to have really picked up steam after young neo-Nazis marched in Charlottesville in 2017, chanting Nazi slogans, murdering a young woman protestor, and giving Hitler salutes.

Our media completely failed to identify them as Nazis, even though they were proclaiming that themselves.

Since Trump's endorsement of their behavior with his "good people on both sides" comment, which he continues to defend, such behavior has been emulated across the nation.

Poke anything associated with Trump and odds are Nazi memes will pop out.

The "America First" slogan was the name of an openly pro-Nazi movement in America in the 1930s, a fact that seems to have been lost down the memory hole. And Trump told his former Chief of Staff, Marine General John Kelly, that "Hitler did some good things..." along with referring to American soldiers as "suckers" and "losers."

And then there are Trump's attacks on the media, echoing Joe Stalin and Adolf Hitler with their "enemy of the people" rhetoric. He's suing media outlets left and right, just like Vladimir Putin and Viktor Orbán did in their early years to intimidate reporters and bankrupt opposition publications and websites.

Elon Musk just called for reporters for CBS's 60 Minutes program — "the biggest liars in the world" — to receive "a long prison sentence."

In an echo of Hitler's "denunciations," his "border czar" is even calling for the police at the Department of Justice to investigate Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez for telling immigrants about their constitutional rights.

After pointing out at a rally that Hitler said that Jews

were "poisoning the blood" of Germany (yes, he pointed it out himself), Trump then said of nonwhites in America:

"It's true. They're destroying the blood of the country, they're destroying the fabric of our country, and we're going to have to get them out."

The 2021 CPAC meeting featured a stage resembling the Odal Rune, a potent Nazi symbol, that drew a rebuke from the hotel hosting the conference.

In 2022, Trump dined with Nick Fuentes, a prominent and out Holocaust denier. Trump later posted a 30-second video that twice references a "unified Reich." Trump's buddy Steve Bannon has repeatedly endorsed the notoriously antisemitic and racist novel "The Camp of the Saints" which characterizes Black Americans, "dirty Arabs," and "feces-eating Hindu rapists" as engaging in a conspiracy to destroy White people and civilization.

Trump's son, Don Jr., retweeted a message by a White supremacist who attacks interracial dating and queer people, "liked" tweets by another account that posts pictures of Jews with exaggerated noses, made a "joke" about gas chambers and our media, and participated in an interview with a talk show host who said slavery was the best thing to have ever happened to Black people.

When Vice President Vance visited Germany this past month, instead of meeting with that nation's chancellor or his peer, he hung out with the leader of the Nazi-adjacent AfD party, while giving a speech in which he extensively quoted Putin's sentiments. Proud to be known by the company he keeps...

And then there's DOGE, the official title of the iron-fisted, massively rich oligarchs who ruled Venice for 10 centuries that's been reclaimed by billionaire Musk for himself and his work. The logo is arguably explicit, as Jim Stewart-son points out at his excellent mind-war.com newsletter/website:

"On the DOGE logo there are eight stars above the cartoon, and 8 stars on the flag inside the gear. This is an-

*Continued on page 14*

## JD Vance Knows Better

*A constitutional law primer for 'Presidents' Day*

By SABRINA HAAKE

In 1828, gold was found in the Appalachian Mountains of Georgia on land that belonged to the Cherokee Nation. As word of the gold spread, miners and settlers pushed into the area. The State of Georgia wanted to regulate, permit and benefit from the commerce, but the land belonged to the Cherokee under treaty with the federal government. As the state and miners continued to encroach, the Cherokee Nation refused to cede more land and sought an injunction that eventually reached the Supreme Court.

In 1832, Chief Justice John Marshall infuriated sitting president Andrew Jackson by declaring that the State of Georgia had no right to encroach on Cherokee lands, because the land belonged to the Cherokee under the terms of a federal treaty. Ignoring the Supreme Court's ruling, a furious President Jackson famously responded: "John Marshall has made his decision, now let him enforce it."

President Jackson, a champion of slavery and states' rights, ignored the Supreme Court's ruling, and instead endorsed the Trail of Tears, a forced march to Oklahoma during which thousands of Cherokee starved and froze to death. It was among the most shameful episodes of ethnic genocide in American history.

In 2021, two years before he became a US Senator, Vice President JD Vance embraced the spirit of Andrew Jackson. Vance said that when Trump returned to office, he should "Fire every single ... civil servant ... (and) replace them with our people. When the courts stop you, stand before the country like Andrew Jackson did and say: The chief justice has made his ruling. Now let him enforce it."

*Vance is protecting Trump's attacks against the federal government*

His election as Vice President has not tempered Vance's lust for power; if anything, it's become worse. The Trump administration is closing entire federal agencies without understanding what services they provide or how they operate.

Tech bros like to move fast and break things, but that's not how government works, nor should it.

The federal government exists to serve the American people, not to turn a profit. When agencies are shuttered, Trump/Musk/Vance can brag on State TV about billions in "immediate savings," but they have no idea what the downstream costs will be. How will closing USAID increase starvation and, thereby, radicalization and migration that will eventually visit our shores? When NIH research is shuttered, what will the resurgence of AIDs, polio, or epidemic variants cost in terms of human suffering and commerce? When FEMA or the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration is closed, who will forecast deadly weather events and who will help the stricken people?

These questions fall outside the bandwidth of an impatient Ketamine addict and low-impulse control President. Vance, in contrast, possesses the intellectual capacity but is using it to wield unchecked authority and upend the balance of power.

*Vance goads federal judges*

After illegally firing federal employees based on political purity tests, including FBI agents, inspectors general, DOJ lawyers and commissioners, then giving Elon Musk's teenagers access to federal payment systems, Trump issued a spending freeze to retroactively suspend Congressionally created programs. A federal judge issued a temporary restraining order against the freeze, which Trump loyalists both disregarded and attacked.

Vance blasted the judiciary writ large and suggested judges lack jurisdiction over Trump's "legitimate power," clearly gaslighting the right into believing Trump's actions are "legitimate." Vance went even further, offering these examples:

"If a judge tried to tell a general how to conduct a military operation, that would be illegal. If a judge tried to command the attorney general in how to use her discretion as a prosecutor, that's also illegal."

Vance, who attended Yale Law School and presumably took ConLaw 101, knows better. Using Vance's examples, if Trump orders the military to shoot peaceful American protesters in the head, something Trump's falling down drunk Secretary of Defense would likely relish, Vance says the Courts are powerless to stop him. If the attorney general decided to imprison every Democrat in the nation, something Kash-enemies-list-Patel would enjoy, Vance says

again that there's nothing the courts can do.

Vance is wrong, and he knows he's wrong.

*Vance deliberately distorts the separation of powers*

Contrary to Vance's specious claim, centuries of court cases establish the role of the courts in checking overreach by the executive branch. In 1952, in Youngstown Sheet & Tubing Company v. Sawyer, President Truman issued an executive order directing the Secretary of Commerce to take control of the nation's steel mills to avoid an expected United Steelworkers strike. The consequences to the nation's economy promised to be devastating, so the federal government demonstrated its vital interest in blocking the strike. In a 6-3 ruling, however, the Supreme Court ruled held that a president lacks that authority, clarifying that "the President's power to see that the laws are faithfully executed refutes the idea that he is to be a lawmaker."

Trump/Musk/Vance, by the wholesale elimination of federal agencies created by Congress, are trying to be lawmakers. Vance, claiming the courts can't stop them, is trying also to be the judge.

The Chief Justice must have heard the Veep denounce the court's authority. In his traditional, year-end report on the federal judiciary, Roberts remarked that judicial independence "is undermined unless the other branches [of government] are firm in their responsibility to enforce the court's decrees ... Within the past few years ... elected officials from across the political spectrum have raised the specter of open disregard for federal court rulings. These

dangerous suggestions, however sporadic, must be soundly rejected."

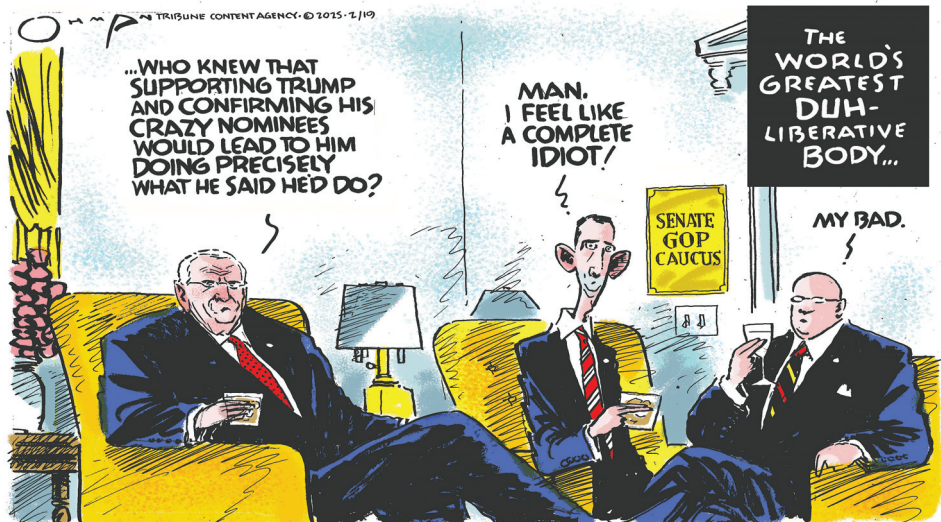
*Courts are pushing back against Trump/Musk/Vance's lawlessness*

On Feb. 6, Reagan-appointed U.S. District Judge John Coughenour issued a stark warning of his own, accusing Trump of trampling on the Constitution for personal gain. "It has become ever more apparent that, to our president, the rule of law is but an impediment to his policy goals. The rule of law is, according to him, something to navigate around or simply ignore, whether that be for political or personal gain."

In a separate case demonstrating Trump's defiance, plaintiffs alerted a federal court that Musk is still putting employees of the U.S. Agency for International Development on administrative leave, despite a recent judicial Order instructing the opposite.

As Trump/Musk/Vance fight to seize money that has already been legislated by Congress to pay for essential services including Medicaid, school lunches, and low-income housing subsidies, the courts will block them. Fourteen states have already challenged Trump's unchecked power, and more suits will follow. Whether Trump follows the ultimate adverse rulings, or follows Vance and Andrew Jackson's advice to ignore them, will determine whether we still have a functioning democracy.

*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.*





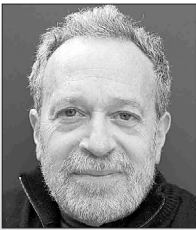
The War on Science is a War on the Public

The Trump administration is defunding and censoring science to serve corrupt corporate interests.

By BASAY SEN

Among the flurry of actions by the Trump administration, it could be easy to miss one that poses a grave danger to public health and our planet: a no-holds-barred attack on science. In a series of disturbing moves, the administration has censored scientific research, slashed resources for public health and the environment, and advanced fossil fuel industry propaganda. These moves only serve corporate interests — at the expense of ordinary people and the planet. Already, the administration has scrubbed government websites providing information

ROBERT REICH



The 1978 law that established the Office of Special Counsel provided for removal only for cause. Trump gave no reasons when he fired the counsel.

Will the Supreme Court Constrain the Wild Trump?

It is well to remind ourselves that Feb. 17 was Presidents Day, not Dictators Day. Of all the things the framers of the Constitution worried about, their biggest worry was that a president would become as powerful as a king. Which is why they created Congress and the judiciary — to check and constrain him. Fast-forward to the first Gilded Age of the late 19th century, when inequalities of income and wealth had become so extreme that the so-called “Robber Barons” of the era (think Elon Musk, Jeff Bezos, and Mark Zuckerberg) controlled the economy, and corruption was rampant. (I say “first” Gilded Age because we are now clearly in the second.) Reformers of that era created an income tax to try to limit the Robber Barons’ incomes, caps on corporate campaign expenditures to limit their political reach, and independent regulatory agencies to limit their power. The Federal Trade Commission, for example, was established as an independent agency in 1914, to take on corporate monopolies and fraud. Fast-forward again to today. There are by now 19 independent regulatory agencies, including the Securities and Exchange Commission, the Federal Reserve, the Commodity Futures Trading Commission, the National Labor Relations Board, the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation, the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau, and the Office of Special Counsel.

These independent agencies, staffed with experts, have become a major countervailing power to the political clout of large corporations. But I fear that the Supreme Court is about to end their independence. On Feb. 16, White House lawyers asked the justices to allow Trump to fire the head of an independent watchdog agency. It’s the first case arising from the blizzard of actions taken by Trump in the early weeks of the new regime to reach the Supreme Court. The White House’s emergency application asks the Supreme Court to vacate a federal trial judge’s order temporarily reinstating Hampton Dellinger, head of the Office of Special Counsel.

The Office of Special Counsel — a little-

on climate change and environmental justice. And it’s attempted to slash funding for research on climate and medical science (though a federal judge has temporarily blocked the defunding of medical research). Meanwhile, in a pair of astonishingly irresponsible moves, the administration has fired a large number of staff of the Epidemic Intelligence Service, which identifies and tracks emerging epidemics, and pulled the U.S. out of the World Health Organization — even as we face the serious risk of a worldwide bird flu pandemic. On the climate front, Donald Trump has launched an ideological attack against the very idea of environmental justice. That’s the idea that marginalized communities — including people of color and poor people of all races — suffer the worst from pollution. There’s a large body of peer-reviewed scientific literature confirming this pattern, but Trump and his ideologues don’t care. Elsewhere, Trump’s Energy Secretary — former fossil fuel executive Chris Wright — has made the outlandish claim that electricity in the U.S. is more expensive today, and the electric grid is less reliable, because of closure of coal-fired power plants. Every part of this industry propaganda is

known but important independent agency — enforces federal whistleblower laws, which protect whistleblowers from political retribution, and the Hatch Act, which prohibits federal employees from engaging in most political activity. In the 1978 law that established the Office of Special Counsel, Congress gave the counsel a five-year term and provided that they could be removed only for “inefficiency, neglect of duty, or malfeasance in office.” But Trump’s one-sentence email to Dellinger on Feb. 7 gave no reasons for firing him, effective immediately. Dellinger sued. He called his removal illegal and argued that nothing about his performance could possibly meet the standard Congress laid out for dismissing a special counsel: “Since my arrival at OSC last year, I could not be more proud of all we have accomplished. The agency’s work has earned praise from advocates for whistleblowers, veterans, and others. The effort to remove me has no factual nor legal basis — none — which means it is illegal.” Since Feb. 7, Dellinger has continued to police the government against Hatch Act and whistleblower violations — even when they have involved federal workers who allegedly discriminated against Trump. (In a complaint filed last Tuesday, Dellinger alleged that, during a hurricane response in October, an aid supervisor for the Federal Emergency Management Agency illegally instructed FEMA workers not to visit homes with Trump signs.) On Feb. 12, Judge Amy Berman Jackson of the Federal District Court in Washington issued a temporary restraining order blocking Trump from firing Dellinger. Judge Jackson wrote that the 1978 law “expresses Congress’s clear intent to ensure the independence of the special counsel and insulate his work from being buffeted by the winds of political change,” adding that the government’s “only response to this inarguable reading of the text is that the statute is unconstitutional.” On Feb. 15, a divided three-judge panel of the U.S. Court of Appeals for the D.C. Circuit rejected Trump’s emergency motion for a stay of Judge Jackson’s ruling. The unsigned majority opinion said the government’s motion was premature. “The question here is not whether the president is entitled to prompt review of his important constitutional arguments. Of course he is. The issue before us is whether his mere claim of extraordinary harm justifies this court’s immediate review, which would essentially remove the legal issues from the district court’s ambit before its proceedings have concluded.” In its Feb. 16 filing before the Supreme Court, the White House said the Supreme Court “should not allow lower courts to seize executive power by dictating to the president how long he must continue employing an agency head against his will.” Translated: Congress cannot limit the president’s power to fire heads of independent agencies. Make no mistake. This is a fundamental challenge to the basic idea — part of the fab-

verifiably false. The U.S. electricity grid is highly reliable. While electricity rates are rising, the increase over the 10-year period from 2013 to 2023 was only about 1% in inflation-adjusted terms. If anything, coal plant retirements were a factor in keeping rates lower, since the plants being retired are older plants with higher operating costs. And this year, solar energy is expected to be a major contributor to keeping rates almost unchanged. Significantly, every one of these facts comes from the Energy Department’s own research and data. That’s why we shouldn’t let them scrub it. The administration’s erasure of data has profound human consequences. According to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), the foremost international climate science institution, “Human-induced climate change, including more frequent and intense extreme events, has caused widespread adverse impacts and related losses and damages to nature and people,” including “reduced food and water security.” These statements are in the present tense. Severe climate change impacts are already occurring, and will get much worse if we don’t

ric of our government for well over a century — that Congress has the power to create independent agencies. Trump’s emergency application took direct aim at a precedent from 1935 in which the Supreme Court unanimously ruled that Congress can shield independent agencies from politics. That case, Humphrey’s Executor v. United States, concerned a federal law that protected commissioners of the Federal Trade Commission, saying they could be removed only for “inefficiency, neglect of duty or malfeasance in office” — the same language that Congress used decades later to protect the special counsel. Franklin D. Roosevelt, nonetheless, fired a commissioner, William Humphrey, arguing only that Humphrey’s actions were not aligned with the administration’s policy goals. The Supreme Court held that the firing was unlawful and the law establishing the independence of the Federal Trade Commission was constitutional. Fast-forward again. The Roberts Supreme Court doesn’t like independent regulatory agencies. Most of the current justices subscribe to what’s called the “unitary executive” theory, a bonkers notion that the framers intended for a president to have total control over every aspect of the executive branch. In 2020, the Roberts Supreme Court laid the groundwork for reversing Humphrey’s Executor in a case involving the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau. The law that created the bureau — again, using language identical to that at issue in Humphrey’s Executor and in Dellinger’s case — said the president could remove its director only for “inefficiency, neglect of duty or malfeasance in office.” In a 5-4 decision, the Supreme Court struck down that provision, ruling that it violated the separation of powers and that the president could remove the bureau’s director for any reason. Roberts, writing for the majority, said the presidency requires an “energetic executive.” He continued: “In our constitutional system, the executive power belongs to the president, and that power generally includes the ability to supervise and remove the agents who wield exec-

slash our greenhouse gas emissions rapidly. Disasters like this year’s Los Angeles wildfires and last year’s floods in Appalachia and the Southeast will become more frequent and damaging. By censoring and defunding climate science, Trump and his cronies are trying to erase the link between these impacts and fossil fuel pollution. Trump has been effectively bribed by fossil fuel oligarchs — and he’s returning the favor by making it official U.S. government policy to remove all restraints on the growth of their industry. Under Joe Biden, fossil fuel companies reported record profits as drilling reached record highs in the United States. Yet consumers still battled high gas prices and other costs. Under Trump, doing favors for this polluting industry is no likelier to benefit regular people. An administration claiming to crack down on “fraud, waste, and abuse” in government is doing the opposite. It’s engaging in corruption on a massive scale to benefit wealthy, politically connected oligarchs — at the expense of the rest of us. Basav Sen directs the Climate Policy Program of the Institute for Policy Studies. This op-ed was distributed by OtherWords.org.

utive power in his stead.” Two justices — Clarence Thomas and Neil M. Gorsuch — would have pulled the plug on independent agencies then and there. Thomas wrote: “The decision in Humphrey’s Executor poses a direct threat to our constitutional structure and, as a result, the liberty of the American people. With today’s decision, the court has repudiated almost every aspect of Humphrey’s Executor. In a future case, I would repudiate what is left of this erroneous precedent.” Justice Elena Kagan, writing for what were then the court’s four liberals, dissented, saying the Constitution did not address the scope of the president’s power to fire subordinates. Congress should therefore be free, she said, to grant agencies “a measure of independence from political pressure.” That 2020 decision by the majority of the Supreme Court anticipated the Supreme Court’s decision last July that granted Trump, then a private citizen, immunity from prosecution for any “official” conduct during his first term. So what now? The Supreme Court on Feb. 21 declined to lift Jackson’s restraining order, allowing Dellinger to remain in office temporarily, but I’m afraid the Trump White House and the Supreme Court have teed up the Dellinger case to mark the end of Humphrey’s Executor — and therefore the practical end of independent agencies. They may carve out the Federal Reserve on some pretext, but they are bent on centralizing presidential power. I wish I could be more hopeful, but I honestly don’t see any other decision emerging from this high court. Celebrate Presidents Day, not Dictators Day. And don’t, whatever you do, give up hope. This is all part of democracy’s stress test. I guarantee that eventually democracy will come out stronger for it.

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.

THIS MODERN WORLD

THE RAPID UNSCHEDULED DISASSEMBLY OF AMERICAN DEMOCRACY

by TOM TOMORROW

LISTEN UP, DOGESTERS! YOU ARE MY ELITE TEAM OF EXPERIENCED TECHNOLOGY PROFESSIONALS, TASKED WITH ELIMINATING FRAUD AND ABUSE! WHAT HAVE YOU ACCOMPLISHED SO FAR?

I PUT SUPER GLUE IN ALL THE LOCKS AT USAID!

I FOUND SOME WOKE EXPENDITURES HIDING IN A BROOM CLOSET!

I UNPLUGGED ALL THE COMPUTERS AT TREASURY! AFTER I DOWNLOADED EVERYONE'S SOCIAL SECURITY NUMBERS!

GREAT! GET OUT THERE AND DO MORE OF THAT! MEANWHILE, I'LL KEEP DISRUPTING THE CONSTITUTION MYSELF! IT'S VERSION 2.0 NOW! THIS ISN'T THE USA ANYMORE--IT'S THE US-X!

I AM RASCAL!

SUCH A GOSH, MR. MUSK--

--YOU'RE CEO OF SEVERAL COMPANIES, A CONSTANT PRESENCE ON SOCIAL MEDIA, AND YOU'RE DOING ALL THIS? HOW DO YOU FIND THE ENERGY?

I'M HIGH ON, UH, LIFE. ALSO, DON'T EVER ADDRESS ME WITHOUT PERMISSION.

UHHH--DOES SOMEONE HAVE SOMETHING FOR ME TO DO?

AM, SORRY DONALD, YOU COMPLETELY SLIPPED MY MIND. VANCE! FIND THIS MAN SOME EXECUTIVE ORDERS TO SIGN!

RIGHT AWAY, SIR!

NOW IF YOU'LL EXCUSE ME--I NEED TO MOVE FAST AND BREAK EVERYTHING!

NEXT: WHO THE HELL EVEN KNOWS, ANYMORE.

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# A Timely Push-Back Against Too Much Trump-Musk Secrecy Deals

By CLARENCE PAGE

It's not easy to steal the spotlight from two seasoned publicity lovers like President Donald Trump and Elon Musk, but Musk's 4-year-old son X AE A-Xii, or "X" for short, made it look easy during his Oval Office visit.

Now viral on the web, little X seemed to teach his dad a lesson I learned the hard way when I agreed to take my own son to my office on Take Your Child to Work Day. The most memorably lesson he seemed to pick up was that Dad's job is pretty boring, especially for a 4-year-old.

Little X Musk offered his own version of that lesson in an executive order signing event Feb. 11 in the Oval Office with his dad, an adviser to the president as head of DOGE, the president's "Department of Government Efficiency," which is not a real federal department, since Trump apparently decided he could not spare the time to make it into one.

Although it is not easy to make out what the mics picked up of the young Musk's voice in a video shared by media in the room, he seems to say "Shush your mouth" to the president as his daddy spoke — a sentiment I am certain was widely shared.

And it was not the only push-back that Trump and his team heard this week.

On Feb. 13, the interim U.S. attorney for the Southern District of New York, Danielle Sassoon, resigned rather than carry out an order from Deputy Attorney General Emil Bove to dismiss the criminal indictments against New York Mayor Eric Adams.

Later in the day, five other top Justice Department officials resigned, including the head of the Public Integrity Section in Washington, which oversees corruption prosecutions, where Bove went next seeking a prosecutor to dis-

miss the case.

The drama carried over into Feb. 14, according to Reuters, when Bove assembled the career integrity section lawyers and told them they had an hour for a volunteer to step forward. After weighing a mass resignation, a veteran prosecutor in the section stepped forward to do the dirty work.

For old Washington hands, it calls to mind President Richard Nixon's infamous "Saturday Night Massacre," when the desperate president ordered Attorney General Elliot Richardson to fire Special Prosecutor Archibald Cox, who was taking his job investigating the Watergate affair too seriously for Tricky Dick's liking.

To his credit, Richardson resigned rather than carry out the order, as did his subordinate, William Ruckelshaus. Eventually, a man was found to do the deed, Solicitor General Robert Bork.

Richardson and Ruckelshaus, it should be noted, were Republicans. They were loyal to their party and to their president, but they were public servants of conscience. Their highest loyalty was to the U.S. Constitution and the rule of law.

In that regard, Sassoon is cut from the same cloth. Although Trump's MAGA World has denounced her as though she were some sort of infiltrator left behind by the radical left, in fact her conservative credentials are impeccable.

As she pointed out in a letter remonstrating with Attorney General Pam Bondi, she is a Harvard College and Yale Law School graduate, a former clerk for the late conservative icon Supreme Court Justice Antonin Scalia and a member of Federalist Society, the prestigious conservative legal group.

Explaining her resignation to Bondi, Sassoon called Bove's order to dismiss the case "inconsistent with my ability and duty to prosecute federal crimes without fear or favor and to advance good-faith arguments before the courts."

"I have always considered it my obligation to pursue justice impartially, without favor to the wealthy or those

who occupy important public office, or harsher treatment for the less powerful," she continued. "I therefore deem it necessary to the faithful discharge of my duties to raise the concerns expressed in this letter with you and to request an opportunity to meet to discuss them further."

That meeting apparently didn't happen. Instead, the resignations did — and clouds of suspicion call for more investigation.

The resignations matter. They are a stunning repudiation of the administration's attempt to force the dismissal of the charges against Adams — for reasons that hopefully will become clearer.

They are an encouraging sign that some political conservatives remain true to the standards we would like to see in the face of Trump's countless other attempts to pollute the integrity of the criminal justice system with old-fashioned machine-style politics.

A cloud of suspicion has raised Sassoon's charge that the mayor's lawyers had "repeatedly urged what amounted to a quid pro quo, indicating that Adams would be in a position to assist with the Department's enforcement priorities only if the indictment were dismissed."

In one eye-catching passage in her letter, Sassoon said that Bove had scolded a member of her team for taking notes during the meeting and ordered that the notes be collected at the meeting's end.

What is being hidden? That's a question that Americans have been asking themselves repeatedly as the unelected Musk has bragged of his DOGE teams rummaging through and slashing government departments without much accountability and highly questionable authority.

As that big argument rambles on, Sassoon and her fellow dissenters deserve our gratitude for reminding us that accountability matters, when others sound like little X, telling us to "Shush your mouth."

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

## If Federal Healthcare Spending Is a Target, Then So Is Rural America

***Underserved communities across rural America would experience outsized negative effects to health outcomes resulting from cuts to cornerstone federal healthcare funding programs.***

By KATHERINE HEMPSTEAD  
Robert Wood Johnson Foundation,  
The Daily Yonder

Lists of potential healthcare spending cuts to include in a reconciliation bill are circulating on Capitol Hill, and healthcare is getting star billing.

Proposals include many measures affecting the Medicaid program, including the imposition of block grants, major reductions in the federal share of spending for the ACA expansion population, and the imposition of work requirements. If enacted, these policies would not only reduce coverage but also transfer a huge fiscal burden to states.

Also hanging in the balance are the enhanced premium tax credits in the Affordable Health Care (ACA) marketplace, which increased both eligibility for tax credits and the size of subsidies. These enhancements greatly increase the affordability of marketplace coverage, especially in places where healthcare is expensive, but they will expire

at the end of 2025 unless Congress acts to extend them.

The Medicaid program is an attractive target because it is so large. As the nation's largest source of health insurance coverage, Medicaid covers nearly 80 million diverse Americans, including children, adults, and patients with disabilities.

While the effects of these proposed cuts would be widespread, rural America will feel the most pain, because Medicaid and the ACA marketplace play a disproportionately important role in the financially fragile health care systems of rural communities. And while Medicaid is important everywhere, in rural America it is a lifeline.

A new report from Georgetown's Center on Children and Families highlights this point, showing that the nearly 46 million residents of small towns and rural areas are more likely than their metro counterparts to rely on Medicaid for coverage. In six states, at least half of rural children are covered by Medicaid. In 15 states, Medicaid covers more than one third of non-elderly adults living in rural areas.

Even these numbers understate how essential Medicaid is in rural counties all over the country, such as Madison Parish, Louisiana, where 71% of children are covered by Medicaid, Sullivan County, New York, where 36% of non-elderly adults rely on Medicaid, or Starr County, Texas, where more than half of older adults rely on Medicaid for home and community based services and nursing home care.

The ACA marketplace has also become an important source of coverage for rural America, where many people are self-employed, or work for small employers that don't offer coverage. Many rural areas have high healthcare costs, so the enhanced sub-

sidies make a big difference. A new analysis of Congressional Districts (CDs) shows that districts classified as rural will face the largest median increase in premiums if the enhanced credits are allowed to expire — 58%, as compared with a 28% increase in districts classified as urban. There are more than 10 rural CDs where premiums will at least double if the premiums are not renewed. They include a broad cross-section of states including Wyoming, West Virginia, Michigan, North Carolina and Illinois.

Farmers increasingly count on the ACA, especially as premiums have become more affordable in recent years. A Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF) report on coverage in the 10 states where farmers are the highest share of the labor force showed the large combined impact of the ACA marketplace and Medicaid. Overall, more than 25% of the population in these states were enrolled in one of these two programs. More than half of enrollees from these states were rural residents, and use of the Premium Tax Credits was nearly universal.

Because healthcare costs can be so high in rural areas, the tax credits save residents an average of \$506 each month. In Wyoming, for example, average monthly premiums were reduced from \$937 to \$118, thanks to the tax credit. In these states there has been a marked increase in health insurance coverage, thanks to these affordable options, and the uninsurance rate has declined by 26% between 2014 and 2023.

Losing the federal funding that enables affordable coverage puts these gains at risk, and the impact will spread far beyond those who lose their health insurance. The rural healthcare system is financially fragile and highly dependent on federal spending. In rural America, incomes are lower and fewer

people have employer sponsored insurance. Rural hospitals face multiple challenges including staff shortages, lack of profitable specialties, and inadequate revenue. More than 100 rural hospitals have closed in the past decade and hundreds more are at risk for closure. Rural residents are much less likely than their urban counterparts to have access to most kinds of healthcare services, including primary care, maternity care, and oncology. Resultingly, rural and urban disparities in morbidity and mortality are widening.

There are ways that telecommunications and other innovations may improve some aspects of rural healthcare. Reforms that increase telehealth capabilities and create regional hubs for critical specialty care may help to improve both quality and access to care. Yet no amount of technology improvement can compensate for a massive reduction in insured patients. People and communities will suffer if these proposed cuts become policy. Pulling federal dollars out of coverage programs will further starve rural healthcare providers, worsen access, and deepen the rural health disadvantage. Healthcare is not just a business, it is a critical pillar of any community. But when the supply of healthcare becomes truly inadequate to the needs of residents, communities cannot thrive, and perhaps some cannot survive. For this reason, rural communities have much at stake in the current hunt for federal spending cuts.

*Katherine Hempstead is a senior policy adviser at the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, where she focuses on coverage and healthcare costs. This story was published in the Daily Yonder. For more rural reporting and small-town stories visit [dailyyonder.com](http://dailyyonder.com).*

## Hartmann...

*Continued from page 12*

other National Socialist signal. It means Heil Hitler. Musk has used this signal numerous times, in addition to quite literally doing two Hitler salutes at the inauguration."

There are also 14 teeth on the gear that makes up the O in DOGE in the logo, a direct rip-off from Hitler's Nazi labor movement of the 1930s, reflecting the famous "14 words" memorized by every white supremacist: "We must secure the existence of our people and a future for white children." Check out this 30-second video, courtesy of Jim Stewartson at mind-war.com

(online).

Following that theme, Trump, Vance, and multiple Republican politicians and media figures have, for years, promoted the Naziesque "Great Replacement Theory" that posits American Jews are paying their agents in business, government, and society to hire Black, Brown, and queer people and women to replace White men.

Additionally, when Trump tweeted out his Anders Breivik quote about saving the country and thus violating no laws, Musk retweeted it with 14 American flag emojis. These guys aren't subtle because they don't have to be; they know any American media that calls them out will either be attacked

as paranoid or they'll simply say it was a joke or misunderstanding.

But their followers know exactly what they're saying, and why. Just like they understood that Trump's birther crap was really his way of saying, "Hey, White people, have you noticed that guy in the White House is Black? We can't tolerate that!"

And they also clearly heard the dog whistle when he came down the escalator and attacked brown-skinned immigrants. Or when he claimed the Potomac crash was because the helicopter pilot was a woman hired "because of DEI."

Or when Trump offered refugee status to White South Africans, but not to Black or

Indian South Africans.

There's so much evidence of Trump's and Musk's apartheid leanings, it's pretty much impossible to deny any longer. Which raises the question: Is our media in with the Nazis, or just committed to Not-Seeing them?

*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](http://hartmannreport.com).*



HEALTH CARE/*Joan Retsinas*

Those Canaries in Our Cage

Canaries signaled “danger” to mineworkers. If canaries died, the miners knew danger was imminent — even if all seemed OK.

In our body politick, the canaries are dying.

Consider abortion, once legal and safe. Then the Supreme Court ruled: let the states decide. And the states divided into a hodgepodge of restrictions on the timing of abortions, the places where abortions could happen, the restrictions on medication, the efforts to extradite doctors from state to state. The legal mess resulted not just in confusion, but in some deaths, as legislators, hospital administrators and physicians debated whether a patient truly risked death if she traveled to another state. Planned Parenthood morphed into a travel agency. But the latest move — the canary in the mine — came with the recent CDC advisory on abortion. Specifically, it counsels adoption. After “abortion” was wiped from the CDC website, users now change the messaging around pregnancy. Project 2025 had envisioned a country where abortion is all but nonexistent, at least legal abortion. We are moving there.

Next minefield: Obamacare. The previous Trump cam-

paign had vowed to kill Obamacare, and replace it with an elusive “something much better.” This Trump administration has moved boldly to kill it. The canary: The government slashed the funding for outreach by 90%. The administration had already supported some of the most egregious components of insurance pre-Obamacare, such as exclusions for pre-existing conditions. It had supported faith-based alternatives to traditional insurance (prayers would substitute for comprehensive coverage). Slashing the funding for outreach has rendered Obamacare — a.k.a. the Affordable Care Act — a stealth policy that would-be enrollees must struggle to find.

The minefield that physicians, health experts, parents — some Republicans, but not enough — warned we were entering is vaccination. Long a staple of public health campaigns, physicians rarely see measles, chickenpox, tetanus, polio, diphtheria, whooping cough. To calm opponents, Robert Kennedy Jr., the new cabinet head, pledged to follow the science, a marked departure from his past embrace of theories that linked vaccinations to autism, that promoted “anti-vax campaigns.” Even after Kennedy’s embrace of “natural clinical trials” for the measles vaccine in Samoa led to an outbreak there, the Republican senators lauded him, pointing to his enthusiasm for healthier food and his assurance that he wouldn’t squelch vaccines. But you can tamp down compliance subtlety. The canary in this mine: Louisiana’s department of health has said it would no longer promote vaccination campaigns. That has been the major task of public health departments — and the reason for our nation’s high rates of compliance. Expect more states to follow suit. Expect vaccination rates to fall. And — no

surprise — expect American physicians to start seeing some of these once-rare diseases.

One last minefield: medical progress. All those cuts to NIH, all those pink slips to researchers and grant-writers, all those dollars supporting public health overseas (a poll of Trump supporters might support all those cutbacks especially to agencies like AID that work overseas) — as of now they generate headlines about jobs lost, or, depending on political vantage, money saved. That money, though, supports clinical trials. Without trials, we make no progress in alleviating the diseases that plague a lot of us. Alzheimer’s. Parkinson’s. Cancer. Arthritis. Strokes. Colitis. If you want better drugs, better treatments, you need clinical trials. Trials fail for a lot of reasons: the experimental drug doesn’t work, the study was poorly designed, the sample size was too small, the side effects proved toxic. A lot of reasons for failure. We can now add: Elon Musk’s cutbacks.

To date, we have not halted clinical trials domestically; but we have halted money for AID. The *New York Times* reported the canary. A patient in South Africa was testing a silicon ring designed to prevent pregnancy and HIV infection. With the device inserted, she was ordered to return to the clinic. The cutback had aborted that trial, along with other trials. Not only had funding stopped the trial, it had left participants with devices and drugs in their bodies.

Miners, seeing a dead canary, knew they had to act. Similarly we must protest, protest, protest. Four years of this Trumpian new world will make America not great, but sick.

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Oppose, Oppose, Oppose

By SAM URETSKY

*That seat of science Athens,  
And earth’s proud mistress, Rome,  
Where now are all their glories  
We scarce can find a tomb.  
Then guard your rights, Americans,  
Nor stoop to lawless sway,  
Oppose, oppose, oppose, oppose  
For North America.  
— Joseph Warren, 1774 (sung to the tune of “British Grenadiers.”, “America” was pronounced “Americay” (songofamerica.net/song/free-america/)*

*“Oppose, Oppose, Oppose — and Do It Loudly,” by Paul Krugman (paulkrugman.substack.com/) Jan. 31, 2025*

It took four years for Donald Trump to qualify as the worst president in American history, but now he’s managed to beat that record in a single month. There was a time when being American was a source of pride, when we could identify with Captain America and Superman symbolized Truth, Justice, and the American way. That’s probably okay, since Superman is an undocumented alien, and the current administration would probably send him back to Krypton, or at least refuse his alter ego, Clark Kent, reporter

for the *Daily Planet*, access to the White House for calling the Gulf of Mexico the “Gulf of America.” For the record, DC comics has a superhero called Uncle Sam who has most of the powers of Superman but lives in an alternative universe and doesn’t wear tights.

There is a distinct difference between President Trump and President Abraham Lincoln, whom historians consider our greatest president, who said, in his second inaugural address “ With malice toward none; with charity for all; with firmness in the right as God gives us to see the right, let us strive on to finish the work we are in; to bind up the nation’s wounds; to care for him who shall have borne the battle and for his widow and his orphan — to do all which may achieve and cherish a just and a lasting peace among ourselves and with all nations” Lincoln, of course, not only maintained the union, but saw the future by signing the Pacific Railway Act of 1862, which provided federal subsidies to two railroad companies. The act established a public-private partnership to build the first transcontinental railroad.

Even people who voted for Trump are joining in rallies and other demonstrations against the President. On Feb. 17, TBSNews (The Business Standard) headlined “Anti-Trump protests erupt across US from New York City to Seattle.” Thousands of people took to the streets to protest threats to reproductive rights and pledges of mass deportations. On Feb. 5, *USA Today* published, “‘People are feeling galvanized’: Anti-Trump protesters rally in cities across US. Rallies are planned in every state.” Feb. 5, the *Washington Post* headlined, “Protesters in cities across the US rally against

Trump’s policies, Project 2025 and Elon Musk.”

On the other hand, *The New York Times* (2/17) had a report, “Venting at Democrats and Fearing Trump, Liberal Donors Pull Back Cash ... Demoralized donors are frustrated with Democrats’ failings and worried about retribution from the president. Their frugality has left liberal groups struggling to fight the new administration.”

Of course there is an answer, and it’s not expensive. The liberal groups want donations to pay for advertising, and can’t possibly afford to compete with Elon Musk, but anyone can write a letter to their Representative and Senator — make a phone call — The official website of Congress (Congress.gov) allows you to find your representative by Zip code, and provides their contact information, including phone numbers. Use USA.gov’s “Contact Your Elected Officials” tool to get contact information for your members of Congress, the president, and state and local officials. If your representative has a virtual town hall, register for it and attend — they keep count. On Feb. 13, Rachel Maddow featured a story about the huge number of people attending these virtual town halls — all held by Democrats, saying that Republicans don’t want to deal with their constituents.

If there’s a poll, answer it (if they ask for money, give the least possible, unless you feel like it). But make it clear that Trump and Musk are not supporting the American Way. Make your voice heard.

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BOOK REVIEW/*Ken Winkes*

Goodbye Diversity, Equity and Inclusion

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) are now gone, scrubbed from Federal government websites. As I write, the so-called Department of Government Efficiency is firing federal employees charged with encouraging diversity in federal employment and funding, and a president’s executive order has stripped any consideration of racial bias in the manner government contracts are awarded.

So, say goodbye to DEI. Welcome to the new Trump era. The country can thrive again, we’re told, because we’ll hire only the best people, based solely on their merit, not on their race, sexual preference or gender identity.

If only the definition, application, and effects of meritocracy were so simple.

In his masterful account of meritocracy’s shortcomings, Michael Sandel tells us why they are not. The title of his 2020 book, “The Tyranny of Meritocracy,” concisely states his point. Our national drive to identify and reward merit over the last 70 years has created deep social and economic schisms of its own, far more damaging to the American psyche than any misapplied DEI initiative.

In the 1960s, the idea of “merit” began to migrate from traditional and more general notions of human virtue and worth to academic achievement alone. Since then, a great sorting process has disproportionately rewarded those at the top of the academic ladder, leaving most Americans behind and widening and hardening society’s class and economic divisions along the way.

Sandel’s acute analysis shows how those partitions have generated the envy, anger, and resentment in millions of

Americans that fueled Trump’s ascent to power. Seen that way, Trump 2.0’s furious attack on DEI could be seen as a distraction from acknowledging their real source: A national meritocracy based on educational attainment.

In fact, “merit” defined by standardized test scores and academic achievement, gave birth to a rising American aristocracy, identifiable by diploma instead of family crest or coat of arms, its highest orders of nobility conferred by the nation’s elite universities. In the 1960s, universities like Harvard, Yale and Stanford admitted about one-third of their applicants. Today, they admit fewer than one in 20. As ever greater numbers competed for the meritocratic gold medal, the admissions process exerted unparalleled pressure on students and families, giving rise to a billion-dollar SAT test preparation and college admissions counseling industry that only the few could afford. Over time, this new aristocracy became self-perpetuating. Like schools’ achievement test scores, “merit” today is largely determined by zip code.

But the harmful effects of meritocracy go far beyond the anxiety induced in families by the meritocratic horserace. Economically, socially, and psychologically the harm has been enormous and widespread. It’s no accident that the vast income gulf between high and low earners that has emerged over the last 50 years paralleled the educational gap driven by the rise of meritocracy. Today the average college graduate is paid nearly twice that of a high school graduate. And that’s just the average. At the same time the education-associated social and cultural divisions that inform our politics have similarly widened.

Sandel locates many of those divisions in the psychology of achievement. It’s natural enough to take pride in accomplishment, he notes, but it’s equally natural for those who lose the race to feel shame or to resent the winners. I did it all myself, the winners tend to say, while those left behind often see themselves as failures or victims. In contemporary America, the twin faces of pride and shame explain a lot.

As a counter to merit’s tyranny, Sandel repeatedly reminds us that while achievement, particularly financial achievement, depends on talent and effort, success is also

contingent on good fortune, starting at the accident of our birth. Being wise enough to choose the right family to be born into or to know the right people are frequently overlooked spurs to merit.

Harvard professor that he is, Sandel is very familiar with his subject. While living the meritocratic dream himself, he has thought deeply about what that dream has meant for our nation. Sure, we want to hire the best people for the job, he says, but he asks if a meritocracy recognized and defined by academic and material success is the best or most reasonable way for a just society to live.

By phrasing the book’s subtitle as a question, Professor Sandel answers his own. “The Tyranny of Merit: Can We Find the Common Good?”

We haven’t yet. Not nearly. And so long as we bow to a merit that ignores community and civic values, we won’t.

“The Tyranny of Merit: Can We Find the Common Good?” by Michael Sandel. Picador. 2020. 272 pages

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





WAYNE O'LEARY

# How Hitler Did It in Germany

The good news is that observant Americans now know where they stand. Donald Trump and his supporters are going full fascist. They're not temporizing, not hinting, not threatening; they're going all the way, to the extent they can, in the direction of outright dictatorship.

What MAGA Republicans mean by "shock and awe" is the prompt establishment of an authoritarian state, and they now believe they have the means to get there. The only thing potentially standing in their way for the immediate future will be an aroused citizenry, which we saw come to the barricades in early February. Whether the forces of democracy, including the country's as yet uncorrupted lower-court system, can resist and hold out until the tide turns is an open question; Trump and company are betting they can't, betting they lack the will.

We've seen something like this before, of course, in Europe prior to World War II. Minus the deliberate organized violence, what's happening now in the U.S. compares to little else as definitively as the seizure of power by Germany's Nazi regime of the prewar years; a coup d'état by any other name is still a coup.

Here's a list of the clearly illegal actions perpetrated by Trump's fascistic executive branch operating lawlessly with no accountability and total impunity: 1) Closing congressionally authorized federal agencies and dismantling their programs; 2) Arbitrarily dismissing or purging federal civil servants without due process; 3) Blocking access to public buildings by duly elected congressional representatives; 4) Violating

Congress' power of the purse by refusing to dispense legitimately allocated federal funds; 5) Improperly seizing federal records and violating the informational privacy rights of American citizens.

All this is being done by DOGE (Department of Government Efficiency), an unsanctioned, extralegal organization headed by a private individual (Elon Musk) with no official status and a staff of uncredentialed, underage and untrustworthy hires answerable only to him.

Trump has asserted that he and his Svengali, the techno-billionaire Musk, will do what they want to establish their desired form of government, and they dare anyone to stop them. Adolf Hitler made the same assumptions and calculations in prewar Germany, and brazenly carried through successfully in the face of an intimidated and paralyzed opposition; the steps he took a century ago to solidify his rule were eerily parallel to today.

The best way to understand Hitler's tactical approach to accumulating power and its similarity to Trump's copycat approach is to peruse British historian Alan Bullock's unsurpassed analysis, "Hitler: A Study in Tyranny" (2nd ed., 1960). Der Fuehrer, Bullock relates, first created an illusion of legality, carrying out his overthrow of representative democracy, a system he despised, by using the moral authority of the state once he became its embodiment as Reich chancellor in 1933. In Bullock's words, "he turned the law inside out and made illegality legal."

Hitler never won a majority vote in any election, and neither has Trump. Instead, both of them used threats, bluff and bluster, misdirection and manipulation, and the tactic of surprise. Hitler, said Bullock, did "just the things no one believed he would dare do" to undermine democratic government. Similarly, Trump has employed a so-called shock-and-awe offensive, doing the unthinkable before his unprepared and disbelieving opposition can react; so far, it's worked.

Hitler achieved total power between January and March 1933 first by marshalling Germany's industrial interests (Krupp, I.G. Farben, et al.) behind him for campaign financial support with promises to control labor unions and undercut democratic socialism, and second by persuading the old imperial ruling class (the monarchist Right, led by Paul von Hindenburg and Franz von Papen) to accept him as chancellor in a conservative coalition government they mistakenly thought they could dominate. The former corresponded to Trump's favor-seeking billionaire tech bros, the latter to the ineffectual Republican congressional leadership that had hoped to use him, but now fears to cross him.

Once installed as chancellor, Hitler was able to force through the infamous Enabling Law that rewrote the German constitution, conferring upon him sole overriding powers that included enacting statutes unilaterally without consent of the Reichstag (parliament) — something akin to Donald Trump's arbitrary executive orders ignoring Congress. From there, der Fuehrer proceeded to ban opposing political parties and independent journalists (Trump's "enemies of the people"), purge the civil service of Jews, leftists and republicans, and disable the trade unions.

Hitler's prime henchman, Minister of the Interior Hermann Goering, dismissed hundreds of high-ranking and mid-level government and police officials, and replaced them with Nazis or Nazi sympathizers, a process disturbingly similar to Trump's proposed partisan gutting of the federal career civil service. Hitler's labor policy was even more severe. Union offices were raided, records and treasuries seized, and union leaders jailed or placed in concentration camps. Thereafter, independent unions were abolished by law, collective bargaining was ended, and workers were involuntarily enrolled in a government-run labor association that set conditions of work without their participation.

Compare that with the Trump admin-

istration's recent actions putting the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB), created in 1935 to enforce collective bargaining and the right to organize, effectively out of business. This was done by illegally firing the NLRB's head member, thereby depriving it of the quorum necessary to monitor employee elections and certify unions. The precedent-setting move was carried out on behalf of Jeff Bezos' Amazon to prevent Whole Foods, which it owns, from having to accept a union voted in by workers.

The cast of characters Adolf Hitler put together to facilitate republican Germany's transition to fascism have striking counterparts in the disrupters and chaos agents charged with carrying out Donald Trump's wishes. Musk is certainly Trump's Hermann Goering, and OMB Director Russell Vought, the "post-constitutionalist," makes a believable Joseph Goebbels, with a propaganda assist from the Heritage Foundation's Kevin Roberts; together, they're responsible for the latest installment of "Mandate for Leadership: The Conservative Promise" (a.k.a "Project 2025"), the MAGA movement's "Mein Kampf."

Theoretician Curtis Yarvin, the philosopher of American dictatorship (Trump as all-powerful "CEO"), is a good stand-in for Alfred Rosenberg, and enforcer Stephen Miller is the perfect SS chief Heinrich Himmler. Mark Zuckerberg, the weaselly, self-interested tech bro, is type cast as shadowy, anti-democratic arms manufacturer Gustav Krupp. There's even a comparable cohort to the 1,500 pardoned criminals who stormed the capital for Trump in Hitler's SA (Storm Troopers) of street-fighting fame. And what is Mar-a-Lago but Trump's Berchtesgaden?

It's all happened before, and it's happening again, but this time in America.

*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.*

# Neutering the CFPB: A Banker Speaks Out

By SETH SANDRONSKY

Randell Leach is the CEO of Beneficial State Bank, a regional community bank based in Oakland, Calif. He and I conducted via email the interview below about the ongoing shutdown of the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau (CFPB), and what it means for both the financial sector and consumers.

**Seth Sandronsky:** Generally, what do you think about the head of Office of Management and Budget calling for the CFPB to cease investigations and end the beginning of new rules?

**Randell Leach:** Halting the CFPB's enforcement and rulemaking efforts only helps predatory lenders and others who are scared of transparency and accountability. The powerful banking lobby has long fought against CFPB, as it does with other regulators. So I'm sure that some bankers are welcoming this shutdown. But I believe that's incredibly shortsighted. Since its creation, the CFPB has redirected more than \$21 billion back into the pockets of American consumers while establishing safeguards against unfair and deceptive financial practices. Ceasing the agency's vital work not only lets predatory practices go unchecked, it also sows chaos and confusion in the financial system — a system that relies on predictability and stability.

Look, obviously the CFPB is not a panacea, but it plays a strong role in creating a financial market that's conducive to fair competition, innovation, and the financial wellbeing of consumers. Public trust in banks is already fragile, so it's hugely important to have a strong agency protecting consumers.

Without the CFPB doing its job, we're going to see more predatory lenders take advantage of customers and more individuals and families at risk. That's not good for the financial sector or the economy as a whole.

**SS:** Any comment on President Donald J. Trump moving to reverse medical debt and overdraft protections that the CFPB had im-

plemented?

**RL:** We don't yet know how far this enforcement freeze will go, how long it will last, or what the precise future of these rules might be. It's not very helpful to speculate. What's important is that the uncertainty is itself harmful to American consumers and businesses. All we know for sure is that the financial wellbeing of everyday Americans is at risk the longer this effort to undermine consumer protections goes on.

You can disagree with specific regulations or raise concerns about how they're implemented. But let's not lose sight of the facts. Medical debt is one of the leading causes of financial distress in this country, and the protections that the CFPB put in place were designed to make sure that people weren't unfairly targeted by debt collectors when they were already struggling. High medical debt is more a symptom of the structural problems with our healthcare system (high costs and limited insurance coverages), and not necessarily a reflection of a consumer's ability to manage their finances and their willingness to repay. Similarly, the rules on overdraft fees were meant to make sure that people weren't punished too harshly for mistakes like overdrawing an account by just a few dollars or for banks choosing a methodology of processing checks that is more harmful to consumers. These types of things can add up quickly, especially if you're living paycheck to paycheck.

If these rules get reversed, it will significantly impact people's financial health. There are at least 205 million people across this country who are eligible to receive relief from the CFPB's enforcement and supervisory work. So when we talk about reversing these policies, we're talking about a massive number of Americans who are losing essential protections, for whom interacting with the financial sector will now be more risky and costly and less fair.

**SS:** Any comment on Elon Musk's potential conflict of interest? NPR is reporting: "The fact that Musk is now engaged in payment businesses that would be regulated by the CFPB at the same time he's trying to tear down the CFPB puts in sharp relief the conflicts of interests here and how much this dis-

serves the general public," said Richard Cordray, who led the CFPB under President Barack Obama. "The whole situation is rife with conflicts of interest."

**RL:** Any effort to dismantle or weaken the CFPB — regardless of who is behind it and what interests they might serve — undermines public trust in the financial sector. This is particularly concerning given the rapid evolution of financial technology and payment systems. As new financial products and services emerge, we need more oversight and accountability, not less. A strong CFPB helps ensure that innovation in the financial sector serves the public interest while protecting consumers from harmful practices.

The fundamental question isn't about any individual or company, it's about whether we want strong protections in place for American consumers so they can access financial products and services without being taken advantage of. The CFPB, while not without flaws, has helped advance that goal.

And yes, potential conflicts of interest should be vigorously investigated and addressed to ensure the integrity of our governance system.

**SS:** Any comment on Democrats' response? *The Hill* is reporting: "Sen. Elizabeth Warren (D-Mass.) and Rep. Maxine Waters (D-Calif.) and nearly 200 other Democratic lawmakers are demanding that Elon Musk and his Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE) employees be removed from

the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau (CFPB). "Your efforts to dismantle the CFPB are dangerous, and we will fight them at every turn," the Democrats wrote in their Feb. 11 letter addressed to Russ Vought, the director of the Office of Budget Management and Secretary of the Treasury Scott Bessent.

**RL:** I'm encouraged to see Senator Warren, who helped establish the CFPB, and other lawmakers taking action to maintain this vital regulatory framework. After all, protecting Americans from unfair financial practices and ensuring transparency in our banking system shouldn't be a partisan issue. Just last year, the conservative-leaning Supreme Court ruled to uphold the CFPB's funding structure.

Why is protecting consumers so divisive? We're talking about essential safeguards that were put in place after the 2008 financial crisis, when millions of Americans lost their homes and savings due to inadequate oversight of financial institutions. I don't think any of us want to go back to that. We want to make sure people can save for retirement, buy homes, and start small businesses without falling prey to predatory lending practices. Frankly, that should be a priority for political leaders on both sides of the aisle.

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RIKME [caglecartoons.com](http://caglecartoons.com)





# Moonbases and Solar Arrays: Will China Win the Space Race as Musk’s DOGE Cripples NASA?

By JUAN COLE

ANN ARBOR – The irrational, ignorant and often plain stupid cuts that rogue DOGE operatives of Elon Musk are making to the US government will endanger the health and well-being of American society for decades.

Musk himself is a giant contractor for the government and many of his moves may be intended to disadvantage his competitors and spew more billions of our tax dollars into his shitty companies. Although Musk’s myrmidons seem to be leaving the Department of Defense — the biggest black hole in the US budget and the most corrupt of US government agencies — alone for the moment, their actions nevertheless have dire implications for US national security.

The National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) officials expect their agency to be gutted just as other key government departments have been. Trump is appointing a Space-X executive to run NASA.

Musk has attacked NASA for its plans to return to the moon, arguing for going to Mars instead.

Meanwhile, in the real world, the rising superpower of China is not headed by terminal nincompoops, and has several space initiatives on the books that could leave the US in the dust.

The idea behind China’s space solar array is that the planned 0.6 miles wide solar platform could beam microwaves straight down to earth, generating as much energy in a year as all 100 million barrels of petroleum that are produced annually.

Trump is putting all of America’s (pricey) eggs in fossil

fuels and trying to derail the development of solar power in the US, and so there is unlikely to be a US solar space array. But that failure will lead to other setbacks.

Putting that kind of heavy equipment up into space is a challenge, but Chinese space officials and scientists think they have figured out a way to do it. They are developing a reusable heavy-lift rocket with a lift capacity of 136 metric tons.

They have named it the “Long March-9” (CZ-9). The title is a reference to the historic march in 1934-35 of guerilla fighters of the Communist Party from their initial base on the Jiangxi-Fujian border in the southeast of the country, where they were being successfully besieged and attrited by the forces of right-wing warlord Chiang Kai-shek. Over 80,000 fighters broke through enemy lines and marched up 6,000 miles to Shaanxi in the northwest near the Soviet Union. In the aftermath, Mao Zedong, who had lost power in the early ’30s, reemerged as the CPC leader. The Long March would be like walking across the United States from Washington, DC, to Los Angeles and then back again.

I wonder if the Chinese Communist Party feels besieged by the White nationalist oligarchy of the United States, and sees the space projects as a way to break out, just as their predecessors did in the 1930s.

Not only can the CZ-9 rocket put up a huge solar array into geostationary orbit over several trips, but it can also spearhead the project of establishing a moon base only 10 years from now. From now through 2027, the Chinese plan seeks to achieve needed technological breakthroughs in areas necessary to establishing a moon base. These efforts include using space robots to locate ice on the surface of the moon that can be mined for water for the taikonauts or Chinese astronauts.

In the second phase from 2028 to 2035, taikonauts will be landed on the moon and establish a permanent base on its surface.

Thomas Corbett and Peter W. Singer at Defense 1 point out that the Chinese plan is firm and advanced at a time when Elon Musk and others are arguing about

whether the US should even bother to go forward with NASA’s own plan to go to the moon. They note that many other countries (including Pakistan) have signed up to help with the Chinese moon base.

China’s Chang’e-4 mission made the first landing on the far side of the moon in 2019, bringing back soil samples. It is a feat that America never achieved.

Already, taikonauts on the Tiangong space station have created rocket fuel and oxygen through artificial photosynthesis. This achievement could help with the plans for a moon base.

America’s own research and development in science is at the moment being crippled by various Trump measures, including slashing payments to universities for the overhead on scientific research, putting that research in dire peril. Where near-term breakthroughs in cancer treatment, e.g., had been expected, these may now never happen.

Elon Musk himself has never invented anything and does not understand science. He is just a collector of other peoples’ ideas and companies, at which he is admittedly very good. But a collector is ultimately pretty useless, and to the extent he takes useful things off the market for the sake of his quirks and ego, he can actually be destructive.

In contrast, the Chinese are starting to outstrip the US in science innovation.

Of course, those considerations will be made moot if the US population largely dies off from plagues and epidemics unleashed by the destruction of our health and vaccination infrastructure. The Chinese could just sit back, vaccinate and wear masks during epidemics, and watch the US dwindle to a sh\*thole country, courtesy of our ad-lepated, looney tunes old fool of a president.

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## U.S. Treatment of Undocumented Indians Sparks Outrage as Inhumane

By N. GUNASEKARAN

The deportation of Indians who had illegally entered the United States has shocked not only the people in India, but also the people across the world. In a deplorable manner, the US authorities handcuffed deportees along with leg chains, restricting their mobility for a long journey in a US military aircraft.

Many of the deportees financed their risky, dangerous expeditions to the US, selling their land, mortgaging their properties and taking on crippling loans. After returning home, they were left depressed and anxious, with no jobs, no money and no means to lead a dignified life. Their future appearing bleak.

The action of the US government cannot be justified under any circumstances. Treatment of Indian deportees is unacceptable, highly condemnable and a serious violation of human rights. Numerous human rights organizations, such as Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch, have frequently criticized the excessive restraints and harsh treatment of illegal migrants during deportations. The human rights organ-

izations have also called for adherence to international human rights standards and greater transparency in the immigration enforcement processes. The UN International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and the UN Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment established clear guidelines to prevent inhumane treatment.Excessive or indiscriminate use of restraints, as seen in the treatment of Indian migrants, constitutes the gross violation of these standards and guidelines.

Neoliberalism has exacerbated the challenges of migration. Due to neoliberal policies, workers and peasants are often forced to migrate internationally in search of decent work. The World Migration Report 2022 revealed that global migration increased from 150 million to 281 million—an increase of approximately 45%—between 2000 and 2020.

In the Arab Gulf, there were 36 million international migrants, making up 70% of the employed population across countries, such as Jordan and Lebanon, in 2020. About 95% of private-sector workers in Qatar and the United Arab Emirates are migrants. Many of these workers are employed in hazardous jobs, particularly in construction, where they face the risk of severe injury and death due to dangerous working conditions. Southeast Asia and East Asia are also important centers of temporary labor migration.

The UN predicted that 305 million people would be in dire need of humanitarian assistance in 2025. In this context, a rise in the number of people fleeing their

home countries would be a natural consequence. No one voluntarily leaves everything behind to start over elsewhere. Therefore, authorities should consider the socio-economic realities when addressing migration issues.

Since illegal migration is a global challenge, it is not sufficient for the US and other nations to focus solely on strict enforcement, border security, and deportation. Instead, they must adopt more humanitarian approaches and seek humane and effective solutions. Notably, some countries prioritize providing asylum and integration for migrants who face exploitation, violence, and poor treatment.

The global movement of working people necessitates broader reforms in immigration policies, both in the US and worldwide. The US should ensure that the migrants are treated in a humane and dignified manner. Illegal migrants in the Western countries, including the US, are vulnerable to abuse by employers and lack of legal protections. Migrants from Third World countries, particularly from Asia, Africa and Latin American countries, often face social stigma, violence, discrimination and exploitation. Also, reports indicate that they frequently experience racial discrimination and periodic crackdowns by authorities.

Historically advanced countries including the US consolidated their wealth and power thanks to the migration of workers from colonized countries. From colonized Asian countries the US and western powers recruited laborers to work on plantations, mines and infrastructure project in

their own countries as well as in their colonies. For example large numbers of Indian laborers were forced to migrate to work in former British colonies like Malaysia, Fiji and Mauritius. Such large-scale migration helped for the enormous growth of present-day developed countries. These nations should not forget the immense gains they made through mass migration from Third World countries.

The root causes of migration are poverty, severe unemployment, intolerable living conditions in many rural regions in Asian countries due to agrarian crises, as well as political instability in neighboring countries. These issues must be addressed by ruling establishments through policies that ensure employment with full social security and work towards eradicating poverty and inequality. Mass illegal migration reflects the failure of ruling elites to implement people-oriented policies.

Many migrants leave their home countries in search of better economic opportunities in advanced nations, hoping to earn higher wages than they would at home. Their challenges must be addressed in a more humanitarian manner. This would also require regional collaboration, enhanced international cooperation, and more comprehensive solutions to migration issues. It must be recognized that workers have the right to move to and work in the country of their choice. Additionally, it is essential to ensure that asylum remains a genuine right for workers.

*N. Gunasekaran is a political activist and writer based in Chennai, India.*

## Montgomery...

Continued from page 10

mental health services among other social supports,” according to Lutheran Services in America.

News outlets in Ohio, Nebraska, South Dakota, and elsewhere agreed, pointing out the range of good work being done by Lutheran social service agencies. But I don’t think Musk cares.

Using false claims to justify widespread harm seems to be the operating principle behind Musk’s cruel crusade. Consider the brutal dismantling of USAID carried out by Musk with President Trump’s support.

USAID has boosted U.S. influence around the world while providing desperately needed humanitarian assistance to fight disease, prevent starvation, and pro-

vide a lifeline to people displaced by political violence.

The agency enjoyed bipartisan support for this work for over 60 years. Then Musk and Trump suddenly (and illegally) shut it down, abruptly cutting off countless people from lifesaving support. Musk bragged heartlessly about “feeding USAID into the wood chipper.”

“In its simplest terms, the apparent demise of USAID is the result of the world’s richest man ending a program that helps millions of poor people,” wrote Father James Martin, a Jesuit priest and editor at large for *America* magazine, a Catholic publication. “You don’t need a Ph.D. in moral theology to see why this is an evil. You can just read Jesus’s parables on the rich and the poor.”

Lutherans aren’t the only people of

faith being smeared. When Catholic bishops criticized a policy change to allow immigration agents to arrest people in churches, Vice President J.D. Vance suggested the bishops weren’t concerned about the human cost of these policies but about their own budgets.

Since then, no less than Pope Francis himself has condemned mass deportations and the dehumanizing rhetoric behind them.

Sadly, it’s no longer surprising to see conservative Christian activists attack and demean the faith of other Christians who disagree with the Trump team’s actions. When Episcopal Bishop Mariann Budde respectfully asked President Trump to show mercy toward immigrants, LGBTQ people, and their families, she became the target of vicious smears and threats.

Bishop Budde has stood her ground, but others have not.

Iowa Governor Kim Reynolds, whose state is home to the nation’s largest Lutheran congregation, refused to answer when a congressman asked if she believes Lutheran Family Services is a money laundering operation. Reynolds is smart enough to know it’s not, but she was unwilling, like many elected officials, to say anything that might invite the wrath of Trump or Musk.

The Americans who will be harmed by these lies deserve better than this senseless cruelty.

*Peter Montgomery is a Senior Fellow at People for the American Way. This op-ed was distributed by OtherWords.org.*



# A Crisis President Comes to Town

By JAMIE STIEHM

A bright, clear Presidents’ Day in Washington: a perfect moment in time and place to say what makes the best and worst of presidents.

For historians, the pattern is indelible. The American people show who the great presidents are, because they bring out the best in us.

The opposite is also true. Three weeks into his second round, power-mad Donald Trump is the worst, going away. He appeals to the darkness in our character every single day and way.

Trump, in three weeks, radically expanded his role and caused tidal waves of misery and grief at home and abroad. With tariffs and mass layoffs, he’s the agent of unemployment and inflation in the healthy economy former President Joe Biden handed him.

Let’s not even talk about the price of eggs, which Republicans (and the media) falsely framed as the main election issue.

Friends and Romans: Any president occupying the Oval not only reflects but shapes us. In fact, Washington is starting to

seem an occupied capital like Jerusalem by the Romans, Paris by the Germans.

In this state of emergency, the former presidents — Bill Clinton, George W. Bush and Barack Obama — should speak out.

Sometimes I envied my father for being born in 1933, in the depths of the Depression. A born patrician, Franklin Roosevelt, whose cheery, bold voice on the radio comforted the country and his widowed mother, explained the New Deal and saved our souls for 12 years.

I was born in the ‘60s but don’t remember the sparkling John F. Kennedy years — the tragically short thousand days.

Winning a good war, calling upon the unity and strength of a nation, not only its soldiers but all ages and walks of life, is what Roosevelt had in common with Abraham Lincoln, born dirt poor.

The morale of preserving union, the Battle Hymn of the Republic and human freedom pressed the Civil War on. The Union prevailed amid more blood than anyone imagined: over 600,000 young lives.

Lincoln inspired by his ringing, eloquent words, which traveled from Illinois to Washington. Yet the new president was dismissed by Southern “Slave Power” titans as an awkward outsider they could roll.

Lincoln never started a fight but never lost one either. Determined visionaries of destiny, Lincoln and Roosevelt were mas-

ters of the uplifting spoken word and phrase, brilliant presidential prose which lasts to this day.

That’s the job of the great “crisis presidents” facing the Depression or Civil War.

Note Trump’s rise and voice in the American town square: often online, largely trash talk. Sowing seeds of White nationalism for years infected the body politic.

Ironically, Trump *creates his own crisis* in plain sight.

Democrats watch, silently spellbound, as Trump gets even with everyone in this town — and country? — burned by hate from his impeachments, prosecutions and avenging the Jan. 6 mob attack on the Capitol.

Trump threatened and subdued Senate Republicans into approving some Cabinet secretaries wildly unfit for office. Bobby Kennedy Jr., anti-vaccine crusader, and Pete Hegseth, Fox News host — really? They are designated to destroy or weaken their departments.

The Education Department is on the chopping block, and the Justice Department is in turmoil, with top attorneys resigning in protest. The president forced out 19 ethics watchdogs and is cutting the Federal Aviation Administration as planes crash.

Trump has dared the courts to challenge his two-line guillotine emails. So far, the jury’s out. But you tell me why he had

to fire Colleen Joy Shogan, the archivist of the United States, or Deborah Rutter, the cultural leader of the beloved Kennedy Center. Is Carla Hayden, the librarian of Congress, next?

Billionaire Elon Musk has his portfolio, ramming through thousands of layoffs in a skilled, dedicated, even expert federal workforce.

Vice President JD Vance has the foreign portfolio. In Munich, he denounced Germany (among other European allies) for its fears of its far-right party. Evoking Nazi ghosts in the name of “free speech,” Vance moved the German chairman of the security conference to tears.

This spectacle was unthinkable until it happened. Vance’s hostile stance toward NATO friends caused a crisis of confidence in the post-war alliance born in 1948.

Trump never cared about all that. He looked at NATO as a money-loser. Now he’s eying Ukraine as a money-maker and demanding \$500 billion in minerals.

Don’t. Let. Go.

*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](http://JamieStiehm.com).*

## Gone to Portugal

By BARRY FRIEDMAN

By the time you read this, I’ll be living in Coimbra, Portugal, eight minutes from the University of Coimbra, the oldest college in Portugal. Founded in 1290 by King Dinis, alternately known as the “Farmer” or “Poet” king, it is a school where students wear *capa e batina* (cloak and cassock), and its library was the inspiration for the one at Hogwarts. Up until Feb. 16, I lived eight minutes from the University of Tulsa, whose library was not.

Maybe the eight minutes will make me feel like home.

Why did I leave America?

Não foi só Trump (“It wasn’t just Trump”).

More on that in a moment.

After a trip to Portugal last March, my wife and I, while literally in our driveway, were at the proverbial crossroads with America.

“You want to move to Portugal?”

I can’t remember who said it first.

I woke up most mornings politically and philosophically in a sour mood; Melissa was fearful of a country with more guns than people, and where, according to Johns Hopkins University, firearms remain the leading cause of death for children and teens; both of us got tired of reading about women bleeding out in hospital parking lots because the obstetrician-gynecologist on call was afraid of performing an abortion for fear of losing his or her license.

And then there was the matter of groceries.

In the time we were away, our 24-hour grocery store decided it would now only be open until 11 p.m. Most grocery stores in Portugal close at 8 p.m. To get me to stay, America needed to offer more than three additional hours to get a two-liter Diet Coke.

Amazon Prime in Spain will deliver 112 kinds of toothpaste to Coimbra.

Our married gay neighbors in Tulsa were scared.

America was scaring them.

Days after we returned to America, there was a shooting at a mall or an office or a school — when isn’t there? — and then another, then another. Melissa’s health insurance company was sending ominous letters. Our governor in Oklahoma was again thanking Jesus for something or was giving dominion of the state over to HIM. And ... and ... and ...

We had been in Portugal for only 10 days, stayed in class joints, as my dead father used to say, so of course we liked it there. What’s not to like when you’re staying at a quaint boutique hotel that delivers breakfast every day to your room in a big white canvas bag filled with hard bread, chocolate croissants, containers of orange juice, and jars of yogurt?

Waiters have health insurance.

And then Biden debated Trump.

I found an immigration attorney online with remarkably good English skills. He emailed me an application to start the process. It stayed on my desktop for days. I was 67, I didn’t have pancreatic cancer or COPD, I could write these columns from anywhere. When would we do something like this if not now?

I hit “send.”

I was applying for a D-7 Retirement

Visa. Matheus, the attorney, got the Número de Identificação Fiscal (NIF) — a tax ID number — for me and opened a Portuguese bank account. I deposited 10 grand. I had to prove passive income coming in every month of 860 euros (about \$950) (Social Security would cover that) and pass a criminal FBI background check (the government now has my fingerprints), obtain travel insurance, sign a one-year lease on an apartment (that I hadn’t seen), and pass an interview with representatives of the Portuguese consulate. There were a million emails back and forth between me and Matheus, and there was a trip to Houston to physically hand in a mountain of papers. Matheus advised me to open a brokerage account to make transfers easy. I did.

“A brokerage account?” I thought. I have only heard of such things on the show American Greed.

In December, Mrs. Sexais from the Portuguese consulate in Washington notified me that my visa was approved. I mailed in my passport. It came back with an official looking stamp.

I will be allowed to stay in Portugal for four months, which will then qualify me to get a residency card, which will then, after three years, if I behave, allow me to apply for full Portuguese citizenship — and I won’t have to give up my American citizenship. Now ... Trump.

I never thought he’d lose — all summer and fall, the polls weren’t really moving, the anger coming from the right was unapologetic, confident, and loud. But politics were a necessary component to all this, yet not a sufficient one. You don’t leave a country solely because your president-elect is a lout, an anti-Semite and/or your state superin-

tendent of public instruction is an incompetent horror.

But maybe you should.

And, of course, there is the adventure of it all.

No place is perfect. Europe, generally, and Portugal, specifically, have not always been hospitable to people like me. According to the World Jewish Congress: “Things took a turn for the worse following the Black Death in the mid-14th century, when the Catholic Church blamed Jews for the plague, leading to widespread anti-Jewish riots that diminished the standing of Portuguese Jewry. The longtime Jewish presence in Portugal came to an end in 1496, when King Manuel I decreed that all Jews residing in his realm either convert or leave, resulting in a mass exodus of Jews. Fearing economic dislocations due to the expulsion, the Portuguese authorities forcibly converted tens of thousands of Jews. Ironically, Portugal had initially served only four years before as a haven for Spanish Jews expelled from their homes.”

America was a haven once. It wasn’t that long ago. You can still see it in the rearview mirror.

*Barry Friedman is an essayist, political columnist, comedian and Iberian correspondent for **The Progressive Populist**. His latest book, “Jack Sh\*t, Volume 2: Wait For The Movie. It’s In Color” is the follow-up to “Jack Sh\*t: Volume One: Voluptuous Bagels and other Concerns of Jack Friedman.” He is also author of “Road Comic,” “Funny You Should Mention It,” “Four Days and a Year Later,” “The Joke Was On Me,” and a novel, “Jacob Fishman’s Marriages.” See [barrysfriedman.com](http://barrysfriedman.com) and [friedmanoftheplains.com](http://friedmanoftheplains.com).*

## Wages of Destruction in North Carolina

By GENE NICHOL

It is dangerous business to steal an election.

Jefferson Griffin has demonstrated a quiet desperation to get his election contest case to the North Carolina Supreme Court. He’s violated every procedural norm to get there. Everybody in the country knows why.

The North Carolina high court has repeatedly proven itself to be the most partisan appellate tribunal in the United States. For almost all our Republican justices, when the demands of law conflict with the demands of party, loyalty to party prevails. Law must step aside. Oaths of office must be violated.

Griffin thinks such a tribunal is the perfect forum for his case. He also thinks he’d be the perfect new member for such an institution. No doubt he’d fit in.

The Allison Riggs-Griffin race is the only statewide 2024 election presently left uncertified in America. There’s only one North Carolina Supreme Court.

Inspiringly, one Republican justice, Richard Dietz, is actually a judge. He has explained, straightforwardly, in dissent, why Griffin is supposed to lose under the law as we know it:

“(Griffin’s) post-election litigation seeks to remove the legal right to vote from people who lawfully voted under the laws and regulations that existed during the voting process.” It would, therefore, “greatly damage the integrity of the electoral system.”

Griffin’s asserted “legal errors could have been addressed long before people went to the polls.” He didn’t do that. He was fine with the rules ‘til he lost. Now, not so much. But, as Dietz indicated, “once people are actually voting it is far too late to challenge the rules used to administer an election.” That is, as Justice Anita Earls put it, unconstitutional “post-election gamesmanship.”

Still, the remaining Republican justices have stayed certification, seemingly anxious to steal the election outright. Chief Justice Newby, sounding like an op-ed writer, whined that folks were blaming Griffin for refusing to accept the verdict of the voters and that there were “concerns” about the decision of the election board.

Justice Phillip Berger (Jr.) wrote that “when you strip away politics and reality-optional hot takes,” Griffin’s case is about “sweeping bureaucratic incompetence”— doing his best Elon Musk imitation.

Justice Tamara Barringer was more alarmed, claiming the case “shows an existential need to carefully monitor” the election board. She would “suspend the ordinary procedures

and proceed to the merits” — rather than let it “twist in the jurisprudential winds.” She’ll deliver for the Republicans any day, any time. Just call. Rules be damned.

Trey Allen, the last member of the unfaithful caucus, did say that granting a stay “does not mean (Griffin) will ultimately prevail on the merits.” But if anyone thinks Allen, the most loyal of the hyper-partisans, whose main credential for election is that he clerked for Newby, is going to stand up to the Republicans, he is surely dreaming. Deep and illusory dreams.

So, it’s not hard to see what’s coming. What’s hard for me to understand is that they think they’ll get away with it. That we’ll put up with the trashing of our legal system, our electoral system, our birthright of democracy — just because they pretend to be judges. As Winston Churchill put it, more than once: “We didn’t come this far because we’re made of sugar candy.” These folks need to read a little history. And to get to know their neighbors.

*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.*



# Patriotic Americans Alert! A Trumpian Fascistic Coup is Underway — Stop It Before the Terror Starts

Rise up people, and fast. Tyrant Trump and his Musk-driven gangsters are launching a fascistic coup d'état. Much of everything you like about federal/civil service for your health, safety, and economic well-being and protections is being targeted.

To feed Trump's insatiable vengeance over being prosecuted, being defeated in the 2020 election, or now just being challenged, this megalomaniacal, self-described dictator is harming the lives of tens of millions of Americans in need and millions of Americans who are assisting them.

In his demented lawless arrogance, convicted felon Trump is nullifying the freedoms and protections of the American Revolution (King Donald is today's King George III), and rejecting the Declaration of Independence (which listed the rights and abuses against the British Tyrant that Trump is shredding and entrenching). He is defiantly violating the U.S. Constitution, its controls over dictatorial government, and its powers exclusively given to Congress. The Constitution demands that we live under the rule of law, not the rule of one man.

While Trump enjoys Mar-a-Lago and his golfing, Madman Musk, a South African, is literally living in the Executive Office Building next to the White House, with his heel-clicking Musketeers, seven days a week (they brought in sleeping cots) guarded by a large private security detail.

Consider, people, that the world's richest man, with billions of dollars of federal contracts, is unleashing his henchmen to wreck the daily work of public servants

committed to providing critical services that have long and bi-partisan support. Assistance to children, emergency workers, the sick and elderly, public school students, and people ripped off by business crooks. He is firing the federal cops on the corporate crime beat — whether at the FBI, the EPA, or the key Consumer Financial Protection Bureau which Trump/Musk are gutting.

Some headlines: "Laws? What Laws? Trump's Brazen Grab for Executive Power" by the great reporter Charlie Savage (*New York Times*, Feb. 6, 2025). Outlaws taking charge, driven by greed for the government's honeypots of corporate welfare, and near-zero taxes for the rich and big corporations.

Or "Searching for Motive to Musk Team's Focus on 'Checkbook' of U.S." by Alan Rappeport, Feb. 6, 2025, *New York Times*.

Or "White House Billionaires Take on the World's Poorest Kids" by the super-reporter Nicholas Kristof (Feb. 6, 2025. *New York Times*) shutting down The Agency for International Development's distribution of AIDS medicines, and crucially stopping U.S. health agencies from countering rising, deadly pandemics in Africa that could come here quickly without U.S. defensive actions abroad. Already the devastating effects on children missing healthcare and food are erupting.

Kristof concludes that all this (and the dollar amounts are very small compared to their benefits) may seem like a game for Trump/Musk, but "... it's about children's lives and our own security, and what's unfolding is sickening." It is also criminal!

on Jack Benny and Benny Goodman, we members of Generation X survived our histories of childhood neglect and adulthood underappreciation only to graduate into our later years assuming that no one cares about us and no one ever will. So yeah, there was that time I stood three feet away from Johnny Thunders when he gave his last concert and the hilarious lunch I had with Johnny Ramone and the time Ed Koch gave me the finger after I bounced a bottle off the roof of his limousine, but I'm pretty sure nobody under age 45 cares.

As the author and psychiatrist Iain McGilchrist says: "In the old days young people went to university to learn from people who were perhaps three times their age and had read an enormous amount. But nowadays they go in order to tell those older people what they should be thinking and what they should be saying."

Or maybe younger people would care. But they'd have to ask. And I'd have to be convinced that they weren't just being polite. Probably not going to happen.

Whatever the cause is, and what I've written so far is no doubt only part of the reason, there is probably less familial, cultural and popular history being transferred from older generations to younger ones than ever before. Changes in technology and education are contributing to our failure to pass on knowledge and wisdom.

If you don't know where you came from, you don't know who you are.

Generation Z, for example, never learned to write in cursive. Which means they can't read it. In the same way that Mustafa Kemal Atatürk's decision to abolish Arabic script in favor of a Latinate alphabet suddenly made hundreds of years of incredible literature inaccessible to Turks after 1928, and Mao's simplified Chinese characters meant that only scholars can read older texts, newer generations of Americans won't be able to read an original copy of the Declaration of Independence or a letter from their grandmother.

Similarly, the dark ages of photography are well upon us. Though it has never been cheaper or easier to take or store or transmit a high-resolution photo, the number that are

When the forces of law and order reassert themselves, Elon Musk may become known as felon Musk. He is not a properly appointed federal official. He has no authority to send his wrecking crews into one agency after another, demanding private information about Americans, pushing people out, and shutting down operations.

Musk, whose next target is the federal auto safety agency that has been enforcing the safety laws against Tesla and has not surrendered its regulation of self-driving cars (Musk's next big project). Musk refuses to disclose his sweetheart contracts with the federal agencies nor has he disclosed his tax returns. Demand them.

What is very clear in the first 20 days of Trump's lawless madness is that he is moving fast for a police state along with deepening the corporate state with and for Big Business. His prime victims are not the vast military budget at the Department of Defense, nor the big budgets of the Spy Agencies or of Musk's lucrative fiefdom — NASA, the Space Agency. No, like the bullies they are, Trump/Musk are smashing people's programs. They hate Medicaid (provided to over 80 million Americans) or the food programs for millions of children. Crazy Trump is pushing to shut down many clean wind power projects and cut credits to homeowners installing solar panels while booming the omniscid oil, gas, and coal industries. He wants many more giant exporting natural gas facilities near U.S. ports which could accidentally blow up entire cities.

Musk's poisoned Tusks have even reached Laos, Cambodia, and parts of Vietnam where mine-clearing efforts have been cut off. These are the U.S.'s Vietnam War era unexploded ordinances and bomblets that have killed tens of thousands of innocent residents, mostly children, in the past 50 years.

The *Washington Post* headline on Feb. 6, "Musk Team Taking Over Public Operations" understates the carnage. They are brazenly shutting down agencies, taking down thousands of government websites

likely to pass from one generation to the next has never been smaller. When mom dies, her smartphone password usually dies with her. Even when obtaining a court order is not required, how likely is a grieving child to sort through an overwhelming volume of photos, few of them worth preserving, and have the presence of mind to carefully store the keepers somewhere where their own children will be easily be able to access them someday? And let's not mention the digital disasters that can instantly wipe out entire photo archives.

For all their shortcomings—fading, development costs—film-based photos survived precisely because they were more expensive, which made them precious, which prompted people to store them in albums. We've all read stories about how victims of a flood or fire sometimes only escaped with one possession, the family photo album.

I'm grateful for all the old stuff old people told me whether or not I wanted to hear it. Some stuff was pretty enlightening, like the couple on my paper route where the husband had fought in World War I and still had his gas mask on which he had written the names of each little French village through which he and his squadron had passed. They invited me in for tea when I came to collect my money. It's one thing to read about the horrors of mustard gas. Holding that contraption in my hands made it feel real.

Other things I picked up probably didn't teach me much of anything at all. Still, it was pretty interesting to learn how to use an old-fashioned adding machine, Victrola

helpful to all Americans, and telling conscientious civil servants to obey or be driven out.

The Republicans in Congress, to their future shame and guilt, are surrendering their constitutional powers in the very branch of government our Founders assigned to check any rising monarchy in the White House.

The Democrats in the minority are just starting to protest, some in front of shuttered federal buildings. But they have not yet initiated unofficial public hearings in Congress to give voice to the surging anger of Americans (now flooding their switchboards) whose narrow majority of Trump voters are sensing betrayal big time. Demand unofficial hearings now! Federal judges are starting to uphold the violated laws.

The media, itself threatened by Trump's attacks, censorship, and who knows what is next from this venomous liar (see the *Washington Post's* Glen Kessler's Jan. 26, 2025 piece "The White House's wildly inaccurate claims about USAID spending" or "Trump's gusher of misleading economic statistics at Davos") will cover protests and testimony by people all over the country. The rallies and marches have begun and will only get larger as Trump and Musk sink lower with their tyrannical abuses.

The career military does not relish the reckless buffoon that Trump put over them as Secretary of Defense. American business cannot tolerate the chaos, the uncertainty, the tumult. Thirty-nine million small businesses are already feeling the oncoming Trump tsunami.

Break with your routine, Americans. It's your country they are seizing with this burgeoning coup. Take it back fast, is what our original patriots of 1776 would be saying.

*Ralph Nader is a consumer advocate, lawyer and co-author of "Wrecking America: How Trump's Lawbreaking and Lies Betray All" with Mark Green (2020). See [www.nader.org](http://www.nader.org) or [facebook.com/ralphnader](https://facebook.com/ralphnader).*

## TED RALL

# Resistance to Memory

When I was young, I knew a lot about old people. Especially about old people I knew personally: members of my family, my mother's contemporaneous older friends, teachers, clients on my paper route.

It wasn't a choice. When I was young, no one asked whether I was interested about events that significantly preceded my birth. They just talked. My mom told me countless detailed stories about her childhood growing up during the Nazi occupation of France; many if not most of these tales of woe were repeated despite my reminders that I was already familiar with them. I was expected to listen as the schoolteacher got shot, the cat was abandoned and the Allied tanks rolled in.

Children, teenagers and young adults were expected less to be seen and not heard than to listen politely nodding their heads as their elders described watching the Beatles arrive at Idlewild (on black-and-white TV with rabbit ears, natch), where they were when they heard that John F. Kennedy had been shot and, in the case of my seventh-grade homeroom teacher, what it was like to be in the convention hall when FDR accepted the Democratic nomination.

Pop culture, politics and personal histories from decades prior persisted in a way that doesn't seem possible today, when youth culture and the Internet have delivered a clear message to older generations like mine (I'm an old Gen Xer) that our stories are neither wanted nor sought out.

And sought out they would have to be. Unlike my Baby Boomer babysitter who taught my nine-year-old self hippie slang, how to curse and how much fun she'd had at a free-love commune, and also unlike my Silent Generation father who schooled me

record player and self-playing piano one of my neighbors had in her garage. My mom taught me how to use carbon paper; recalling the fact that businesses and government agencies routinely made numerous copies to be distributed to different files proved useful when I researched my senior thesis at the National Archives.

When I complain about a problem, I like to offer a solution. But I'm not entirely sure that the fact that billions of yottabytes worth of human knowledge is getting memory-holed, mostly because Millennials and Gen Zers aren't particularly interested is necessarily a problem. Maybe don't need that stuff to try to save themselves from climate change or killer asteroids.

What I do know, if indeed it is a problem, is that it is one without a possible solution. In the same way that streets would be clean if nobody littered but people always do so they never are, there is no way to convince today's 30-year-olds that they should take an interest in what today's 60-year-olds have to say.

"The past is never dead. It's not even past," William Faulkner wrote. But he's so old, he's dead.

Nowadays, even the present is past.

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





# Trump’s Policies Put Us in Economic Danger

By DAVE MARSTON

Donald Trump’s platform was clear when he was running for president. He promised to make bold improvements—quickly raising revenue by imposing tariffs on foreign goods, slashing prices at grocery stores, and ending fraud and wasteful government spending through greater efficiency.

None of this is happening.

After a few short weeks, inflation is rising, potentially crushing economic growth. In January 2025, inflation expectations were 3.3%. February’s reading was a shock, with expectations rising to 4.3%, according to Barron’s Business Journal. A jump of this magnitude has happened only five times in 14 years.

Though he tabled early Mexico and Canada tariffs, China’s are in place. To make matters worse, on Feb. 10, Trump unveiled tariffs on steel and aluminum. The next day, the European Union, home to 450 million people, vowed retaliatory tariffs.

Meanwhile at home, so-called “egg-flation” is on the rise in the United States. It is most pronounced in the state of Colorado after a law passed in 2020 mandates that all eggs sold in the state must now come from “cage free” hens, meaning that they get to spread their wings and roam a bit each day.

The law went into effect last month, and combined

with avian flu, Coloradoans now pay up to a \$1 per egg. In recent years it was \$2 per dozen. Labor shortages from frightened undocumented workers staying home are also hurting egg prices.

Although deporting undocumented workers apparently pleases many supporters of the president, the government’s roundups could have an inflationary impact on basic living costs. Migrant workers do our toughest jobs, whether it’s picking fruit, processing proteins like eggs and meat or building Tesla’s Gigafactory.

Fake news narratives paint undocumented workers as a drag on America. The facts show that they pay into our retirement system and Treasury to the tune of \$76 billion annually, according to the Council on Foreign Relations. These workers receive no benefits in return.

We are at 4.1% unemployment—a tight labor market. If we lose millions of these workers we will see a dramatic rise in labor costs, and a lessening of productivity.

Combined with tariffs, these actions are stagflationary, contributing to cost increases while slowing growth.

Vulnerable Americans, those who rent and who live paycheck to paycheck, have few options when goods rise rapidly in cost. We import over 80% of our aluminum. Are we prepared for soaring prices on automobiles, electronics and packaged food products?

President Trump won the presidency in part on his promise to fix what he labeled a horrible economy. But thanks to his unnecessary tariffs, the only way to achieve lower prices here at home now is through a recession.

Recessionary periods are hard on people. Job losses, home foreclosures and drug use typically spike during tough times. A recession combined with a trade war hark back to the 1970s, a time when high prices and high unemploy-

ment—plus two energy shocks—battered Americans’ wallets and psyches.

Americans were so frustrated during that time that they elected Ronald Reagan, who cut taxes for the rich, emptied our mental institutions and gutted protections for labor. He also ushered in the billionaire class that today includes Donald Trump and many in his cabinet.

Yet there was a time of hope instead of empty promises at the start of Donald Trump’s first presidency. Steve Bannon, a conservative media executive, initially served as chief strategist to the president. His advice to Trump: Shake things up by raising taxes on billionaires and cutting taxes for working people.

Bannon was fired seven months later as Trump passed broad tax cuts, up for renewal soon, for the wealthy. His policies continue to favor the richest in America.

Running for office for the second time, Donald Trump singled out the migrant community for persecution, demonizing them for exaggerated ills in the economy. What never got communicated clearly was that our economy was on a steady keel, with prices steadying along with interest rate declines. Now we’re primed for an inflationary spiral.

Who will do the jobs that migrants do? Where will we source necessary foreign-made goods? How will we build needed housing? Undocumented workers make up 20% of the construction force.

And what is government efficiency when Trump allows people without security clearances to fight fraud by eviscerating federal agencies mandated by Congress?

*Dave Marston is the publisher of Writers on the Range, writer-sontherange.org, an independent nonprofit dedicated to spurring conversation about Western issues. He lives in Durango, Colo.*

## A Cuban Immigrant Led to Temptation by the Fallwells

By ROB PATTERSON

After watching “God Forbid: The Sex Scandal That Brought Down a Dynasty,” I felt like I needed to take a long hot shower to cleanse myself from the human toxicity the Hulu documentary details.

It’s not the somewhat salacious sexual triangle among the Rev. Jerry Falwell Jr, his wife, and the Miami pool boy they seduced into a lengthy erotic relationship that made me feel sullied by viewing the film. Consenting human adults engage in a rainbow of erotic indulgences and pleasures that are simply what our species do; the sooner American society evolves beyond puritanical shame issues and misplaced judgments regarding sex that fuel our culture war battles, the better off our society will be.

What is disgusting and, yes, deplorable about the whole matter is the lies, hypocrisy, double-dealing, lust for power and other human failings on the part of Falwell. The fact that the pool boy comes off as a reasonable, likable and honest young man whose sexual urges led him into a situation he regrets only shines a stronger light of moral truth on not just the second-generation political evangelist’s failings. But how too many within the right wing oppose and condemn others for behaviors they engage in themselves.

The young man from Miami, Girancarlo Granda, a Cuban-American, was a 20-year-old college kid working at

the pool of Miami’s legendary Fontainebleau hotel when Becki Falwell, Jerry’s wife, wooed him into a sexual encounter that became a relationship. And included Falwell – son of the founder of Liberty University and the (so-called) Moral Majority and a key figure in politicizing conservative (so-called) Christianity – watching them and pleasuring himself. It’s a not-uncommon kink in sexually-liberated circles known as cuckolding. With Falwell as the “cuck,” as the slang refers to his role.

Granda says at the film’s outset that if he had known what the affair would lead to, “I would’ve walked away and just enjoyed my private life.” He has his misgivings throughout, even though he describes himself as a conservative Republican and wound up rubbing shoulders with that movement’s power powerbrokers, including Donald Trump.

At one point Giancarlo says he told Jerry Jr that he felt his father was “a piece of sh\*t.” And the younger Falwell all but admitted his agreement.

Filmed with a somewhat glitzy, fast-paced style that reflects the Miami Beach party culture that drew the Falwells there and offered Granda a way to make a fairly good living as he emerged out of his hermitic gamer teen years as he matured, the doc makes some strong and salient points by, first, the story itself and its non-sexual sordid and questionable details. And towards the end how Falwell Sr gained political power by hitting on hot-button right-wing issues, most pointedly abortion vs. choice.

The sleaze in the younger Falwell’s behavior is the lengths he went to in order to keep the affair secret from the public, as it clearly violated the code of behavior at Liberty University, the nation’s largest conservative religious college

that he headed. And how he used power, economics and the allure of rubbing shoulders with celebrities to exploit a rather naive young man.

We watch Granda as he eventually wakes up to an epiphany that he has been manipulated, exploited and treated shabbily by someone of low moral character who professes the opposite. And even realizes that Trump, who he initially admired, is an autocrat of much the same sort his family sought escape from when they fled Cuba for America. It’s ultimately a story that’s emblematic of the times we live in, disgusting viewers with its tawdry details, but hinting at hope that everyday Americans like Granda can ultimately see the light.

### Populist Picks

**ALBUM:** *TexiCali* by Dave Alvin & Jimmie Dale Gilmore – The two leading lights of Americana music in the Golden and Lone Star States team up a second time for another tuneful and eloquent collection that brims with the soulful charms of Southwestern bohemian soulfulness and spirit.

**TV DOCUMENTARY:** “In Restless Dreams: The Music of Paul Simon” – As the folk-rock icon and superstar retires from live performance, this film recounts his illustrious past and examines Simon’s life and creativity in his senior years.

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

## SATIRE/Rosie Sorenson

### May Day! May Day! May Day!

*Three Days in May  
May 1, 2, 3, 2025*

If you’re wondering what the hell to do with your feelings of horror about the Trump/Musk clusterf\*\*k of our country, listen up!

If you’re tired of quaking under the covers, shivering like a beat-down puppy, or paralyzed like a mouse in the jaws of a snake, or if you’re feeling sick with bile at the DEMS for doing—?, or tired of feeling ashamed because you are doing NOTHING but avoiding the news, stick around.

WE HAVE THE SOLUTION: DO NOTHING!

That’s the beauty of the plan. No marches, no banners, no bullhorns, no brown shirts.

Just stay away from any/all shopping, i.e. the spending of money online and otherwise for THREE DAYS: May 1,2,3, 2025.

That’s it.

Don’t even buy chewing gum! If mil-

lions of us do this one small thing, Big Business (and we mean you, Elon!) will get the message that we have power and we aim to use it!

Now is our time to holler “May Day! May Day! May Day!” (which comes from the French word for “M’aidez,” meaning “Help me! Help me! Help me!” dammit!!

THIS IS THE BEST, SAFEST, Do-Nothing Protest imaginable.

Caveat: You may want to stock up ahead of time on some essentials like milk, condoms and toilet paper but no worries—you know your Uncle Buck has a garage full!

No need to sign a petition, no need to march in the rain, the sleet, the snow. Stay home, or go out to the park and feed the geese (with food you bought the day before!)

But if you’re out of tampons and you can’t borrow from your friend, Mary, OK. Just this once.

This is our sacred democracy in action. No worries if you’re the wrong sex, the wrong gender, the wrong age, the wrong religion, the wrong political persuasion, the wrong color, the wrong weight, the wrong physiognomy and yes, the wrong country.

WE ARE ALL IN THIS TOGETHER!!!

So, please join by doing NOTHING May 1,2,3, 2025!!

Our Founding Fathers (and Mothers) will thank you!!

*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:*

## THEATER REVIEW/Ed Rampell

### TRUMPbeth: A Murderous, Maniacal Macbeth for Our Moment

*As gripping as Bolden and Hill are as the leads, accompanied by a fine supporting cast, the real standouts in this cast are the three witches.*

We live in such troubled times that it takes a Shakespeare (in this case, literally) to best express what we’re now facing with the incoming

*A Medical Memoir of Gaslighting, Grit & Grace,” available on Amazon if you can’t find it at your neighborhood bookstore. Email Rosie.Sorenson29@yahoo.com.*

Trump regime: “Something wicked this way comes,” as the Second Witch warns over her steaming, swirling pot. Indeed, it’s “J” in Pasadena, California’s A Noise Within Theatre’s first play of 2025, an all too timely retelling of the Bard of Stratford-upon-Avon’s classic tragedy “Macbeth.” William Shakespeare may have shed his all too mortal coil in 1616, but with its murderous mayhem about a maniacal monarch’s seizure of the crown in his quest for absolute rule, ANW has chosen the perfect play for Trump’s power plays. In terms of the Shakespearean canon, Orange Julius Caesar would have been a fitting, clever choice as well, but considering the fact that a convicted felon is now commander-in-chief and – surprise! – the criminal-in-chief is breaking the law pell-mell, the Scottish play ideally comments on our eerie era.

Over the years I’ve experienced many iterations of the oft-presented “Macbeth,” beginning with Barbara Garson’s satirical “Macbird!” which adapted the JFK assassi-

*Continued on next page*



## Rampell...

Continued from previous page

nation within the drama’s plot points and I saw when I was a boy at the Village Gate. I’ve also seen the Scottish play mounted by Antaeus Theatre and Will Geer’s Theatricum Botanicum on the live stage, plus screen versions, including Orson Welles’ 1948 film and Akira Kurosawa’s 1957 chilling samurai-set “Throne of Blood.” Arguably the most famous version of all time was the 1936 Orson Welles-directed “Voodoo Macbeth” with an all-Black cast that opened to great acclaim at Harlem’s Lafayette Theatre, a production of the Negro Theater Unit of the New Deal’s Federal Theatre Project. A 2022 movie also entitled “Voodoo Macbeth” recounts the story of the mounting of this daring drama that reset the Scottish play in Haiti, co-starring Jewell Wilson Bridges as Welles and one of L.A.’s finest theater actresses, Inger Tudor, as Rose McClendon.

I cite the above to point out that director Andi Chapman was faced by a creative dilemma: Given the multiple Macbeths over the millennia (well, not quite the right word, but it provided alliteration), how do you create a unique, different rendition that has your personal stamp upon it, making it worth the price of admission for stage stalwarts who have probably seen it all before? How to make something old seem new?

First of all, Chapman opens with some highly cinematic scenes (including Special FX) and there are other similarly stylistic filmic vignettes that are eye-catching and attention-getting. Presumably taking (lifting?) a page from Welles, the play’s non-traditional casting is distinctly diverse in this multi-culti production (reminiscent of Broadway’s “Hamilton” — or, given the Shakespearean aspect, should we say “Hamlet-on?”). The pounding congas bestow a Caribbean ambiance at times. ANW’s “Macbeth” also seems to reference the legacy of minstrel shows, as well as that 1970s’ filmic vogue of Blaxploitation pictures. Imagine Pam Grier — or sticking with the Shakespeare analogies, Tamara Dobson, who played the eponymous character in 1973’s “Cleopatra Jones” — as Lady Macbeth. The zaftig Julianne Chidi Hill incarnates the female lead, dripping with venom as she verbally emasculates her husband Macbeth (Kamal Bolden), egging him on to murder the King of Scotland, Duncan (Alex Morris, a five-time NAACP Theater Award winner), for the offending crime that he wears the crown — and not Macbeth.

Driven over the edge by guilt, the homicidal husband

and wife both go mad. The brawny Bolden’s delusions as his character “spots” a spectral Duncan at a banquet table are genuinely disturbing. The not-so-great Thane goes insane — as Henry IV said: “Uneasy lies the head that wears a crown.” Likewise, Hill’s somnambulistic wanderings and delivery of Lady Macbeth’s famous (infamous?) “Out damned spot!” soliloquy are — well — spot on, really blood curdling.

(Their maniacal musings put me in mind of the clearly mentally ill people who are relentlessly thrust upon the public. Kanye’s Super Bowl ad was obviously the product of a disturbed mind — and the fact that the URL he was ballyhooing linked to a website peddling Nazi items was proof of his lunacy. Like Lady Macbeth, Trump has sleep problems (to wit all those 3:00 a.m. nonsensical tweets — one way to stop the unconscious from manufacturing nightmares is to, literally, not sleep). Elon Musk is reportedly “on the spectrum,” and all the money in the world (which, apparently, he appears hell-bent on grabbing, except for the crumbs he tosses his hireling Donald’s way) won’t make what was supposedly an abusive childhood go away, nor make him “cool.” I can’t help but wonder: What does it do America’s collective psyche to be subjected to obviously demented public figures on a regular basis?)

### Meanwhile, Back at the Review

As gripping as Bolden and Hill are as leads, accompanied by a fine supporting cast, the real standouts in this cast are the three witches (referred to in the playbill as “the Weird Sisters”). With their wild-eyed antics, movements (dance choreography by Indira Tyler), outrageous hair (wig/makeup design by Tony Valdés), apparel (by costume designer Wendell C. Carmichael) and oh yeah, lest we forget, Shakespeare’s immortal dialogue, Joy DeMichelle, Roshni Shukia and Mildred Marie Langford (who doubles as Lady Macduff) are truly terrifying. With their hair-raising romp, this bewitching trio steals the show, which is at its most memorable when they grace the stage with their enchanting presence; DeMichelle, Shukia and Langford deserve to be well-remembered when award season rolls around. The witches’ prophetic, spellbinding scenes alone are well worth the price of admission and lighting designer Andrew Schmedake conjures up some wicked, spectral, mood-inducing chiaroscuro for them and throughout the play.

So does fight choreographer Ned Mochel, who or-

chestrates duels, fisticuffs and derring-do that are thrilling to behold onstage, in person, up close and personal. (Speaking of which, NOTE TO AUDIENCE: Keep your feet out of the aisles theatergoers, unless you want your tootsies trampled upon by madcap performers racing back and forth from the stage to the rear of the theater.)

Nick Santiago’s projections are professionally rendered, but when they go from gothic architecture and abbeys and castles to New Orleans-type homes with balconies, I was bewildered. Carmichael’s costuming wanders all over the place — from vaguely Scottish Middle Ages garb to suits and ties to confederate uniforms, et al. Maybe a sly wink to the Civil War is apropos given the factional infighting and warfare of Macbeth, but really, the reason why whoever adapted the SCOTTISH (not Dixie) play in such a way is lost on this puzzled reviewer. Maybe I’m just not smart enough to get it, but really, these affectations were just theatrical distractions to moi. This was neither a modern dress Macbeth or period piece per se — pretty confusing. (The text also seemed pared down and the order of some scenes rearranged.) When the drama is so thematically relevant, it doesn’t seem necessary to jazz things up (that reminds me, yes, there’s also jazz music; Jeff Gardner is the sound designer) in order to attract ticket buyers to the umpteenth Macbeth.

Having said all that, despite these quibbles, ANW’s “Macbeth” provides a bone rattling, thought provoking night (or matinee!) at the thee-a-tuh, and I was really glad I saw it. Bravo! At the end, I wondered about how, like mad King Macbeth (and Pres. McKinley), King Donald and his marauding crowd will get their just desserts when modern Macduffs (Ben Cain) and Malcolms (Randolph Thompson) rouse the masses to save us from what Malcolm denounces as “the snares of watchful tyranny”?

A Noise Within presents “Macbeth” on Thursdays, Fridays and Saturdays at 7:30 p.m., with 2:00 p.m. matinees on Saturdays and Sundays through March 9 at 3352 E. Foothill Blvd., Pasadena, CA 91107. For info and tickets: [www.anoisewithin.org](http://www.anoisewithin.org); (626)356-3121. Free parking is in an adjacent garage.

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

## EDGE OF SPORTS

### The Revolution Against Oligarchy Has to Start Somewhere — Why Not the Luka Doncic Trade?

*We should support the nonviolent anger directed toward Miriam Adelson, the billionaire owner of the Dallas Mavericks. And not just because of her terrible basketball decisions.*

By DAVE ZIRIN

If this is not a microcosm of our times, I don’t know what is. In Dallas, there are demonstrations, vandalism, and people getting accosted and removed from a publicly funded venue by private security. Much of the anger is aimed at a true oligarchic villain: Miriam Adelson. She made her money by marrying current corpse/former international casino magnate Sheldon Adelson. In the spirit of Sheldon, she gave \$100 million to Donald Trump and then helped to throw him a lavish inaugural ball. What Miriam seems to want for her money is for Trump to ethnically cleanse Palestinians from the West Bank and Gaza. That’s her passion: removing Palestinians from their land and creating a greater Israel from the river to the sea. When Trump speaks of Gaza as a new “riviera” being populated by luxury hotels, this is one of the people who would likely be building them. Her every step deserves to be disturbed by protest.

Yet these demonstrations are at the American Airlines Center, the arena of the National Basketball Association’s Dallas

Mavericks. Adelson bought the team from liberal billionaire-darling Mark Cuban and then proceeded to trade the face of the franchise, Luka Doncic. The beloved Luka—Cuban once said he would sooner divorce his wife than trade Doncic—is 25 years old, one of the three best basketball players on Earth, and he just took the team to the finals. The week before the trade, he bought a house in Dallas as a show of love for the city and his desire to put down roots in his adopted home. Maverick fans were besotted by him.

But on Feb. 1, the team traded Doncic in the dead of night to the Los Angeles Lakers. Doncic, the five-time first-team All-NBA player (at 25!), was shocked and devastated. The team, in the words of guard and team leader Kyrie Irving, was “grieving.” The fans were punched in the stomach. The basketball world struggled to understand it. But, instead of acknowledging the pain and thanking Doncic for his service, the team kicked him on his way out the door. They said he was so out of shape and, through his lassitude, so toxic to the “culture” that it couldn’t count on him to be healthy or the kind of leader who could win a championship. Again, this team went to the finals last year.

The basketball world heard this critique about Doncic’s personal habits and were floored. NBA stars have always had their less than stellar personal habits overlooked, because they put the butts in the seats. Larry Bird drank more beer than the cast of *Cheers* and had the muscle tone of veal. Michael Jordan gambled recklessly and smoked cigars like he was Fidel Castro. Shaquille O’Neal would wait until the season ended for minor surgeries so he could have time off and not ruin his summer. Superstars get leeway—it’s the way it’s always been. Fans, journalists, and front-office executives could not stop howling, “Make it make sense!”

Also, the team didn’t even do what’s called a sign-and-trade, in which it would have actually told Doncic that it was going to send him to Los Angeles, then signed him to a “supermax” contract, and then traded him. That decision cost him an ungodly amount of money (only the team that you are currently on when receiving All-NBA

honors makes you eligible for the supermax). This gifted the hated Lakers financial flexibility for additional roster moves.

The trade felt like it came out of spite, not from a basketball decision. But even if you give the Mavericks’ executives the benefit of the doubt and concede that they felt Doncic’s body would break down and they just wanted a star who could be counted on to be on the court, it made no sense to trade him for forward/center Anthony Davis. The almost 32-year-old Davis is an incredible talent, but his nickname around the league is “Mr. Glass” because he spends so much time injured. Sure enough, in the third quarter of Davis’s first Mavericks game, Davis got a noncontact abdominal injury and will be out for at least a month, dooming the Mavericks’ season. It was immediate confirmation of everyone’s fearful prediction and raised again bitter questions of the logic of trading Doncic for Davis on the grounds of durability.

Most of the blame initially fell on Nico Harrison, the Mavericks’ general manager who, due to threats, has had to beef up his personal security. (The team fed “insider” reporters the info that these were death threats, but the police have said no such threats have been formally reported.) But in the last few days, the anger has shifted toward Adelson. As people try to make sense of the nonsensical, people are embracing a conspiracy theory that makes more sense than the team’s official logic. The speculation is that Doncic was really traded to demoralize the fan base so that Adelson could move the team to Las Vegas and make them the centerpiece of one of her tacky casinos. Or at least, with Vegas as a viable option, she could put pressure on the Texas state legislature to make casino gambling legal and hand her huge sums of public money for her new Dallas gambling police.

The rumors are so high-pitched that Adelson’s son-in-law—a hoops-know-nothing overseeing the team named Patrick Dumont—has been going to games and sitting next to Eric Johnson, Dallas’s greasy Republican mayor who switched parties after winning reelection. Dumont knows so little about hoops he gave an interview to the press slamming Doncic, saying the basketball superstar didn’t have the personal dis-

cipline of the players from his youth: like the aforementioned Bird, Jordan, and Shaq.

Davis’s injury has injected the rage with steroids. Kyrie Irving said, “I think it has graduated from, just like, hate to anger. It’s the cycle of emotions.”

Fans have been showing up to games with signs or T-shirts with a now-iconic image of Miriam Adelson with a clown nose, and they are being physically removed from games. Even showing up on the jumbotron during a kiss-cam and mouthing something against Adelson or Harrison will get security to kick you out. Meanwhile, “the people’s billionaire” Mark Cuban was caught standing up and loudly cursing at fans for chanting against Adelson and Harrison and had the hecklers removed. (After an outcry, the team is saying it will change this policy. We shall see.)

So let’s look at what we have: anger at one of our scummiest billionaires; the billionaire’s hired security throwing people out of the arena; the “liberal” billionaire who sold her the club standing with his corrupt class and castigating fans; and what seems like a bottomless well of righteous fury. I can understand the confusion outside the world of basketball: In a time of rising fascism, people are yelling at one of Trump’s bankrollers, but it’s over a basketball trade! I get it. Nevertheless, we should support—and stoke!—this nonviolent anti-Adelson rage. Yes, there are a lot of steps between wanting Doncic back in a Mavericks uniform and a revolutionary challenge to the oligarchs ruining this country and destroying the planet, but it’s on the same staircase.

*Dave Zirin is the sports editor at The Nation. He is the author of 11 books on the politics of sports. He is also the coproducer and writer of the documentary “Behind the Shield: The Power and Politics of the NFL.” Email [edgeofsports@gmail.com](mailto:edgeofsports@gmail.com)*

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## AMY GOODMAN



80 years after the end of World War II, President Donald Trump is accused of tearing down the international order that has prevailed since then.

## Dark Shadows of Fascism Over Germany and the U.S.

“Nothing is more dishonorable for a civilized people than to let itself be ‘governed’ without resistance by an irresponsible clique of rulers devoted to dark instincts.” These words open the first communiqué of the White Rose, a collective of young Germans in Munich, including brother and sister Hans and Sophie Scholl, clandestinely opposing the Nazis.

They issued six pamphlets from 1942-43, exposing the mass extermination of Jews, Roma and others and calling for resistance. They wanted to ensure that, after the war, Germans couldn’t say they didn’t know about Nazi atrocities. They ended their fourth pamphlet with the words, “We

will not be silent.”

The Nazi Party was founded in Munich. One hundred years ago this week, on February 27, 1925, Adolf Hitler delivered a speech to 3,000 people in a Munich beer hall. Just out of prison for his role in a failed coup, Hitler was relaunching the party and cementing his role as its unquestioned leader.

Now, 80 years after the end of World War II, President Donald Trump is accused of tearing down the international order that has prevailed since then. This was apparent last month at the Munich Security Conference (MSC), where Vice President JD Vance gave a speech widely viewed as an ominous harangue against the long-standing refusal by European democracies to engage with far-right parties in their respective countries.

“You cannot win a democratic mandate by censoring your opponents or putting them in jail,” lectured Vance, ignoring that his Republican Party is the one known for chanting, “Lock her up!” or “Lock him up!” at so many rallies. Vance then attacked racial and ethnic minorities — not a good look in the city where Hitler got his start:

“No voter on this continent went to the ballot box to open the floodgates to millions of unvetted immigrants ... all over Europe, they’re voting for political leaders who promise to put an end to out-of-control migration.”

Earlier, Vance toured Dachau, the earliest concentration camp set up by the Nazis, in 1933, first used to imprison the Nazis’ political opponents, then for Jews and other targeted minorities. He also met with Alice Weidel, the leader of Germany’s far-right party Alternative for Germany, or AfD.

Once consigned to the fringe, AfD is expected to place second in Germany’s Feb. 23rd elections. In January, Elon Musk, who many describe as Trump’s co-president given the power he wields while gutting the federal workforce, provoked outrage in Germany when he appeared virtually at an AfD rally.

Former Greek Finance Minister Yanis Varoufakis explained on the Democracy Now! news hour, “Alternative für Deutschland, the Alternative for Germany ... It would be wrong to call it a Nazi party or a neo-Nazi party. It would be right to refer to them as another conservative, racist, xenophobic party which alludes to the dark era of the Nazi period.”

Varoufakis was in Munich for protests against the MSC and NATO. He cofounded MERA25, a political party active across Europe.

Melanie Schweizer, a MERA25 candidate for the German parliament, was also in Munich for the protests.

“The situation in Germany at the moment is really dire. There is a blatant attack on freedom of speech, freedom of assembly,” Schweizer said on Democracy Now! “We see a dismantling of the rule of law in Germany, a crisis of democracy. We really very much fear the upcoming elections...that this might be the last election before fascism, because the center parties, especially the Social Democrats, the Green Party, also the Left Party — they have taken over the rhetoric of the far right — not just the rhetoric, but also the policies.”

Schweizer is a human rights attorney who has spoken out in defense of Palestini-

ans, for which she has been targeted by Germany’s rightwing media and dismissed from her government job.

Francesca Albanese, the UN Special Rapporteur on the Occupied Palestinian Territories, was supposed to speak last month at the University of Munich, but her talk was cancelled due to its “political orientation.” The student group that invited Albanese called it “yet another case in which an urgently needed academic discourse on the serious situation in Israel/Palestine is being denied in Germany.”

Hans and Sophie Scholl were distributing the White Rose’s sixth leaflet at that same school, the University of Munich, which they attended, when they were caught and arrested on Feb. 18, 1943. Four days later they were tried, convicted, and beheaded, with another White Rose activist. Others were rounded up and executed in the following months. Most of them are buried in Munich’s Perlacher Forest Cemetery. JD Vance would have been better served by a reflective visit there, rather than meeting with the AfD.

As the US drifts closer to authoritarianism, the words of Hans and Sophie Scholl and the White Rose collective remain vital: We will not be silent.

*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.”*

## Are You Ready To Believe In What’s Possible? There’s a Podcast for That.

By BONNIE JEAN FELDKAMP

Shortly after the election, I decided to refocus my column. Instead of contributing to the vitriol found in much of the public discourse, I want to carve out space dedicated to shining a light on the people doing good work to help make this world a better place. I’m holding space for good. It’s what I’m calling my column going forward.

This is the perfect time to formally announce this change, because the person I want to share with you is a kindred spirit in this way.

I first met Dan Peters, or “Dr. Dan” as he is known, as a guest on his Parent Footprint podcast a few years ago. He interviewed me about my back-to-school column series on mental health. Now, after 330 episodes, Dr. Dan has also shifted focus for a new podcast called “Make it a Great One with Dr. Dan.”

After listening to the first episodes featuring people with incredible life stories, it was my turn to interview him. I wanted to know Dr. Dan’s story.

Dr. Dan, who holds a doctorate in clinical psychology, is a psychologist and executive coach as well as the executive director of the Summit Center in San Francisco. But he began his life as an intuitive child and empath. He was someone who had a knack for seeing the potential in people and situations. He was the friend who wanted “to make sure that everyone in the group was OK,” he said. Children, especially boys, are rarely taught that this kind of sensitivity is an asset.

The flipside of seeing potential in others is grappling with disappointment. “I was very idealistic,” Dr. Dan said, which meant he also had to learn that even if you want to be helpful, it doesn’t mean other people want your help. You can’t make people see what you see and expect them to match your intensity or live up to what you envision. That’s a hard space to navigate as a child.

Interestingly enough, tennis gave him focus for his abilities. He developed into a stellar player but also a great mentor for kids at tennis camp. Because of Dr. Dan’s intuitive abilities, he could recognize his fellow players’ talents as well as who they were as

people. He said, “I could tell who had talent but was lacking the grit.” Dr. Dan would compete accordingly and was drawn to those kinds of situations.

It wasn’t until college that he discovered psychology, and those classes just clicked for him. Around the same time, talk radio shows offering advice to callers such as “Ask Dr. Ruth” and the hit television show “Frasier,” centered around a psychiatrist with a radio show, were really popular. These spoke to him. He remembers thinking he’d love to have a career like that someday but had no idea how. What he did know was that he wanted to have a job where he got paid to be himself.

It was a college counselor who suggested he become a psychologist. “Through that guidance,” Dr. Dan said, “I started on this path, and it just took hold of me.” So the idealistic child who could see what was possible built a career out of helping people reach their fullest potential by being exactly who he is.

Listening to his new podcast, “Make it a Great One with Dr. Dan” feels like a wonderful celebration of self-actualization. Through incredible examples of the human experience, Dr. Dan inspires listeners to see what can happen when we believe in our

potential and dare to dream.

Many of us feel overwhelmed these days, and the tendency can be to disconnect and pull away. Dr. Dan encourages us to remain open to possibility and instead truly be the change we want to see, because change is happening, and real change is an inside job.

“It’s about living authentically,” he said, “trying to express our true selves, what we’re here to be — our potential, possibility, purpose.” Dr. Dan also stressed that one’s purpose doesn’t need to be found in your job, either. Just “get in touch with what drives you, what motivates you,” he said, “and give yourself permission to step into it.”

I’m stepping into it with this column. I hope you’ll join me.

Listen to Make it a Great One with Dr. Dan wherever you listen to podcasts. Learn more about Dr. Dan at DrDanPeters.com.

*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 at <https://www.youtube.com/bonniejeanfeldkamp>.*

## Dispatches ...

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the values and integrity they were built upon.”

Patel congratulated Bongino, whom he called a “warrior.”

“With Pam Bondi as our new attorney general, we are assembling a team focused on restoring public trust, upholding the rule of law, and ensuring justice is served,” Patel said.

The Bulwark reported that the FBI Agents Association issued a memo implying that Patel broke a commitment he made to appoint “an on-board, active special agent” as deputy director, “as has been the case for 117 years.”

Critics lambasted Patel’s pick, with progressive podcast host David Pakman writing on the Bluesky social media site, “We’re so screwed.”

Adam Goldman and Devlin Barrett wrote in *The New York Times*: “The combination of Mr. Patel and Mr. Bongino will represent the least experienced leadership pair in the bureau’s history. It is also all but certain to prompt concerns about how the men, who have freely peddled misinformation and embraced partisan politics, will run an agency typically insulated from White House interference.”

Some critics expressed fear Trump will use Patel and Bongino to attack political opponents.

**POSTAL WORKERS PROTEST ILLEGAL TRUMP TAKEOVER SCHEME.** Postal workers and labor movement allies rallied in Washington, D.C. Feb. 24 to protest Donald Trump’s reported plan to seize control of the independent Postal Service, a move that could pave the way for full privatization of the country’s mail operations, Jake Johnson noted at Common Dreams (2/24).

The rally was organized by the National Association of Letter Carriers (NALC), which said Trump’s proposal to bring the Postal Service under the purview of the Commerce Department is “unconstitutional and illegal.”

“The 295,000 active and retired members of the National Association of Letter Carriers have a message to deliver to the White House: Hands off the Postal Service,” the organization said in a statement after the *Washington Post* revealed details of the executive order Trump is reportedly preparing to sign.

“I want all of my postal worker brothers and sisters to know, this has nothing to do with your performance,” Fredrick Redmond, secretary-treasurer of the AFL-CIO, said at the protest. “This has nothing to do with you as workers. You provide the highest level of service to the American people.”

“This is about an unmitigated consolidation of power by this administration, power to put more money and more resources in the

hands of the billionaires as opposed to spreading the wealth amongst the people who create the wealth every day,” Redmond added.

The rally followed protests over the weekend in Portland, Ore., where postal workers voiced concerns about the future of the USPS under Trump’s leadership.

“People in rural areas wouldn’t be able to get their medications that they depend on, they might not get mail at all, if it’s privatized,” Jae Burlingame, a longtime mail carrier, told a local media outlet Feb. 23.

According to the *Pbst*, Trump is weighing an executive order that would terminate every member of the Postal Service Board of Governors and absorb the USPS into the Commerce Department, which is led by Trump-appointed billionaire Howard Lutnick.

Trump said Feb. 21 Lutnick was “going to look at” potential USPS changes and touted the billionaire’s “great business instinct.”

The Postal Service is currently self-funded, relying on the sale of postal services and products, such as stamps, rather than tax revenue.

CNN noted Feb. 21 that “other countries have privatized their postal services in the past. But a plan to privatize the 250-year old service that predates the formation of the United States could dramatically change the way Americans receive deliveries, and even

who would be able to get service.”

“Current law requires the USPS to deliver to all addresses, even rural ones that are too costly for a private business to serve profitably,” the outlet added. “Even many online purchases handled by private companies such as United Parcel Service depend upon the Postal Service to handle the ‘last mile’ of delivery to homes.”

Christy Hoffman, president of the UNI Global Union, said “we have seen the perils of privatizing postal services in Europe, which have led to reduced services, increased prices, job losses, and cut off rural communities where it is unprofitable to deliver mail.”

“Instead of privatizing USPS,” Hoffman added, “Trump should be supporting the Postal Service to seize opportunities in e-commerce, expand services, particularly to marginalized and remote communities, and safeguard a precious, public-owned, communication network that is ultimately irreplaceable.”

In a letter to the U.S. president over the weekend, a group of Democratic lawmakers led by Rep. Gerry Connolly (D-Va.)—who attended the rally—warned that the “unprecedented and reckless plan to dismantle the Postal Service as an independent agency would directly undermine the affordability and reliability of the U.S. postal system.”

*Continued on next page*



# Democrats, Don’t Save Trump From Himself

*Republicans have the votes. The minority party ought not give them a single one.*

By DANA MILBANK

So, here’s a shocker: It turns out that, if you elect a felon as president of the United States, he will continue to break laws once he’s in office.

Who knew? Ultimately, it will be up to the courts to determine which of President Donald Trump’s actions are illegal. But a case can be made — indeed, many cases already have been made in federal courts — that the new administration over the course of the last fortnight has violated each of the following laws. See if you can say them in one breath. In reverse chronological order of first enactment:

The Protecting Americans from Foreign Adversary Controlled Applications Act of 2024. The Administrative Leave Act of 2016. The Federal Information Security Modernization Act of 2014. The Affordable Care Act of 2010. The Foreign Affairs Reform and Restructuring Act of 1998. The Religious Freedom Restoration Act of 1993. The Computer Fraud and Abuse Act of 1986. The Inspector General Act of 1978. The Privacy Act of 1974. The Impoundment Control Act of 1974. The Rehabilitation Act of 1973. The Federal Advisory Committee Act of 1972. The Immigration and Nationality Act of 1952. The Administrative Procedure Act of 1946. The Public Health Service Act 1944. The Antideficiency Act of 1870.

That’s a century and a half of statutes shredded in just over two weeks. And those don’t include the ways in which Trump already appears to be in violation of the Constitution: The First Amendment’s protections of free speech and association; the Fifth Amendment’s guarantee of equal protection and due process; the Eighth Amendment’s prohibition against cruel and unusual punishment; the 14th Amendment’s promise of birthright citizenship; Article I’s spending, presentment, appropriations and bicameralism clauses; Article II’s take-care clause; and the separation of powers generally.

“The Trump administration so far has been the Advent calendar of illegality,” says Norman Eisen, whose group, State Democracy Defenders Action, has been filing lawsuits against the administration. At least seven federal judges appointed by presidents of both political parties have already blocked Trump’s moves to freeze federal funding, end birthright citizenship, extend a dubious buyout offer to government employees and deny treatment to transgender inmates.

Benjamin Wittes, who runs the popular Lawfare publication, predicts that, of the dozens of instances in which Trump is in conflict with existing law, he will ultimately lose 80% of the cases when they eventually arrive at the Supreme Court after 18 months or so of litigation. But that’s a long time to wait while the president’s lawlessness causes chaos and suffering. And even if the pro-Trump majority on the Supreme Court hands him a victory only 20% of the time, that could still fundamentally reshape the U.S. government, reducing Congress to irrelevance.

Republicans in Congress have for years

asserted their Article I authority, and they howled about encroaching dictatorship when President Joe Biden did nothing more nefarious than forgive student-loan debt. (The Supreme Court struck that down.) So what are they doing about Trump usurping the powers of Congress? They’re applauding.

Sen. Thom Tillis, a North Carolina Republican, acknowledged that what Trump and Elon Musk are doing to cut off congressionally mandated funding “runs afoul of the Constitution in the strictest sense.” But, he told reporters this week, that’s “not uncommon” and “nobody should bellyache about that.”

House Speaker Mike Johnson, at a news conference Feb. 4, was asked by Fox News’s Chad Pergram about the “inconsistency” of Republicans who are now “ceding Article I powers to the executive branch under Elon Musk.”

“I think there’s a gross overreaction in the media,” Johnson replied, with a forced chuckle. He admitted that what Trump is doing “looks radical,” but went on: “This is not a usurpation of authority in any way. It’s not a power grab. I think they’re doing what we’ve all expected and hoped and asked that they would do.”

These are not the words of a constitutionally designated leader of the legislative branch. These are the words of a Donald Trump handmaiden. And it is time for Democrats to treat him as such.

Democrats have been negotiating in good faith on a deal to fund the government for the rest of fiscal year 2025; the government shuts down on March 14 if funding isn’t extended. There’s no doubt that Rep. Tom Cole (R-Oklahoma), chairman of the House Appropriations Committee, and Sen. Susan Collins (R-Maine), chairwoman of the Senate Appropriations Committee, are also negotiating in good faith.

But the whole thing is not on the level. Trump has shown that he will ignore the spending bills passed by Congress and fund only those programs he supports — the Constitution, and the law, be damned. And Johnson has made clear that this is “what we’ve all expected and hoped and asked that they would do.”

In a letter to his Democratic colleagues in early February, House minority leader Hakeem Jeffries said he told House GOP leaders that Trump’s efforts to cut off programs funded by Congress “must be choked off in the upcoming government funding bill, if not sooner.” But even if Democrats extracted from Republicans language in the spending bill that the programs must be funded as Congress specifies, Trump has already made clear that such a law wouldn’t be worth the paper it’s written on. And Johnson made it clear he has no intention of obliging Democrats with such a guarantee anyway; he said at his Feb. 4 news conference that Jeffries’s letter “laid out the foundation for a government shutdown.”

Clearly, there is no hope of good-faith negotiation with Trump, or with Johnson. Republicans control the House, Senate and White House. Let them pass a 2025 spending bill on their own. Let them raise the debt ceiling on their own. Let them enact Trump’s entire agenda on their own. They have the votes. Democrats ought not give them a single one.

Good parenting uses the idea of “natural consequences”: If your child refuses to wear her coat, let her be cold for the day. Either way, the voters will provide the consequences: FAFO. Trump knows what this means: He posted a picture of himself next to a FAFO sign, to deliver the message to Colombia’s president during their recent deportation standoff.

Democrats, by withholding their votes,

will be giving Trump and Johnson some good parenting. Republicans can shut the government down. Or they can enact the sort of devastating cuts to popular programs that they like to talk about. Either way, the voters will provide the natural consequences.

The third week of the Trump presidency has been just as chaotic as the first two. Trump, who won the 2024 election promising to end wars and to put “America First,” now proposes to take over Gaza and to spend American taxpayer dollars to dismantle bombs and make it a “Riviera” on the Mediterranean. (He later clarified that Israel would handle the forced resettlement of the 2 million Palestinians there — “people like Chuck Schumer” — and then cede the Palestinian land to the United States.) The Trump-appointed chairman of the Federal Communications Commission is using his agency to assist Trump in his personal vendetta against CBS News, forcing the network to hand over unedited tapes of an interview with Kamala Harris that are the subject of a lawsuit Trump filed against CBS. Funding was shut off to some Head Start programs for preschoolers. And the administration, though it isn’t deporting any more migrants than the Obama administration did, stepped up efforts to humiliate them and is now sending deportees to Guantánamo Bay.

Meantime, the world’s wealthiest man runs amok through the federal bureaucracy, and he appears to have access to private records of all Americans and highly classified information, such as the identities of CIA operatives. He is reportedly doing this with a group of unvetted men in their early 20s — as well as a 19-year-old heir to a popcorn fortune who recently worked as a camp counselor. Musk, though he seems to be running much of the country, has exempted himself from all government disclosure and ethics requirements. But fear not: If Musk, whose companies get billions of dollars in federal contracts, “comes across a conflict of interest,” said White House press secretary Karoline Leavitt, he will — Scout’s honor — recuse himself. The administration’s attempt to induce federal employees to take a legally dubious buyout came in the form of an email with the same subject line — “fork in the road” — that Musk used to drive Twitter employees to quit. The South Africa-born Musk, fresh from his encouragement of far-right extremists in Germany, replied “yes” in early-February to a post on X that said “we should allow more immigration of White South Africans.”

Musk moved to dismiss staff and shut down the U.S. Agency for International Development, which Musk calls “evil.” Maybe that’s because USAID’s inspector general was investigating the activities of Musk’s Starlink in Ukraine. But the administration and its allies rushed to justify the decision — by fabricating propaganda. At the White House, Leavitt told reporters that she was “made aware that USAID has funded media outlets like *Politico*. I can confirm that more than \$8 million ... has gone to subsidizing subscriptions.” Trump inflated the fiction further, to suggest “BILLIONS” went to “THE FAKE NEWS MEDIA AS A ‘PAYOFF’ FOR CREATING GOOD STORIES ABOUT THE DEMOCRATS.”

In reality, \$44,000 of USAID money went to *Politico* over several years — not from “payoffs” or “subsidies” but from officials subscribing to *Politico Pro*, as they did throughout the government (hence the \$8 million). On Capitol Hill, Johnson provided a different fabrication, crediting Trump and Musk for stopping USAID from funding

“transgender operas in Colombia,” “drag shows in Ecuador” and “expanding atheism in Nepal.” But it appears USAID did not fund any of those things.

The willy-nilly cancellation of all foreign aid would end lifesaving programs and various counterterrorism and counternarcotics efforts, dealing a lethal blow to U.S. soft power and driving countries into the arms of China and Russia, while hurting American farmers in the bargain. But it’s not just USAID. Trump and Musk, with their reckless and unfocused attack on federal workers, are raising the likelihood of any number of crises, at home and abroad. Their hollowing-out of the FBI and the Justice Department (with the notable exception of activities targeting Trump critics and migrants) raises the likelihood of a terrorist attack and foreign infiltration, not to mention more crime domestically. Their attempt to drive workers to quit at the CIA and NSA jeopardizes national security. Depleting the ranks of food-safety inspectors and bank regulators poses obvious dangers, as would Trump’s idea of abolishing FEMA. The administration tried to reduce personnel at the FAA — but the Jan. 29 plane crash in D.C. suddenly made it discover we need more air traffic controllers.

Yet Republican leaders on Capitol Hill either salute Trump or look the other way. They confirmed all of Trump’s nominees, including vaccines opponent Robert F. Kennedy Jr. to run the federal government’s health programs; Tulsi Gabbard, who has a bizarre fondness for Russia, to oversee intelligence; and Kash Patel, Trump’s agent of vengeance, to run the FBI.

Senate Majority Leader John Thune (R-South Dakota) said the sort of thing Trump and Musk are doing to USAID is “probably true of any administration when they come in.” Handmaiden Johnson even welcomed the proposed U.S. takeover of Gaza, saying, contrary to reality, that it was “cheered by, I think, people all around the world.”

A few Republicans are raising objections. Collins doesn’t think Musk’s upending of USAID “satisfies the requirements of the law,” and she pronounces herself “very concerned.” But what’s the senator from Maine going to do about it? Apparently, nothing.

That will have to be up to Democrats. The out-of-power party has been bashed in the news media and by progressives for doing too little to stand up to Trump. Then, when Democratic lawmakers protested outside USAID headquarters, they were criticized for doing too much. “You don’t fight every fight,” Rahm Emanuel told *Politico*.

In truth, Democrats have almost no ability to stop Trump, but they do have the power, and the obligation, to stand in lock-step opposition to what the president is doing. Some of them might argue that the only way to protect certain programs, and the vulnerable people who need them, is to cut a deal with Trump and Republicans. But Trump has demonstrated abundantly that he will try to use unconstitutional means to kill off those programs regardless of what Congress does.

But if Democrats can’t stop a reckless president from creating unnecessary crises and harming millions of Americans, they certainly don’t need to give a bipartisan veneer to the atrocity. Let Republicans own the consequences of breaking government. Don’t save Trump from himself.

*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*

Postmaster General Louis DeJoy (another Trump appointee) recently announced plans to step down midway through his 10-year term.

The Postal Service’s governing board is taking the threat of Trump interference seriously enough that its members hired outside legal counsel and instructed lawyers to sue the White House if any board members are removed.

Despite ongoing financial hardships and the fact that on-time delivery has struggled under DeJoy’s watch, Americans still love the country’s public mail system. In fact, according to an August 2024 survey from Pew Research

Center, the USPS holds a 72% favorability rating, only second to the National Park Service (which Trump is also trying to destroy), Alex Samuels noted at Daily Kos (2/22).

### MEDICARE DEFENDERS SLAM ‘OBSCENE’ LOOMING CUTS TO TELEHEALTH COVERAGE.

The announcement Feb. 20 that Medicare will no longer cover many telehealth services starting April 1 prompted elder and telemedicine advocates to urge the Trump administration to continue the provision of vital remote care for millions of Americans, Brett Wilkins noted at Common Dreams (2/21).

According to the Medicare website, “You can get telehealth services at any location in the U.S., including your home” until March 31. Be-

ginning April 1, “you must be in an office or medical facility located in a rural area ... for most telehealth services. If you aren’t in a rural health-care setting, you can still get certain Medicare telehealth services on or after April 1.”

These services include monthly kidney dialysis treatments; diagnosis, evaluation, or treatment of acute stroke symptoms; and mental and behavioral health services, including addiction treatment.

The announcement came as the White House signaled Trump’s openness to slashing Medicare’s budget under the guise of the Department of Government Efficiency’s (DOGE) mission of reducing “waste, fraud, and abuse.”

“Unreal,” economic policy expert Michael Linden said on social media. “We have tril-

lions to spend on tax breaks for the rich and corporations, but we can’t afford to cover telehealth visits for seniors?”

One Trump supporter asked on social media: “Why is Medicare eliminating telemedicine? I’m a senior and find it very convenient. If it’s fraud, figure out a way to prevent fraud. Have calls made over a government app! I want to know why!”

Congressman Ro Khanna (D-Calif.) asked, “What is the rationale for this, other than making life more difficult for many seniors?”

Campaign for New York Health executive director Melanie D’Amigo accused Trump of “killing telehealth for seniors, because many seniors will skip seeing a doctor if they have to go in person.” See more Dispatches at *Populist.com*.



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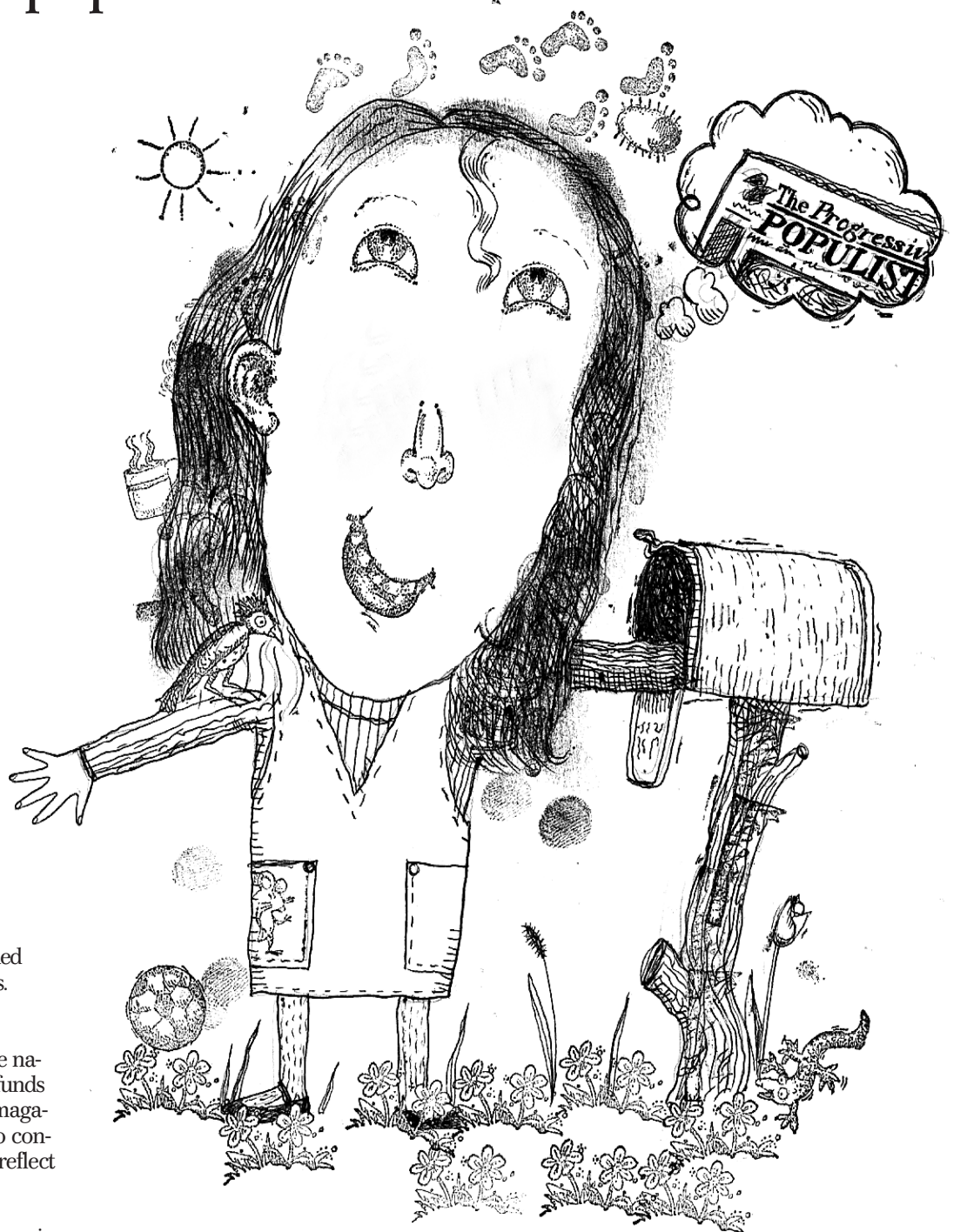
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