

The Sound of Silence: Farewell to Public Media

The Republican Congress letting Trump claw back \$1 billion that had been appropriated for NPR and PBS is the latest attack on the free press.

By HAL CROWTHER

Many years ago, when I was a media columnist for the *Buffalo News*, I hosted an interview program for the local NPR station. My co-host was a tall, attractive Black woman from the Midwest, a star reporter at the *News*. We were products of the same graduate program and clearly shared political views, but we were never a couple, as the newsroom rumor mill suggested. (She told me she had dated White guys and found it interesting, but not promising.) I'm not sure what the station called our show, but we called it, with heavy irony, "Welcome to Buffalo." Because so many of the guests we interviewed — Hell's Angels, gay activists, Black Panthers, AIM warriors from Pine Ridge and Wounded Knee — were so far from welcome in the Buffalo mainstream.

I don't know how we fared in the ratings — we managed to offend some of our colleagues at the newspaper and at least one managing editor — but the show was a real adventure. It achieved its highest drama when we were interviewing the rebel Indians from the Dakotas. One of them had suffered a gunshot wound in a confrontation with the FBI, and in the middle of one of Judy's probing questions our producer raced into the room shouting "Hal! Your sleeve! Look at your sleeve!" I looked down at the right sleeve of my tweed jacket and saw that a slender river of blood from our guest's bandaged arm wound had run across the microphone table and just reached the buttons on my sleeve. The studio was too dark for either of us to notice.

Now that's live radio, right? My news experience up to that point had been mostly on the arts and entertainment side of the business, and this felt a lot closer to the battlefield, to the line of fire. I don't know what the radio audience thought of the wild interruption. Judy gasped audibly, and my guest and I both pushed our chairs away from the blood and the microphones. The interviews continued after some dead air and recorded apologies. The AIM activists were very articulate, and we let them tell their side of the story, of the historic reservation uprising that resulted in the

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AN EDITORIAL

Trump Stain on 'GOP' Won't Wash Out

Republicans in Congress have been unwilling or unable to control Donald Trump as he has pushed the use of executive orders and a pliable Supreme Court that lets him assume dictatorial power.

Out of the box in his second term, Trump asserted executive power unconstrained by the checks and balances of the Constitution. He tried by executive order to restrict birthright citizenship of immigrants' children, disregarding the 14th Amendment. He fired inspectors general in government agencies without providing notice or explanation to Congress and he gave Elon Musk and his unvetted "Department of Government Efficiency" a free hand to take over agency computer systems and fire government workers. And Trump shut down the U.S. Agency for International Development and "paused" grant funding to universities and research institutions.

Lately, Trump has threatened to fire Federal Reserve Chairman Jerome Powell before his term expires in May 2026, for refusing to reduce interest rates, before business leaders warned Trump that would spook the markets. So instead, Trump fired the head of the Bureau of Labor Statistics because he didn't like the jobs numbers she reported Aug. 1. That undermines confidence in future jobs reports.

Trump expanded his plan to control immigration by stepping up the seizure and deportation of undocumented immigrants with expansion of the corps of Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agents. But while he promised to go after the "worst of the worst dangerous criminals," who he says entered the U.S. illegally during the Biden administration, ICE was unable to find enough dangerous criminal immigrants to make their quotas.

As of June 29, ICE statistics show, of 57,861 people detained by ICE, 71.7% had no criminal convictions, and many of the "criminals" were involved in traffic infractions. But Trump had promised to expel millions of migrants in the largest deportation program in American history, so the activity devolved into raids of Latino markets and neighborhoods, where heavily armed, masked agents swarmed in what appeared to be random stops of Brown-skinned people and arrests of those who lacked proper IDs or appeared to be "suspicious characters," many of whom were detained and held for days before they could prove their citizenship.

"President Trump has justified this immigration agenda in part by making false claims that migrants are driving violent crime in the United States, and that's just simply not true," Lauren-Brooke Eisen, senior director of the justice program at the Brennan Center for Justice, told the Associated Press. "There's no research and evidence that supports his claims."

Trump's Department of Homeland Security also targeted foreign nationals, particularly students, researchers and legal residents who lost their student visas and green cards after they were accused of engaging in pro-Palestinian activism, AP reported.

Total ICE arrests shot up at the end of May after White House Deputy Chief of Staff Stephen Miller gave the agency a quota of 3,000 arrests a day, up from 650 a day in the first five months of Trump's second term. ICE arrested nearly 30% more people in May than in April, according to the Transactional Records Clearinghouse, or TRAC. That number rose again in June, by another 28%.

"What you're seeing is this huge increase in funding to detain people, remove people, enforce immigration laws," Eisen said. "And what we're seeing is that a lot of these people back to sort of the orig-

inal question you asked, these are not people who are dangerous."

Trump's preoccupation with tariffs is wreaking havoc on working-class families and small businesses who must absorb the 15% tax Trump arbitrarily placed on European goods, with even higher tax rates on imports from other countries. Trump used tariffs to intimidate foreign nations with minimal consultation with members of Congress, who actually have the authority to set tariffs (but Republicans aren't sticklers about that). While Trump insists the tariffs are a boon for the Treasury, American businesses, not foreign governments, must pay Trump's tariffs and pass those higher along to American consumers, in what amounts to a national sales tax on imported goods. That will increase inflation, with no benefit for American consumers and workers.

The Center for American Progress, on the 35th anniversary of the Americans with Disabilities Act, reported that during the first six months of the second term Trump waged an all-out war against disabled people.

"From executive orders intended to roll back civil rights protections to legislation that cuts key services and support, the disability community has faced structural violence in the form of federal policy. This all comes as the community continues to suffer severe impacts from the COVID-19 pandemic that have resulted in further disablement, isolation, and death. It has even been alleged that President Donald Trump once told his nephew, Fred C. Trump III, that he should let his son, who has "complex" intellectual and developmental disabilities, "just die" because of the cost of care.

Democrats hope to regain control of the House of Representatives, where Republicans hold a slim 7-seat majority next year, with four vacancies, including three seats remaining to be filled after the deaths of Democratic incumbents this past spring, and Democrats are encouraged by polls that show potential voters prefer Democrats over Republicans by an average of 42.7% to 42.2 in a Real Clear Politics average of 10 national polls as of Aug. 11. But those polls motivated Trump to order Texas Gov. Greg Abbott to redraw Texas congressional lines to eliminate five Democratic districts in a special legislative session. That prompted more than 50 Democratic state representatives to leave the state to break the quorum needed to advance the redistricting bill.

Some Democrats fear Trump plans to declare martial law to stop the elections if it appears he might lose control of Congress. Some saw the deployment of California National Guards and active-duty Marines in Los Angeles in June when protesters disrupted ICE raids was a dry run for such a declaration.

In the next step toward authoritarianism, Trump used an attempted carjacking of a former member of Musk's DOGE team as a pretext to take over the Metro Police Department and deploy the D.C. National Guard and the FBI to patrol the streets of Washington Aug. 11, despite D.C. crime rates at a 30-year low. Trump said Baltimore, Oakland, New York, and Chicago are potential future targets for National Guard deployments and "other measures." Facts don't matter.

People should not be intimidated by Trump's overreach, nor despair that elections won't be held. The Constitution makes states responsible for holding elections, not the president. Elections were held during the Civil War, and we're not likely to be anywhere near that level of emergency next year. Also, if elections are not held next year, there will be no House of Representatives, as incumbents' terms expire Dec. 31, 2026. In the Senate, terms of 35 senators would expire, leaving a 1-vote Democratic majority in the next Senate.

Republicans can't risk that. So, in the meantime, progressives need to get organizing, and plan to elect more Democrats. —JMC

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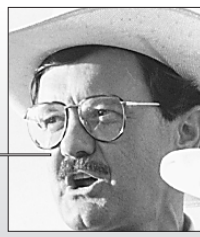
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Cover illustration by Dolores Cullen
See our website at populist.com.

JIM HIGHTOWER



A cabal of corporate elites has lusted to privatize the National Weather Service, to make weather data a corporate profit center. Trump agrees.

Disaster Warning: Profiteers Are Trying To Privatize America's Public Weather Service

From the Lowdown's "Early Political Warning System" comes this Code Red alert (BRRAAAPP) ... a fast-moving front of corporate corruption is sweeping westward from the White House ... (BRRAAAPP) ... Residents are urged to seek higher ethical ground immediately ... (BRRAAAPP).

This is not a test, but a warning of an unnatural disaster: A plutocratic cabal of corporate elites is aiming to gut and eventually eliminate America's National Weather Service! Yes, that's the extensive network of scientific analysts, monitoring systems, researchers, emergency responders, and others trying to anticipate, prepare for, and protect us from the worst of storms, floods, wildfires and other calamities.

In the name of "efficiency," Republican politicians are now defunding and cancelling essential storm warning centers, hurricane monitoring staffs and flood rescue teams. They're even closing some forecast offices at night (as though bad weather checks out at sunset). Why?

Greed. Wall Street profiteers — including President Donald Trump appointees and political funders — have long lusted to privatize the weather service. While no one can control the weather, it is possible to control, commodify, and monopolize the collection, interpretation, and distribution of forecasting data. So, Trump Inc. intends to stop providing these functions as a public service for the benefit of all. Instead, weather data would become a corporate profit center, packaged and sold at premium prices to media conglomerates, insurance giants, private resorts, and others who can afford it.

These privatizing profiteers are shameful. They're deliberately demonizing, destaffing and dismantling a public service that is essential to America's common good — just so they can steal it for their own profit. To rebel against their destructive greed, check out Union of Concerned Scientists: UCS.org

Are You Really a 'Winner' If You Have to Rig the Rules to Win?

If you want to learn how to play the game, boys and girls, forget all that old-fashioned stuff like "do your best," "be a good sport" and "respect the game."

No, no, that's loser talk. Today, the name of the game is winning. You're Number One, or you're nothing, so forget fair play and do whatever it takes to WIN! Of course, the gold medal champion of gaming the system is President Donald Trump, and to see the master in action, look at his current electoral manipulation in Texas.

With only a slim majority in the U.S. House, and with his job-approval rating plummeting, Trump recently realized he's in danger of losing his iron grip on Congress in next year's mid-term elections. Gosh, what to do? Simple — rig the election! And no place is better at that than Texas.

So, Lord Donald ordered Greg Abbott, the right-wing partisan hack who is governor of this once-proud Lone Star State, to convene a special legislative session to re-

draw our congressional districts. Never mind that the districts had already been gerrymandered by Abbott only four years ago. Trump is demanding that voters be herded like cattle into even more convoluted districts. The goal is to oust five Texas Democrats from the House, thus stacking the Congressional deck with more Republicans so he can keep ruling the place. It's political game-playing at its worst, disrespecting voters and the very idea of a House of Representatives.

Of course, there is an honorable way for the GOP to elect more of its own without engaging in political perversion: Stop trying to push far-right-wing nonsense that the great majority of voters don't want. Instead, put up decent candidates who don't need a Trump script to know what they stand for ... and don't need a Trump map to find the district that they supposedly "represent."

Can Feisty Journalists Rescue Their Newspaper from Corporate Greed ... Again?

In 2018 my newspaper died. Well, actually, the emaciated carcass of the *Austin American Statesman* still had a feeble pulse. But its journalistic voice and soul were gone, stripped out by the notorious financial predators of Gannett, the huge media conglomerate that had recently bought the paper.

Happily, though, the *Statesman* has made a near-miraculous recovery, thanks to a small-but-feisty band of actual journalists who believe in local newspapers. They fought Gannett bosses tenaciously, gaining a voice by forming a union, striking and finally compelling the giant to sign a union contract. Victory!

Uh ... not yet. Just months later, Gannett sold the newspaper to Hearst, another massive media conglomerate. This new relationship started well, but soon turned sour when Hearst honchos abruptly refused to honor the paper's contract with the union. Then they began firing employees and jacking around with the newsroom's healthcare and retirement benefits. Adding pettiness to greed, Hearst honchos even refused to let *Statesman* journalists take a holiday that corporate managers get. What the hell?

Bear in mind that Hearst is a phenomenally profitable, \$13-billion-a-year, multi-media behemoth. It's CEO, Steven Swartz, pockets millions of dollars a year and lives in luxury. Also, Austin is a booming media market worth gazillions to Hearst! No need to be so pathetically mingy.

So, the hardy members of the Austin News Guild are back doing what working people do — organizing and mobilizing for a little more justice. "We're no strangers to the petty tactics of corporate elites," they say, so the guild is relaunching its grassroots campaign to battle the bastards, fight for fairness, and protect local news. To track progress, go to: AustinNewsGuild.org.

Trumpsters Say America's History Is What They Say It Is

Has your family visited any of America's phenomenal national parks or historical sites this summer? What treasures they are!

Also, visits to these jewels are enriched by the deeply knowledgeable Park Service staff. And, of course, there's the extra-special bonus that the President Donald Trump regime has added to our public parks this year: Political censorship.

With Trump issuing his dizzying blizzard of right-wing executive orders, you might've missed the one in March commanding the Park Service to scrutinize all of its public exhibits, signs, websites, videos and other materials. Why? To flag and delete any scrap of information that Trump's right-wing cultural cops consider to be "negative" historical content about America or its "heroic" leaders.

Sure enough, the Interior Department's political overseers promptly compelled staff at the Park Service's 433

locations to go on a witch hunt for ideological impurity. In particular, any suggestion that racism, oppression, autocracy and violence have been common features of the American experience has been decreed verboten. And, to assure a thorough cleansing of history, MAGA groups have been invited to go to historic sites and tag items they don't like. Trump operatives say that by mid-September, they will have removed, deleted, or — get this — physically covered up the inconvenient truths of our people's history.

They're like one-year-olds who think if they cover their eyes, we can't see them. Well, peek-a-boo! A rebellious coalition

called "Save Our Signs" is asking grassroots people to take photos and videos of Park Service exhibits before they're hidden away. Then, SOS will display samples of the banned material online so We the People can see the inanity of Trump's 1984ish Newspeak censorship. Link to SOS at jimhightower.com/SaveOurSigns.

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Trump's EPA Canceling Climate Oversight

By FRANK LINGO

Donald Trump's Environmental Protection Agency is trying to rescind its authority over pollutants that cause global warming. According to a July 31 article in *The Guardian*, the "endangerment finding," which was affirmed by the U.S. Supreme Court in 2009, found that greenhouse gases pose a threat to human health, which supported a ruling the court made two years earlier that such gases were pollutants covered under the federal Clean Air Act.

But now the current EPA wants to trash that legal landmark and allow pollutants to flow freely from vehicles, power plants and other industrial sources. This travesty would set environmental protection back more than half a century.

Once the proposal is published in the Federal Register (federalregister.gov), it will have a public comment period, and then face an array of legal challenges. It comes at a time when virtually all legitimate climate scientists (not counting those working for Big Oil) say we are facing catastrophic consequences from climate chaos.

Ain't no converting the unconvertibles. Denial's the response from Republicans with fossil fuel infatuation. They treat everything and everyone like throwaway trash. They motor in their big internal combustibles and wouldn't stoop to running around with svelte electrics. Their phallic smokestacks screw the sky instead of the snowflakes' twirling turbines tickling it.

Will the courts correct course and put us on the path to righteous renewables? Don't bet the farm. When such cases go to the Supremes, expect the Extremes instead.

Extreme corruption favoring corpora-

tions. Extreme tone-deafness to the will of the majority. Extreme denial of the damage to our withering world. Extreme pandering to the most despicable prick ever picked for president.

Besides the terracide waged by the anti-scientific types, there are so many hateful horrible acts that Humpty-Dump has done and continues to do. Every day is a tornado of torture for innocent victims of his vengeance. He's got the fearsome forces of the federal government at his fingertips and no one has ever used it more cruelly.

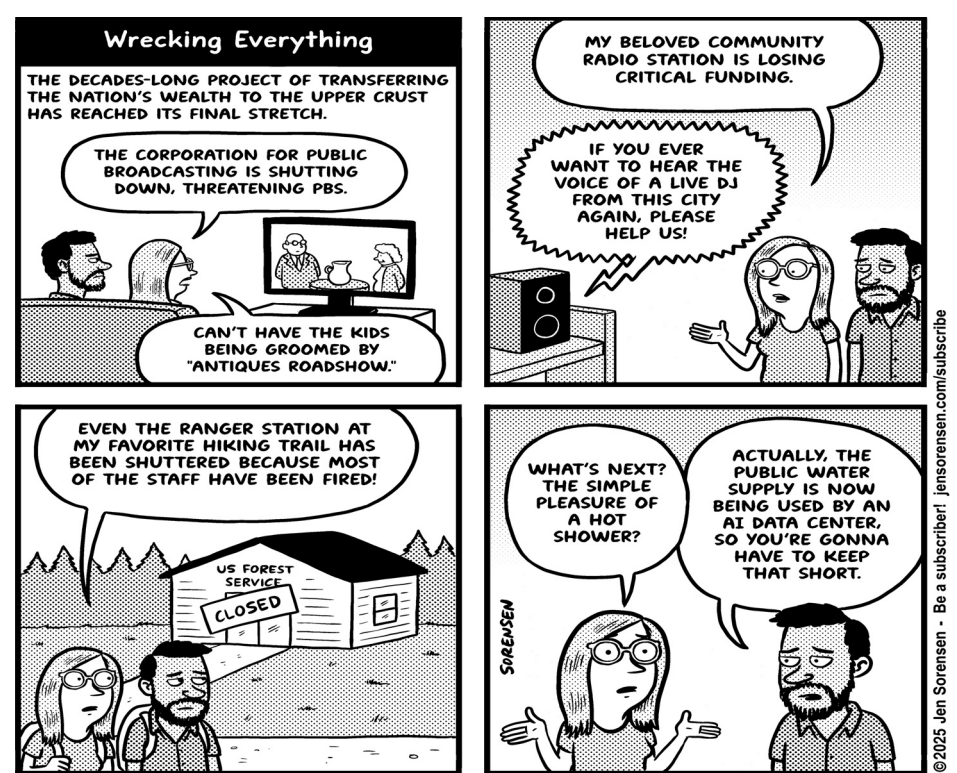
Still, I'm heartened by an outpouring passion from the people. In all 50 states, protesters rally and make good trouble by declaring No Kings. They resist bravely against the Gestapo tactics of ICE, and they've had some successes. Perhaps our collective consciousness can overcome the forces of fascism and free us from tyranny. I'm not being flip. I'm truly hoping and hyping for it. And it has happened before.

It's happened in South Africa. It's happened in Berlin. It's happened in Georgia and it's happened in Ireland and India. People have risen up and risked life and limb with grit and gumption for the greater good. And the will of the masses has prevailed.

We can comfort and encourage each other in this quest. Let's preserve our republic even if others won't. We know how much it matters. We outnumber the bad guys - by a lot. We also have the truth on our side. And friends, truth and action are enough.

Frank Lingo, based in Lawrence, Kansas, is a former columnist for the Kansas City Star and author of the novel "Earth Vote."

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

The Great Sucking Sound

“The three greatest untruths are lies, damnable lies, and statistics.”—Mark Twain

On April 2, a.k.a. “Liberation Day,” Donald Trump launched a tirade against the world outside the US using his doctored Reciprocal Tariffs chart for backup. On it were listed countries he claimed the US had been subsidizing for years. He boasted his new tariff policies would bring trillions of dollars back to the US by relocating foreign production to American soil.

Seriously, “Tariff Man?” Trump again demonstrated his economic incompetence by referring to trade deficits as subsidies. We don’t subsidize countries through foreign trade. Such policies are dictated by the private market, though lawmakers do intervene with restrictions like tariffs, sanctions, and embargoes. If we buy more because of availability and/or price, then we have a trade deficit. If the foreign country buys more, we have a surplus. Simple economics.

MAGA policy wonks fudged the figures to make it appear we were subsidizing the foreign countries, with China at 67%. MAGA supporters took the deficits, then factored in export values. Real tariff figures were not used. Actual economists called the figures “surplus targeting.” Confused? You are not alone.

Why would Trump engage in such subterfuge? Because he knows his MAGA faithful trust every fabrication that pops out of his blowhole. If he can con his idolaters that he won the 2020 election, then they will believe anything.

Our foreign trade deficits, now 50 years old, increased with Ronald Reagan, the first MAGA, who coined the term Trump copyrighted for personal profit. It gained steam under Bill Clinton’s NAFTA, which augmented the foreign exodus of good paying union jobs. Immense profits to multinational corporations, but US plant closings and The Rust Belt here, with bipartisan support.

Only 1992 Reform Party candidate Ross Perot raised serious opposition, condemning “the great sucking sound” of The American Dream vanishing south and overseas.

Zenith was the last US company to make TVs. I purchased one 25 years ago — 50”, around \$1,000. My current TV is 65” and cost \$390. It was probably made in Mexico, where 57% of US TVs are assembled, by line workers making between \$3-\$5 an hour, with far fewer health and safety regulations. India can do it cheaper — and will.

Expect “the great sucking sound” to continue to “trump” any MAGA disingenuous “Liberation Day” statistics. Bipartisan? Not this time.

ED ENGLER, *Sebring, Fla.*

What Republican Party?

The Republican Party was formed in 1853, mainly to oppose the spread of slavery and the states’ rights argument that allowed for it. But since the Civil War was fought and the Union restored, the party has drifted away from being anything like an organization espousing small-r republican values. So much so, that by now one could ask, literally, “who do they think they are?”

If they were to ask me (and they wouldn’t), I would define them as the party of corporate feudalism, or the party of greed, or the party of criminal indifference to human suffering. But what each epithet possesses in accuracy, it lacks in

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A Nation in Decline: Somebody Has to Break the News

By DON ROLLINS

It’s striking, this creeping (and at points creepy) modern day convergence of end-time biblical literalists and empire’s-end political progressives. The two paradigms diverge on almost every conceivable issue, yet agree on one that should rock both worlds: America is going down the crapper. And it’s only gonna get worse from here.

The two traditions, of course, part ways again, but liberals benefit by that unlikely pairing, if only to practice greater clarity about why a true empire is in true freefall.

Leaving the particulars of a literal Armageddonist position for another occasion (you’re welcome, dear reader) its indeed time liberals stop thinking and acting as though America’s brightest days lie ahead. Because they don’t.

And somebody has to break the news. This is no doubt the most difficult mes-

sage imaginable, for polls consistently indicate overwhelming agreement ours is the “greatest country on Earth,” blessed by God. Even though the megatrends suggest America’s weakening, not disappearance from the map, speaking that truth would no doubt initiate death threats.

Still, somebody has to break the news.

To that end, liberal explanations and remedies for America’s tailspin too often buy into the “Tyranny of the Moment” approach to societal decay. It’s a shortsighted, present tense worldview Republicans easily counter by defining progressives as sore losers. Placing America’s decline in historical context will not win over hordes from any party, but the alternative is to play now-only defense while GOP extremists set policies and pass laws quickening our descent into moral dry rot.

Related, Donald Trump alone cannot bear presidential fault for America’s fading empire. Empires rise, empires fall. The causes and symptoms are many, often gradual. Trump fits the bill in every way, but he’s not the first chief executive to fail this country. Once again, context matters.

marketing pizzazz. Most likely they’ll just stick with “Republican” because they are uncomfortable with change, but very comfortable with living a lie.

There was a time, though, when Republicans could sum up their philosophy in a bumper sticker: small government, balanced budgets, less crime. How is that going? The party of small government is micro-managing women’s bodies, voters’ rights, and immigrants’ speech. The party of balanced budgets is crushing future generations with debt that can never be repaid so that billionaires can be spared any responsibility to the society from which they profit so handsomely. And the party of less crime is on a crime wave of massive proportions, excluded from punishment by judicial fiat, presidential pardon, or simple refusal to prosecute. The rule now is that it’s okay if Republicans do it.

The republic that was our charge to keep could not matter less to the so-called Republican Party. So call them what you will, just don’t expect them to fight for anybody but themselves.

JEFFREY HOBBS, *Springfield, Ill.*

Don’t Make Our Nanny Flee

My granddaughter, Sarah, just graduated high school. She’s a good student, raised by two “mothers” who have given her a bright future. When Sarah was a toddler, her mother worked in a local school. “Maria” was hired as nanny-caretaker. She became Sarah’s second mother. After Sarah started school, Maria continued visiting weekly, as a job, housecleaning for my daughter. She also visited on holidays, not as a job, but as a family member.

Today, Maria stays in her apartment, afraid to drive to housecleaning work. She’s afraid to walk to local markets, because ICE agents are posted on the corner. After living here for over 20 years, she’s returning to Mexico. Her departure breaks our hearts; we’re losing part of our family.

Grandchildren grow up and often move away. Now it’s Nanny’s turn, but not her choice. Trump’s cruel deportations dismember our family, and disintegrate our community.

That just ain’t right.
Stop the kidnappings.
Close the internment camps.
Restore due process.

Freeze ICE!
BRUCE JOFFE, *Piedmont, Calif.*

Patterson’s Love for FBI Shows Is Naïve

Contrary to Mr. Patterson’s effusive and embarrassing praise of the disturbing proliferation of FBI dramas over recent decades, permit this 40-year criminal defense attorney to disabuse readers of such nonsense. The FBI resolutely remains the racist, sexist, Constitution-flaunting organization it was under Hoover; while its perverse manipulation of truth has been refined, its goal remains the same, to manipulate naive Americans with impunity to accept government intrusion as a way of life.

TV shows that bedazzled poor Rob offer a very false narrative that emboldens the FBI as it misleads yet also comforts uninformed viewers who, regrettably, become jurors that just cannot accept how corrupt law enforcement actually is (long before Kash Patel). Simple reminders, they habitually infiltrate advocacy groups to discredit citizen protest and create crime to justify police violence even more today than they did 100 years ago. Our laws permit officers to openly lie to suspects, but any suspect’s untruth is itself a crime.

Your source here has dealt with thousands of law officers and many thousand investigations. Sixty percent of FBI and other law enforcement officers are openly corrupt, almost all the rest are tacitly corrupt, and these percentages are commonly recognized by most colleagues, who include prosecutors, judges, and officers themselves; all that might differ (and that only moderately) is the percentages estimated.

Third, many on the Left mistakenly believe there’s an off-year, Democratic middle-America out there, craving moderation — a claim unsupported by a February Pew Research Center poll indicating 29% of Democrats want their party to move further left, and 22% are satisfied as is. Given those figures, bolder progressives have at least some cushion when the America-love-or-leave-it crowd raises holy hell.

If all this doomsaying sounds exaggerated if not improbable, consider America’s parallels with previous expansive empires. Authors Peter Heather and John Rapley draw concrete comparisons between the fall of the Roman Empire and that of our own.

In their work from 2023, “Why Empires Fall: Rome, America and the Future of the West,” they emphasize the roles sustained economic uncertainties and internal political division play in the demise of an entire culture. Heather and Rapley find at least five identifiable waves of change overlapping the two: Emergence of new global powers; economic instability; government overreach and corruption; broad wealth inequality and; growing coalitions among rival

We all know this is our system, and it is left to the non-professionals to acquire the information and power to change it — or not. When you venture into any area that you obviously have zero familiarity beyond television myth, consider ditching faith in fabrication and getting some facts on your side.

JOHN SAMORE, *Albuquerque, N.M.*

By Any Other Name

According to the dictionaries, “trump” means overbearing falsifier/swindler and is a corruption of *triumph*, fittingly suggesting that the unholy “First” Family’s dumping of “Drumpf” as its official surname might have really been entirely, uncharacteristically veracious. DJT’s whoremaster/casino-operator grandpa plus his grasping racist real-estate cheat pater simply had to generate a creep in his mold. Lying in state always was a proper kismet for the pushiest of politicians, and betrayed MAGAs can only hope to witness it sooner than later.

Speaking now of a banal misnomer, nearly all commentators on both sides of the Atlantic still blithely misguide their audiences when misusing those fictitious monikers, “America” and “Americans.” The extraordinary navigator Amerigo Vespucci deserved a better testimonial, although that paleface no more discovered the incomparable “New World” than Columbus did. Real trumpetry has spread like plague across this land since 1492. As I appraised the drowsy *Weekly Guardian* some 20 years past, all the Inuit, Venezuelans and Patagonians are factual Americans; so are Canucks and Mexicans. No doubt ’twas some dim-witted 17th century English “lord” who firstly forged and yapped that aphoney danger apropos his Negroid slave plantation on the western continent, which that abhorrent profiteer may well never even bothered cruising to. Considering the gruesome chain gang of U.S. administrations’ brazen plunder of so many gullible “sovereign” states’ resources over the last 75 years, it’s no surprise that “ordinary” dopes cannot discern their own society’s imperialist megalomania (evinced by these linguistic howlers) and delusion that “coloreds” don’t belong here. Euros, Asians, Africans, Pacific Islanders must realize that Yankees such as DJT, J. Edgar Hoover or Roy Cohn could never GO HOME truly, since their vile careers some time ago subverted that mere prospect. Yup, it’s a neurotic scam, an antiquated sham, to keep on claiming for the U.S. exclusive ownership of both North and South Hemispheres. That’s a hallucination truly Trumpist — namely, a very mad man’s.

VIRGE MacLEOD, *Bonner’s Ferry, Idaho*

Wastefraudenabuse

“Wastefraudenabuse,” a.k.a. “wastefrausenabuse.” I have been hearing this semantic flash-bang grenade all my life from pols running for office. And guess what? When they got to Washington they did a very good job of rooting it out! Ask Elon Musk. He couldn’t find any. So he just fired thousands of folks and called those salaries that weren’t being paid any longer as “savings. If you fire 200,000 civil servants, you will save an amount of money almost equal to one day’s interest on the national debt. Where the fraud is, is not in the government itself but in the programs and contracts of the federal government. For instance, Medicare fraud is almost a cottage industry in the state of Florida. If you want to find fraud within the government, you need to look in the Internal Revenue Service. The fraud is in the tax returns of the top 1% of income earners. This is an “elephant-in-the-room” fact. There are billions to be mined here. That is why this billionaire Boys Club regime has fired 31% of the IRS audit staff to make sure the fraud is very unlikely to be caught. What happened to the \$88 billion Biden had allocated for the IRS?

KEN ARMSTRONG, *Campbell, Calif.*

or hostile nations.

Most alarming is the political arrogance and self-deceit that hastened the demise of the Roman Empire, just as they are our own. Foreign leaders and nations no longer danced to the tune of Roman emperors, embarrassing them as the tables of power began to turn without their even realizing it. Again, Trump is not the first, but he is the latest.

Today’s high-office liberals earn their money. They function in a continual circus with people no sane nation would bestow even a measure of power — something to remember the next time Democrat turns on Democrat.

Nonetheless, America needs a radical rethinking of its place in the world before the world decides for us. Democrats and other progressives don’t have to shout out that irreversible reality, but they can at least start whispering it.

Because somebody has to break the news.

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RURAL ROUTES/ *Margot Ford McMillen*

Rural Economies Are Frail



Uncertainty over commodity prices due to tariffs and other market concerns, loss of immigrant workers and drought are some of the rural worries.

Just back from a Missouri-to-California car trip and wow the rural community is in trouble ... again ...

Or maybe I should say "in trouble, still."

As we rolled through Kansas on I-70, we saw field after field left unplanted. Some looked like they were tilled but left without cover. Others look like they've been enrolled in CRP, a government program that pays farmers to leave fields fallow but mowed to keep weeds down so they can be used in the future. Some fields just looked like they've been left to weeds.

In fact, according to the American Farm Bureau, Kansas farms have lost 5% of their acreage in the last year—1.3 million acres. Nobody seems to know what exactly is going on, but uncertainty over commodity prices due to tariffs and other market concerns, loss of immigrant workers and drought, including alarm over the dwindling Ogallala Aquifer are some of the worries. Depressing news on farm income has also contributed to folks just giving up and moving to town.

In Colorado, I start looking for my usual delight—fruit stands on the western

slope. And, hallelujah! I was able to find them and stock up. I wasn't positive that the melons, peaches, berries and cherries in the bins were from the farms around there but my attitude is that if folks have a crop failure but work hard to stock their farmstands with fair-priced produce to keep customers coming, more power to them. When the year's good they'll still be in business.

With so much vacant land, and so much wind and sunlight, the plains could become America's energy powerhouses but along I-70 the wind farms and solar farms are few and far between.

Rolling along, as the landscape got rockier, the valleys appeared drier. In fact, the only green fields we saw as we neared the Rocky Mountains were irrigated fields planted in alfalfa. Hay for horses. As a horse lover, I'm OK with keeping them fed. But what happened to the wheat? And then, of course, as the landscape got rockier, the pastures disappear and you wonder how the antelope can make it on a diet of sagebrush. That desert goes on for a couple of states, al-

most until you get to California's central valley where water battles between growers and cities have been going on for decades.

Driving home along I-80, we saw more wind farms, hooray. But the main thing that stuck out, vegetation-wise, was the huge number of dead trees at the edges of fields. Drought and the overuse of chemical weed killers has taken their toll along with the usual bugs and diseases that sweep through when they can take advantage of weakened stock. Emerald ash borer is getting all the ash trees in the nation and even the most dedicated ash tree lovers are finally letting go of the expensive treatments that keep the bugs at bay.

But, in general, I-80 fields looked a little better and maybe, I thought, the loss of farm fields was just my imagination. But, no, waiting in the stack of mail at home was a report from *Successful Farming*. Even though crops are maturing on schedule and look pretty good, Kansas corn acres are down 100,000 acres, soybeans down 140,000 acres, sorghum down 100,000 acres and wheat down 300,000 acres.

Fortunately for consumers, good weather means that production per acre is strong so we'll still be able to chow down on cookies, cakes, gravies and cereals. But here's the thing: Rural America is in deep trouble. Stopping along the way for food and lodging, we could see damage to other industries: Independent restaurants are shuttered, slammed out of business by chains and franchises. Yes, the chains and franchises will pay off for Wall Street, but rural America is the heart of production. Less production on farm fields means less

food and that means more imports, more tariffs, more expense for consumers.

While the agriculture system has its problem, we all depend on it. I am the first to object to large-scale production of ethanol from corn and bio-diesel from soy because there is very little net gain from energy going into the fields in terms of gasoline for tractors and chemicals for the genetically altered crops and I certainly don't like the subsidy systems that has kept those mega-farms in business. But, at the same time, America's expanses should be used for the good.

I was pretty relieved when, returning home, I found my local farmers' markets thriving. Local growers, who produce more edible products than ethanol and biodiesel, are still working small acreages to the benefit of neighbors. I'm also hearing folks talk about planting trees in plots that were formerly un-used or in CRP. Growing trees, the scientists say, is the one sure way we have of capturing carbon dioxide and stalling climate change.

With the old rural economic engines threatened from all directions, supporting our local growers is the best way consumers can guarantee a future of safe, fresh, locally-produced food and energy.

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DISPATCHES

TRUMP DEPLOYS NATIONAL GUARD TO POLICE D.C., SAYS OTHER CITIES MAY BE NEXT. Donald Trump on Aug. 11 moved to deploy the National Guard on the streets of Washington, D.C., while also officially taking over the city's police department, Brad Reed noted at Common Dreams (8/11).

What's more, Trump suggested that this could be a model for other American cities.

As reported by NBC News, Trump said during his announcement on plans to deploy the National Guard in the nation's capital that "other cities are hopefully watching this" and that he hoped it would make them "self-clean up, and maybe they'll self-do this and get rid of the cashless bail thing and all of the things that caused the problem."

Trump then named Baltimore, Oakland, New York, and Chicago as potential future targets for National Guard deployments and other measures.

Shortly after Trump made his announcement, Washington, D.C. Attorney General Brian Schwab indicated that he was not taking the president's attempt to take over his city's police force lying down.

"The administration's actions are unprecedented, unnecessary, and unlawful," he declared in a post on X. "There is no crime emergency in the District of Columbia. Violent crime in D.C. reached historic 30-year lows last year, and is down another 26% so far this year. We are considering all of our options and will do what is necessary to protect the rights and safety of District residents."

Rep. Mary Gay Scanlon (D-PA) was also quick to condemn the president's takeover of D.C. law enforcement as an unnecessary power grab.

"The president's attempt to federalize the D.C. Metropolitan Police Department and deploy the National Guard on the streets of our nation's capital is an abuse of power," she said. "It's an egotistical, pathetic attempt to stoke fear and distract from his failures: America is less affordable, healthy, and safe under this administration."

Minnesota Gov. Tim Walz, who last year served as the Democratic Party's vice-presidential nominee, chided critics who had accused him in the past of exaggerating the authoritarian threat of a second Trump term.

"The road to authoritarianism is littered with people telling you you're overreacting," he wrote on X.

The NAACP, meanwhile, compared Trump's enthusiasm for deploying the National Guard in Washington, D.C. to purportedly battle crime with the lackadaisical attitude he took toward deploying the National Guard when his supporters violently stormed the United States Capitol building on January 6, 2021.

"As a reminder: The same president who proclaims he wants to take back our capital during a historic 30-year low crime rate also couldn't find the National Guard on Jan. 6," the organization wrote.

Politico reported Trump's seizure of the D.C. police is on borrowed time from a legal perspective. While the Home Rule Act gives Trump the power to take control of the D.C. police force for emergencies, this power only lasts for 30 days, after which he must seek authorization from Congress to maintain control.

TRUMP NAMES CLUELESS CRANK TO RUN BUREAU OF LABOR STATS. President Trump announced E.J. Antoni as his nominee to lead the Bureau of Labor Statistics on Aug. 11, after he fired the former commissioner Aug. 1, blaming her for a weaker-than-expected jobs report.

Antoni, chief economist for the right-wing Heritage Foundation think tank, was a contributor to Project 2025, Trump's blueprint for taking over the U.S. government, *Oliver Willis* noted at *Daily Kos* (8/11)

Dr. Erika McEntarfer, a labor economist who was nominated by Joe Biden and confirmed by the Senate in January 2024, was fired by Trump in retaliation for a jobs report showing the job market beginning to stagnate since he began implementing his tariffs, with only 73,000 jobs added in July—far below the expected 110,000. The report also showed downward job number revisions for May and June.

Instead of admitting that he made a mistake or changing course, Trump has pushed a twisted and false conspiracy theory alleging that jobs numbers are being manipulated.

Antoni's candidacy for the top BLS job has the open support of former Trump chief of staff and right-wing conspiracy theorist Steve Bannon.

"EJ Antoni as the new head of Bureau of Labor Statistics. That's what we're pushing," Bannon said on his podcast, on which Antoni previously appeared to call for McEntarfer's ouster.

After BLS released a revised jobs report on the state of the economy in August 2024, Antoni declared that it was the sign of a recession.

"Wall Street is increasingly waking up to the fact that the economy post-COVID has never been as good as the government bean counters claimed, and a recession may have already begun," he told the right-wing *Daily Caller*.

Similarly, after the passage of the American Rescue Plan in 2021, Antoni wrote an analysis arguing that it would cause millions of jobs to be lost.

He was extremely wrong on both counts.

At the end of his 4-year term, President Biden added 16.6 million jobs to the economy after signing several key pieces of legislation to stimulate the economy, including the Rescue Plan, the Infrastructure Act, the CHIPS and Science Act, and the Inflation Reduction Act. Most Republicans—and the Heritage Foundation—opposed those bills.

The economy that Trump inherited from Biden was stabilized after the height of the coronavirus pandemic under Trump and was growing. But now that costs are being artificially increased because of Trump's tariffs, that growth is under significant threat.

Trump's tariffs are already hurting the economy, and now someone who couldn't see economic improvements coming when they were well on their way is likely to lead the Bureau of Labor Statistics.

What could go wrong?

RAIL WORKERS WARN UNION PACIFIC-NORFOLK SOUTHERN MERGER WOULD 'SIMPLY LINE THE POCKETS OF WALL STREET.'

An inter-union U.S. rail coalition on Aug. 11 announced its formal opposition to Union Pacific's \$85 billion bid to purchase Norfolk Southern and any other private consolidation of railroad giants, warning that such mergers serve only to enrich investors at the expense of workers, passengers, and communities across the nation.

Railroad Workers United (RWU)'s steering committee adopted a resolution outlining its opposition to the pending Union Pacific (UP)-Norfolk Southern (NS) deal, noting that rail mergers "have more often than not been fraught with inefficiencies, confusion, service disruptions, clogged terminals, staffing shortages, exhausted workers, and general malaise."

RWU "opposes this UP-NS merger as well as any and all takeovers, mergers, or other combinations of the remaining Class One railroads under the current system of private ownership," the resolution states.

"The only further consolidation of the continent's rail system that RWU would support is one that is publicly owned—how

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FROMA HARROP



The Sydney Sweeney 'great genes' controversy has helped us escape unhinged behavior in Washington, as Trump seeks to distract from Jeffrey Epstein files.

The Sydney Sweeney Jeans Ad Praising Her Genes is Genius

How nice to have the Sydney Sweeney "great genes" controversy. It is happily of no consequence, which is just what we need for escape from unhinged behavior spilling out of Washington.

Donald Trump's sending nuclear subs toward Russia, a likely distraction from his

tangle with Jeffrey Epstein, is something I don't want to think about. Not far behind is his firing the keeper of labor statistics over the less-than-stellar employment numbers she had to report.

Trump's top economic adviser, Kevin Hassett, was on the Sunday talk shows defending that action. "It's the President's highest priority that the data be trusted," he said.

Talk about numbers, Hassett co-wrote a book titled "Dow 36,000." Published in 1999, it predicted the index, then averaging just over 11,000, would approach 40,000 in 10 short years. The Dow didn't reach even 30,000 until 2020.

The polemics over Sweeney's genes have gotten much press, but the heated commentary has yet to hit a homer. It centers on an ad towering over Times Square that has the blonde-haired blue-eyed actress saying: "Genes are passed down from parents to offspring, often determining traits like hair color, personality and even eye color. My jeans are blue."

The wordplay is on "genes" and "jeans," leading some to accuse the American Eagle ad of treading on the disgraced area of eugenics. That is the Nazi-associated concept of selective breeding to improve humankind. Sayantani DasGupta, a Columbia University professor, produced a critical video that

rightly calls eugenics "the pseudoscientific and immoral notion that we can improve the human race." However, she adds more questionably that "a woman of color would not have been hired for this advertisement." She posted the video on TikTok, of course.

Let's discuss. Genes determine such physical characteristics as height, hair, face structure and skin color. If Sydney Sweeney can thank good genes for her good looks, so could Naomi Campbell. She was the ebony-skinned supermodel of the 1990s. Campbell represented such top fashion brands as Versace, Chanel, Yves Saint Laurent, Prada and Burberry.

Salma Hayek, the part-Mexican, part-Lebanese warm-complexioned beauty, is also a possessor of good genes. In addition to her Hollywood roles, Hayek became a spokeswoman for Revlon and an ambassador for Cartier. As to DasGupta's point, the American Eagle ad would have been more interesting had it featured a dark-skinned woman speaking the same words.

There's no doubt that the creators behind the ad campaign for American Eagle knew full well that the genes message would make a stir and get people talking about the product. The advertising agency was cleverly trolling Columbia professors and the social media hordes with some cultural bauble

they would surely jump on.

People magazine dutifully reported that some women criticized the ad for also "catering to the male gaze." It shows Sweeney but-toning up her jeans.

These feminists need not strain their necks looking up at the Times Square billboard. They could look down at street level and note all the women and girls catering to the male gaze via their cleavage and the butt cracks outlined in stretchy shorts. But we don't want to "body shame," do we.

The genes-jeans controversy is so bush league that Trump waited a long time to pipe in about it. That didn't hold back Sen. Ted Cruz (R-Texas). He made a fool of himself on Fox News accusing "the Democrats" of saying that "beautiful women are no longer acceptable in our society."

The many Democrats working for American Eagle or invested in its stock must be thrilled by what these dimwits are doing for sales figures. And thanks from the rest of us for diverting our gaze, however temporarily, from the lunacy that's overtaken our politics.

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

Scratch Where It Itches

By ART CULLEN

Chuck Grassley has a case of the fleas from sleeping with dogs.

The senior Republican senator from Iowa intimated at a Senate Judiciary Committee meeting July 30 that President Trump had hurt his feelings.

The night before, Trump attacked Grassley for not moving his judicial appointments along fast enough. Trump was upset that Grassley would not dispatch so-called "blue-slips," a tradition that allows a senator to scotch a US attorney or federal district court nominee.

"Last night, I was surprised to see President Trump on Truth Social go after me and Senate Republicans over what we call the 'blue slip,'" Grassley said. "I was offended by what the President said, and I'm disappointed that it would result in personal insult."

Trump called the practice a "scam." He was angry because New Jersey's two Democratic senators scuttled the nomination of Trump's former personal lawyer, Alina Habba, to be that state's top federal prose-

cutor.

Trump reposted on Truth Social jabs at Grassley's age (91) and tenure in office.

Amid the swirl Grassley shoved through the appointment of Emil Bove as an appellate judge. Democrats walked out of the Judiciary Committee process, as Bove reportedly had urged the Trump Administration to ignore court orders over deportations.

Grassley found out that his loyalty to the tyrant is worthless. That will not prevent him from standing aside generally as Trump deconstructs liberty.

Senate Majority Leader John Thune, R-SD, stuck up for Grassley and this particular tradition, for the time being. Republicans will appreciate the blue slips should they lose control of the upper chamber.

What should they expect? They have done Trump's bidding every step of the way, and when they get trampled their tears could cry me a river.

Grassley and Trump deserve each other.

Grassley the self-righteous and Trump the self-loathing. Yin and Yang.

What a way to trail into the twilight of what could have been a creditable career, to be an errand boy for a felon who kicks

manure in your face. It's a vision of Hell, to be permanently chained to the blathering beast.

Trump claimed that he got Grassley elected! That deserves an exclamation point because it is the ultimate humiliation for a man who held elected office since 1959.

Grassley puts up with it because beneath the sweater vest beats a heart that lusts for power. He wielded it to block President Obama from appointing a Supreme Court justice — again, doing the lifting for someone else, Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, while soiling his own integrity.

Before that, Grassley sputtered about "death panels" in the Affordable Care Act as he cowered before Tea Party complainers in Pocahontas, Iowa. He was afraid more than anything about losing his grip on power. He would say or do whatever it takes, anytime. He threw in with the biggest fleecer ever to ride down the golden escalator.

Trump suggested that people are laughing at Grassley. Democrats, even. It has to be tough on the poor clodhopper. So tough that he had to take his gripe public. Grassley could flee to the farm to escape the abuse, but he comes back for more. He sweeps up ahead of Bove. Grassley will do his duty by whacking away at the elderly

and disabled through Medicaid reductions and cuts to food assistance. He has been around so long that you don't even notice. He keeps on. Grassley likes wielding that gavel.

It means taking heaps of abuse from a man who was found by a jury to have committed sexual assault, and who was convicted by a jury on 34 felony counts in association with him cavorting with Stormy Daniels.

Go ahead. Be offended. Take umbrage at the insult. Nurse your ego. Let the boys pat you on the back in the cloakroom. Ignore dark prisons without due process for immigrants in El Salvador or Sudan. Never mind losing renewable energy tax credits you authored. Stamp out the National Institutes of Health. Trump may be an ogre but you have to play along.

Suck it up, buttercup, you made your bed with the Big Dogs.

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.

Tea Leaves Are For Tea, Hard Data Is For Hard Choices

By ALAN GUEBERT

Contrary to popular belief, economists don't read tea leaves, and most—like the rest of us—wouldn't know a tea leaf from a spinach leaf.

Economists do, however, gather bushels of hard data on goods like used car sales, imported shoes, and grocery prices to estimate how the U.S. and global economies might react (or "gain insight," as many might say already hedging their predictions) to everyday occurrences like factory closings, crop reports, or new technologies.

Also, different economists can differ on what each other's collective data means. Does it, like in late July, suggest the U.S. Federal Reserve, the global economy's key manager, should nudge interest rates lower to spur more spending or should it hold rates steady to hammer any threat of inflation?

In normal times—whatever that might be—there's no easy answer to that seemingly straightforward question.

Now mix in the politics of today's Trump Administration on trade (whatever that is on any given day), war (no "first day" peace deals in Ukraine, Israel, or Iran are in sight), and government spending (billions in budget cuts, trillions in new federal debt)

and no economist worth their pocket protector would dare to forecast where global economic growth—or recession—will be a year from now.

Here's what we do know, though: The American economy slowed through the first six months of 2025 because, according to economists tracked by Bloomberg, "consumers ... and companies sought to inoculate themselves from the Trump administration's frequent and unpredictable shifts in trade policy."

Farmers and ranchers know this better than just about anyone because few elements in the U.S. economy are as export dependent as ag commodities.

This year's U.S. corn exports show just how upside down the ag export picture is for farmers and ranchers. According to USDA's latest export projections, 2024/25 corn exports will hit a record 2.75 billion bushels despite American sales to China, once a top U.S. corn market, forecast down "a staggering" 79% from just a year ago.

What does it mean to farmers to have record export corn sales without your top customer vacuuming up its usual share?

Just about what you would expect. New crop fall cash corn bids are sinking faster than Chinese corn purchases, well below \$4 per bushel in most corn-growing areas.

In fact, outside of cattle — the U.S. cattle herd hasn't been this small since 1973 — almost all export-dependent commodities like corn, soybeans, wheat, and cotton are either below or well below their year-be-

ginning price. Why?

Again, Bloomberg sees a likely answer in the White House's roller coaster trade policies.

"Because swings in trade and inventories have distorted overall GDP this year," it reported July 31, "economists are paying closer attention to final sales to private domestic purchasers" as a better way to measure how the economy is performing.

That new tea leaf, private domestic purchases, "... rose 1.2% in the second quarter, the slowest since the end of 2022." As such, it noted in quoting an actual economist, "The trend of cooling is very clear ... and growth now appears to be slipping below its longer-term potential pace."

This isn't good news for U.S. farmers. It means USDA's already low, July predictions for 2024/25 season-average farm prices

are likely too high. New estimates will be posted Aug. 12, after this column's deadline, but current estimates (all per bushel, cotton per pound.) now peg wheat at \$5.40, corn at \$4.20, soybeans at \$10.10, and cotton at 62-cents.

That's not great news and worse, the spinach, er, tea leaves say that firing any current federal official won't change any of it.

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. See past columns, supporting documents, and contact information at farmandfoodfile.com



Dishonor, Depravity and Ghislaine's Impending Pardon

By JOE CONASON

When Donald Trump pardoned the Jan. 6 gangsters upon returning to the White House, he proved that he is capable of any depraved act to protect himself. So while everybody should be outraged by the prospect of a presidential pardon for Ghislaine Maxwell, nobody should be surprised. There is no dishonor too low for him.

The 63-year-old Maxwell is the most notorious child predator in the U.S. federal prison system, globally reviled for enabling the sexual abuse of hundreds of young girls by the late Jeffrey Epstein. Sentenced to 20 years in prison for those crimes, she has until very recently languished in a Florida maximum-security prison, as required by federal law for felons like her.

Suddenly and mysteriously, the Bureau

of Prisons moved Maxwell to a shiny new facility in Texas, with far less stringent security and far more comfortable quarters. It provides the luxury version of detention coveted by all the incarcerated guests of the federal system.

Since registered sex offenders such as Maxwell are not supposed to be eligible for a "Club Fed" dormitory, the events leading up to her transfer are highly suggestive of favoritism and even corruption. She was moved without any notice to the public or to her many victims following a series of long, closed meetings between Maxwell and her lawyer and Todd Blanche, the former Trump defense lawyer appointed by the president to serve as deputy attorney general of the United States Justice Department.

As everyone paying attention knows, those meetings occurred amid a national uproar over the Trump administration's continuing coverup of the "Epstein files" — meaning all the information gleaned by the FBI during its investigation of that predator. As rage mounted, even among Trump loyalists, the public has seen increasing indications that Trump himself has much to fear from his own multiple appearances in those files. He might be in even more trouble if his old friend Maxwell, a constant presence

during his long and troubling relationship with Epstein, were to tell what she knows.

Yet with a pardon dangled before her eyes by a Trump defense lawyer wearing a Justice Department badge, Maxwell might easily be induced to forget whatever she knows about the president — or start to "remember" terrible things about his political enemies. When the old Trump Justice Department convicted her in 2019, prosecutors considered indicting her for perjury after she lied repeatedly under oath. This Trump Justice Department has fired Maureen Comey, the professional prosecutor who won Maxwell's conviction, and sent a hack defense counsel to bargain with her.

Julie K. Brown, the Pulitzer Prize-winning reporter who first exposed the Bush Justice Department's 2008 sweetheart deal with Epstein, says that the "survivors" who testified against Epstein and Maxwell feel betrayed — and fear a renewed coverup. There is no conceivable reason to pardon her or commute her sentence, except to save Trump from embarrassment or worse.

"(Maxwell) does know a lot," Brown told Sidney Blumenthal and Sean Wilentz on the "Court of History" podcast in late July. "She was on the ground level of this sex trafficking operation. In fact, some of the

... survivors believe that she, in a way, was a bigger monster than Epstein, because she was the one that made them feel safe. She was the one that brought them in. She used fraud (to attract girls) by saying, 'He's going to hire you, you're going to travel, you're going to be a masseuse.' ... She sort of acted like a motherly nurturing type, you know, English lady with her English accent."

Her false front allowed Epstein to get "a foot in the door" at local high schools and spas, where she scouted the "pretty girls" that she and her wealthy coconspirator would rape, abuse and intimidate. Even the consideration of a pardon for her is appalling — but wholly in character for this president, his Justice Department and the pious hypocrites in his party.

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.

Big Insurance Companies are Fleecing Disaster Survivors — and the Rest of Us

Local and regional insurance companies beat the big guys at serving your community — and the planet.

By CATHY COWN BECKER

The nation's largest home and auto insurance companies say we can trust them, but lately they're behaving far more like villains than heroes.

As the climate crisis intensifies, big insurance companies are protecting their bottom line instead of policyholders. They're canceling policies, raising rates, and refusing to cover claims after major disasters — all while making huge profits from the causes of climate chaos.

Climate disaster damage in the United States has steadily increased, with costs totaling \$187 billion in 2024. Yet instead of covering their customers, big insurance is abandoning them.

State Farm and Allstate have stopped accepting applications for home insurance in California, while Farmers pulled out of Florida and AIG curtailed sales in 200 zip codes across the country.

All told, insurers have dropped over 1.9 million home insurance policies nation-

wide since 2018, a congressional investigation found.

Elsewhere, big insurance is raising rates dramatically. Home insurance premiums have risen by over 40% across the United States over the past six years, according to Lending Tree. This year alone, State Farm raised rates 17% in California and 27% in Illinois.

Even as they raise rates, the same companies are facing mounting complaints for not paying claims months after a major disaster — when they're needed the most.

State Farm is under investigation in California after hundreds of Eaton Fire survivors complained about delay and denial. "Trying to get them to answer our inquiries and reimburse for alternative living expenses is taking all my time and energy," said one survivor who lost their home in January. "It should never be this difficult."

In fact, major insurers are fueling the very climate crisis that's destroying people's homes.

Large insurance companies are also large institutional investors, investing their profits in stocks and bonds — including in the fossil fuel industry. Last year, the property insurance industry made \$25.4 billion from underwriting, but \$164.3 billion — over six times as much — from investments

and capital gains, an analysis from Revolution Door Project found.

Even as the climate crisis renders much of the country uninsurable, the property insurance industry had \$582 billion invested in fossil fuel companies driving the climate crisis in 2019, the most recent year for which aggregate data is available.

As of May 2024, State Farm had \$20.6 billion invested in fossil fuels, according to the German nonprofit Urgewald. USAA, AIG, Nationwide, Allstate, Travelers, Liberty Mutual, and The Hartford have all sunk billions into fossil fuels. By far the largest investor is Berkshire Hathaway, parent of Geico and General, with over \$95 billion in fossil fuels — it's actually the top investor in Chevron.

The resulting profits ballooned insurance executive compensation packages by 30% last year. Forty-two top executives at nine major insurance companies took home a total of \$310 million, with Allstate CEO Thomas Wilson alone making \$26.1 million.

By canceling policies, raising rates, not paying claims, and investing in climate chaos, big home and auto insurance companies have revealed themselves to be anything but heroic.

Fortunately, they've never been our

only option.

Local and regional insurance companies may not be household names, but they're the real deal. They understand the needs of the people they insure and are often part of the communities they serve. These companies are just as financially sound as the big guys. Many have been serving their communities for decades.

Best of all, switching to a local or regional insurance company could save you money, since they don't have multimillion-dollar advertising budgets.

Don't know where to start? Green America, my organization, offers a Climate Smart Insurance Directory. It lists local and regional insurance companies in every state that invest little to nothing in the fossil fuel industry and have a rating of A- or above from AM Best. Find it at GreenAmerica.org.

We deserve better than villains investing in the same dangers they say they'll protect us from. Buying local home and auto insurance may just help you find the real hometown hero you need.

Cathy Cowan Becker is the Responsible Finance Campaigns Director at Green America. This op-ed was distributed by OtherWords.org.

They Would Make Mountains Disappear

By JOHN YOUNG

Not that I live in a chalet. But depending on the angle through the trees, towering Longs Peak is in my backyard.

Actually, it's nearly an hour away, tucked into the back seat of Colorado's Front Range. But 14,259 feet at its summit, across great distances only atmospheric disruptions can shroud Longs' craggy eminence.

We're experiencing one of those disruptions. As I write, and from where I stand, a milky smoke trail from Western wildfires makes Colorado's 13th-tallest peak invisible. The end of fire season, with snow and cold, will clear things up, hopefully.

But civilization has its own seasons.

Right now, a threat to the grandness of all that is America emanates from the White House.

Little people deeming themselves bearers of a divine mandate have seized the Environmental Protection Agency and repurposed it. Call it now the Polluters Protection Agency.

Meanwhile, a puny president with imperial designs has shelved the whole of federally sponsored energy conservation efforts and any of the climate science behind them.

Toward the ruination of the planet, few acts in human history have been as destructive as what EPA administrator Lee Zeldin announced the other day.

The agency will seek to end the fundamental legal principle behind air policy since 2009, the undeniable "endangerment finding" that greenhouse-causing emissions

threaten human health.

Zeldin called its repeal the "greatest day of deregulation in American history."

And the darkest day for our environment.

That the science underlying the greenhouse effect — fact, not a theory — ever became a political matter will mark this as a moment of disgrace for generations to come.

The only logical reason for Republican leaders to challenge the science is the immense influence of the fossil fuel industry which, much like the gun lobby, can elect people who will do exactly what it says.

Seeking his return to power, this president laid his cards on the table a year ago when he told oil executives that for \$1 billion in donations the government could be theirs, and all the benefits accruing.

Whatever obscene sum they ponied up, the returns for industry have been extraordinary.

It's always fascinating to think how encumbered and downtrodden Big Energy is, considering that unlike most commodities, most consumers have scant choice about what the industry offers, whether gasoline, natural gas or electricity.

Coal generation? Yes, it's tough out there. Good reasons for that are ample — mainly the marketplace — considering the mercury, the grime, the planet-killing pollution. Forget that. For this administration these matters be damned. It's coal full-speed ahead.

You'd figure that flipping the switch on matters like these, as this EPA has done, would hinge on exhaustive hearings and public comment. But as *The New York Times* reports, all it took for key polluters was an email to the new EPA in March.

In *Times*-speak, it was "a novel way" for a polluter to escape rules that protect our skies and our lungs: "simply send an email" to the EPA and "request as exemption." And

at least 15 coal-burning power plants, four steel mills and two mines did. Yowza!

Back to health endangerment: Republican toadies of industry may act like carbon dioxide is just a harmless gas, but the particulates and assorted toxins that come with the emissions in question are not.

For that self-evident reason, this horrible policy won't last. Americans want clean air, clean energy. They know that fossil fuels will be tapped out one day. They know a balance of energy options is the future. This administration's fossil-fuels-over-all policies are doomed to be dinosaurized.

For that to happen, we must oust the pawns of Big Carbon. We must get back to our future before scenic wonders disappear into our past.

Longtime newspaperman John Young lives in Colorado. Email: jyoungcolumn@gmail.com.



Cover Story...

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murder conviction of Leonard Peltier. I'd venture to say that nothing like it aired on the Buffalo media that winter.

These memories, imperfect now, were called up by the news that the Trump administration and its captive Congress are in the process of destroying NPR and all public broadcasting, actually "clawing back" a billion dollars they had already been allocated for the next two years. The pretext, of course, is that non-commercial media skew to the liberal side of the spectrum and undermine the sort of mindless see-no-evil patriotism MAGA hopes to standardize. Knowing that, I couldn't help re-examining "Welcome to Buffalo" and our motivation at the time. Of course we were idealistic, which some people would translate to innocent, but at no point did I feel we were being exploited by the underdogs and outsiders we welcomed to our show. We didn't endorse them, we didn't ask softball questions to make them feel more comfortable. We thought our audience, whoever it was, deserved a rare chance to hear them.

No one had ever heard of DEI in those days, though "diversity, equity and inclusion" are all concepts we would have embraced. It's frightening to think, 50 years later, that an American government rejects all three as left-wing propaganda. What we thought we were serving, what we wanted to believe all journalists were serving, was the First Amendment. Free speech?

This was long before shameless partisan broadcasting, before Fox News. But any broadcaster who depends on advertisers has to avoid offending them, which made public media the ideal environment for freestyle micro-projects like ours. Every president, every administration has respected this, to a greater or lesser degree. Until now.

Free press? As part of his retribution campaign, Donald Trump has already filed lawsuits against several networks and even the *Wall Street Journal*, owned by Fox News overlord Rupert Murdoch. In each case it was a particular story, particular language that enraged him. For Donald Trump "free

press" means his free access, as president, to unlimited screen time and air time. But his vendetta against public media will have more fatal consequences than his quarrels with CBS or Murdoch. NPR and PBS were never more vulnerable, as the internet continued to upend the information ecosystem. Public media faced a hostile government that controlled the purse-strings, with minimal restraint from Congress or the courts. They also faced a social media-addicted public that seems largely ignorant of what's at stake.

This was an uneven struggle, against a deranged egomaniac who held all the cards. Journalists have only their principles. Trump and the MAGA vipers at his command have no principles and no clear sense of what a principle might be. They have only egos, wallets, grudges and prejudices. For this president, the truth is anything that flatters him, a lie is anything that doesn't.

His shadow is long and dark, in the last few places where facts still matter and "truth" is still a goal. The resignation of Edith Chapin, NPR's editor-in-chief, was reported just a week after Republicans in Congress cut off all federal funding for public media. A day later the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, the agency that oversees NPR and PBS, announced that it's laying off its staff and will hang an "Out of Business" sign in January. Analysts predicted that one in every five NPR stations will have to shut down without federal money. Many of them are in the South, in bright-red states where commercial broadcasters bow to an arch-conservative business community. Once these local, alternative voices are gone, a permanent silence will fall.

Trump's war on public broadcasting, apparently a first-round knockout, coincides with a shocking decline in reliable local journalism. Seventy million Americans live in "news deserts," wide areas on the map where professionally sourced newspapers and newscasts have disappeared. A recent study found that one-third of America's counties lack a single full-time journalist; the number of local journalists has been reduced by 75% since 2002, according to *The New York Times*. Since the turn of the century, 60% of the nation's newsroom

jobs have been lost, and more than 2,500 papers have shut down their presses.

It's no secret where this is heading. Every dictatorship, every fascist takeover begins with an effort to silence its critics, and is never satisfied until every independent news source has been eliminated or intimidated. The next step, the Russian model, is to establish official state media, where the only available news is sponsored and edited by the government. Would Trump go that far? Are you kidding? It's his dream, pursued relentlessly, to be not only the commander-in-chief but the editor-in-chief as well.

As long as any semblance of democracy remains, the trick is to get enough voters to go along with this obscene violation of America's laws and traditions. It's done by targeting scapegoats, arch-villains that gullible citizens might buy into. Trump chose the imaginary legions of the "woke," way-Left radicals who have devoted their lives to policing pronouns and parsing micro-identities. In reality these extremists are a fairly rare breed among Trump's passionate enemies. Though we shared many principles and commitments, I have a friend who once dismissed me as "about as woke as the average wolverine." But MAGA, or at least its congressional branch, was more than ready to go along with the president's War on Woke. For his war on immigration, of course, Trump chose to demonize undocumented immigrants as "criminals and rapists." This was painfully ironic because the Orange One himself is an accused rapist, and I'd be willing to bet that none of those poor deportees carried a rap sheet with half as many convictions as the felon in the White House. The second irony is that "Welcome to America," the message and purpose of the Statue of Liberty, has become as ironic as "Welcome to Buffalo" was back then.

It's impossible to predict the next outburst or outrage from a president who's lobbying for the Nobel Peace Prize and his place on Mt. Rushmore, who covets Greenland and plans to stage an Ultimate Fighting Championship on the White House lawn. A president who just accused Barack Obama of treason, and whose fierce cru-

sade against wind power—tilting against windmills?—has immortalized him as the most ridiculous knight-errant since Don Quixote. The circus goes on and on. But the shutdown at the CPB and its lethal effect on independent local stations is a tectonic, spiritual loss that moves America's cascading culture death much closer to its last rites.

WGBH in Boston responded by launching a fund drive and posting a big sign outside its studios that says "Local. Trusted. Defunded." But small, wildcat community stations like WERU in Hancock County, Maine, which receives 25 to 30 percent of its funding from the Corporation, are the ones that will suffer the most. WERU, a Pacifica station, operates very much in the tradition we thought we were serving back in Buffalo — it features Native American programming and even airs a "Queer Hour" in a region where that might go against the grain. "I'm sure we'll do well with this next membership drive," says WERU program director Joel Mann. "But a couple of years from now ... I'm afraid I just don't know."

The reckless, clueless belligerence of one crazy old man is dismantling, stone by stone and brick by brick, many of the most valuable things Americans have built and sustained. He's even managed to defund the Voice of America, an international radio presence responsible for our image abroad. Donald Trump is a one-man Holocaust for communicators, for truth-tellers. What and who will survive?

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

Populism Can Win Back Working Class Voters

New research shows that progressive economic policies can bring working-class Trump supporters back into the Democratic Party.

By SEAN MASON

The Democratic Party lost big in 2024. If it hopes to bounce back, making inroads with the working class is the only way possible — and a new report from the Center for Working-Class Politics and Jacobin shows that economic populism is the best path to bring them back.

Democrats have historically counted on the votes of working class Americans, but that's changed as White working class voters defected to Donald Trump and the GOP. In the last cycle, Latino men and even a significant number of Black men swung to the GOP as well.

By 2024, the Democratic leadership had firmly committed to its strategy of appealing to suburban moderates at the cost of blue-collar voters. Back in 2016, Senator Chuck Schumer famously articulated this logic: "For every blue-collar Democrat we lose in western Pennsylvania, we will pick up two moderate Republicans in the suburbs in Philadelphia, and you can repeat that in Ohio and Illinois and Wisconsin."

But that strategy hasn't kept the party competitive in much of the country. Is it too late to turn back to the blue-collar voters it left behind years ago?

Our new report, which analyzes responses to 128 survey questions from gold standard academic surveys, finds that championing progressive economic policies can reverse the exodus of blue-collar voters from the party. It can also help us understand why those policies resonate most with working class voters.

Contrary to what many expect, the working class has become both more progressive on economic issues and less conservative on social issues in recent decades. From abortion and gun control to gay rights and views on racial inequality, the working-class today is, if anything, more progressive than the working class that helped elect Barack Obama in 2008.

But this has been easy to miss, because the upper and middle classes have moved left at an even faster rate over the same time period. And relative to the middle and upper classes, economic populist policies resonate more with working-class voters, while socially progressive policies resonate less.

Our report shows the overwhelming popularity of a host of economic populist policies. Increasing the minimum wage, increasing government spending on healthcare and social security, protecting jobs with import limits, and spending more on the poor are all examples of policies that we found resonate with an overwhelming majority of the working-class.

Our analysis challenges oft-repeated stereotypes about the supposed conservative drift of the working-class. For example, there are many who seem certain that the economic policies that helped propel Zohran Mamdani to victory in New York City's recent Democratic mayoral primary would be disastrous outside of the city's liberal bubble.

That conventional wisdom doesn't hold up in polling. For example, we found that about one out of every five working-class people who voted for Trump in 2020 also favored a four-policy package that included increasing income taxes on million dollar per year earners, increasing federal spending on public schools and social security, and raising the federal minimum wage.

Even more surprising, support for a millionaire's tax was 44% among working-class 2020 Trump voters. This is only one example, but we've identified quite a few ways Democrats can appeal to working-class voters without sacrificing a strong economic program.

Our analysis shows that Democrats can win back working class votes from the GOP — without championing regressive social policies. But it requires leading with bread-and-butter economic policies that are overwhelmingly popular with working-class voters.

Ultimately, this isn't about the political fortunes of one party or another. As more Americans struggle to afford the cost of living and the gap between the rich and the rest only grows, it's about whether ordinary people have a voice in the decisions that affect their lives.

Let's hope the Democrats pay attention.

Sean Mason is a data scientist and research associate at the Center for Working-Class Politics. A longer version of this op-ed first appeared at Inequality.org. This version was distributed by OtherWords.org.

Supreme Court Opened the Door to Gerrymandering

By JOEL D. JOSEPH

For 47 years, the law of the land was "one man, one vote." This was decided by the Supreme Court in *Baker v. Carr* (1962). It was a landmark United States Supreme Court case in which the Court found that redistricting qualifies as a justiciable question under the Fourteenth Amendment, thus enabling federal courts to hear Fourteenth Amendment-based gerrymandering cases. The court summarized its *Baker* holding in a later decision as follows: "Equal Protection Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment limits the authority of a State Legislature in designing the geographical districts from which representatives are chosen either for the State Legislature or for the Federal House of Representatives. *Gray v. Sanders*, 372 U.S. 368 (1963)."

In 2019 in *Rucho v. Common Cause*, the Supreme Court essentially reversed *Baker v. Carr*, holding that gerrymandering cases were not justiciable. In other words, the Supreme Court told the states to gerrymander because no one could file suit challenging it.

The Supreme Court of Chaos

Much like the reversal of *Roe v. Wade*, the Supreme Court has created havoc around the nation with its failure to enforce rules against gerrymandering. Abortion is now in the hands of the states and there are numerous battles, mother's dying unnecessarily and doctors under attack, all caused by the Supreme Court. Now the states are in mortal combat over gerrymandering.

Texas is now considering a gerrymandering plan proposed by President Trump that would add five more Republican seats in the state. Democratically-controlled states including New York, Illinois and California are threatening to gerrymander their states if Texas enacts its undemocratic plan.

Eight states have independent electoral commissions to ensure that redistricting does not favor one party. These states are Arizona, California, Colorado, Idaho, Michigan, Montana and Virginia, liberal states, moderate states and

Continued on next page

Trump's War on Truth is Designed to Make Us Stupid and Clueless

Firing the labor statistician is classic Stalin with a callback to Orwell

By DICK POLMAN

When I heard the news the authoritarian imbecile had fired the Bureau of Labor Statistics director for the crime of factual math, I dimly recalled something that George Orwell had written in a magazine essay 86 years ago. I had to look it up to confirm my memory, but there it was:

"It is quite possible that we are descending into an age in which two plus two will make five when the Leader says so."

Orwell wrote that at a time when fascism and communism were riding high in Germany and the Soviet Union, a time when it was beyond impossible to imagine that such darkness could ever envelop the United States of America. Yet here we are, with 77 million voters having chosen a tyrant to tear us asunder from within, to the point where two plus two equals five because duh Leader can't abide numbers that measure reality.

Remember, pre-election when he was convicted in a civil trial of massive business fraud because he fed fake numbers about his net worth to banks and insurers? And because, among his many cons, he insisted that his Man-

hattan apartment was 30,000 square feet, when in truth it was less than 11,000?

And remember, pre-election, when he was booked for alleged crimes in Georgia and, in lieu of being weighed as required, he insisted he was 6-foot3 and 215 pounds? That was quite a stretch, coming from a guy whose bloat brings to mind Sidney Greenstreet in Casablanca.

It's a straight line from that weight farce to the firing of Dr. Erika McEntarfer for reporting weak job growth. It's a straight line from her firing to Trump's math-flunking claim that "we've cut drug prices by 1200, 1300, 1400, 1,500 percent" – which is nuts by definition, because it would mean that drug companies are paying us for using their drugs.

As we know, the purge of Dr. McEntarfer – who was confirmed as BLS director by 90% of the U.S. Senate, including then-lawmaker J.D. Vance – is merely the latest manifestation of Trump's multi-front war on all forms of nonpartisan independent inquiry. His regime has even nixed a federal grant to study "The Spread of Unsubstantiated Information," which was grotesquely predictable.

Day by day, the predator is raping empiricism itself. He told us all along that it would come to this. Those of us who spent years warning about the obvious are dumfounded so many voters remained so oblivious. Now we've got the country we deserved.

Without nonpartisan economic numbers, employers and investors are left in the dark, and, more broadly, the rest of us can't really know what's going on. But that's all by design. Priority One in a totalitarian state is to repress knowledge and render the populace clueless. Any numbers that flatter the tyrant are OK; any numbers that make him "look bad" are borderline treasonous. It's like what happened in the

1930s when Joseph Stalin announced a Five-Year Plan, but later purged his statistical director for "bourgeois pessimism," for reporting low crop yields that made Stalin look bad.

Is there any reason to hope a pivotal share of Americans will wake up to what's happening in time to salvage some semblance of a society grounded in factual reality? Is there any reason to hope that Trump will pay a steep political price for trying to render us clueless and stupid? I've seen polls that show him underwater on virtually every policy front (most notably the economy, thanks to his inflationary tariffs). I've heard that House Republicans back home for the August break are getting booed in town hall meetings for toadying to the tyrant – even in red Nebraska. But the road to a patriotic restoration will be long and arduous; failure will leave us with what Orwell prophesied in his dystopian novel, about math and the bending of minds:

"In the end, the Party would announce that two and two made five, and you would have to believe it. It was inevitable that they should make that claim sooner or later: the logic of their position demanded it... The very existence of external reality was tacitly denied by their philosophy... For, after all, how do we know that two and two make four? Or that the force of gravity works? Or that the past is unchangeable? If both the past and the external world exist only in the mind, and if the mind itself is controllable – what then?"

What then indeed.

Dick Polman, a veteran national political columnist, alumni of the Philadelphia Inquirer and a Writer in Residence at the University of Pennsylvania, writes at DickPolman.substack.com and is distributed by Cagle Cartoons newspaper syndicate. Email him at dickpolman7@gmail.com.

Sexual Predators Stick Together

By SABRINA HAAKE

On July 25, as Trump left for a golf trip in Scotland where he was skewered mercilessly, his criminal defense attorney turned Deputy AG, Todd Blanche, raised eyebrows with convicted child sex trafficker Ghislaine Maxwell.

In Aberdeenshire, Scotland, one satirist reported that Trump was swinging at golf balls while shouting, "I make the best putts!" "I invented golf!" and, "I'm the rightful King of Scotland!... Everybody says so!" A van "welcoming" Trump to Scotland depicted him with Jeffrey Epstein.

In Tallahassee, Florida, an aerial banner flew overhead announcing, "Trump and Bondi are protecting predators" as billboards targeting the Epstein files decision went up elsewhere.

As Trump golfed in Scotland to escape the Epstein story, Blanche spent two days with Maxwell and her attorneys to elicit a new narrative about it.

Years after trial by jury, team Trump wanted a private meeting

In 2021, Maxwell, criminal accomplice to the late Jeffrey Epstein, was afforded the full complement of legal protections during a jury trial that lasted over a month. Maxwell was heard, observed, and considered by a jury of her peers that was selected by her own counsel. Jurors watched and listened to evidence from all sides, where witnesses were presented and cross examined

under oath— or not at all.

Attorneys for several victims were present when Maxwell and other fact witnesses testified at her trial. Attorneys for all sides listened, objected, and clarified when questions were leading or intentionally ambiguous, and immediately cross examined all witnesses— including Maxwell—to get to the truth.

But now, years later, Trump sends his personal criminal defense lawyer to speak to Maxwell alone, outside the presence of opposing counsel, outside the presence of a court reporter, outside the presence of counsel for any victims, outside the presence of any attorney other than Maxwell's and Trump's, in pursuit of a new spin about the same crimes to serve Trump's political interests.

Maxwell's convictions

At the conclusion of all the evidence, a jury found Maxwell guilty on Dec. 29, 2021, of conspiracy to entice minors to travel to engage in illegal sex acts with Jeffrey Epstein, conspiracy to transport minors to participate in illegal sex acts, transporting a minor to participate in illegal sex acts, sex trafficking conspiracy, and sex trafficking of a minor, all separate offenses.

In June 2022, back when the Public Corruption Unit of the DOJ still endorsed the rule of law, the DOJ posted this public statement:

• From at least 1994, up to and including in or about 2004, GHISLAINE MAXWELL assisted, facilitated, and participated in Jeffrey Epstein's abuse of minor

girls by, among other things, helping Epstein to recruit, groom, and ultimately abuse victims known to MAXWELL and Epstein to be under the age of 18.

• The victims were as young as 14 years old when they were groomed and abused by MAXWELL and Epstein, both of whom knew that their victims were, in fact, minors.

The statement went into specifics, stating that Maxwell personally enticed and groomed minor girls to be abused in multiple ways, and gave these examples:

MAXWELL acclimated victims to Epstein's conduct simply by being present for victim interactions with Epstein, which put victims at ease by providing the assurance and comfort of an adult woman who seemingly approved of Epstein's behavior... MAXWELL also normalized and facilitated sexual abuse for a victim by discussing sexual topics, undressing in front of the victim, being present when the victim was undressed, and encouraging the victim to massage Epstein.

Maxwell also participated sexually. She was present during sexual encounters between minor victims and Epstein, and at least one victim described at trial how Maxwell personally fondled her.

Trump wants to supplant the rule of law with his own political needs

Several former federal prosecutors described Blanche's "interview" as both unorthodox and concerning. Elizabeth Oyer, former Justice Department pardon at-

torney and federal public defender told CBS News, "(Maxwell is) somebody who has been sentenced by a court to 20 years in prison, and she is likely also desperate to get out from under that sentence. It's hard to really believe that the Justice Department would rely on anything that she might have to say."

Maxwell's private interview with Trump's attorney also makes it less likely Maxwell will testify before Congress after she was subpoenaed to do so by the House Oversight and Governmental Reform Committee's. After all, it's up to Trump's DOJ to prosecute her if she doesn't, and why would the DOJ do anything that could unravel or poke holes in Maxwell's privately curated statement to Blanche?

Blanche's private after-the-fact interview was another slap in the face to the more than one thousand victims of Epstein/Maxwell's sexual crimes, including Virginia Giuffre, who, at the age of 14, was coerced into intercourse with Epstein while another teenaged victim watched. Giuffre was one of the earliest voices pushing for criminal charges against Epstein and Maxwell; other Epstein victims later credited her with giving them the courage to speak out. Giuffre never got over the assault, and killed herself last April.

The court of public opinion should not let Trump, another convicted felon and adjudicated rapist, substitute his political needs for the rule of law. Maxwell's jurors, victims, and the rules of evidence, have already spoken.

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.

Joseph...

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conservative states. California may abandon its impartial electoral commission to counteract Texas's undemocratic attempt to seize power for the Republicans.

What Can Be Done to Prevent Gerrymandering?

In 1993, the Supreme Court ruled that odd-shaped districts in which minorities were clumped together was a sign that the district was unconstitutionally formed. Justice Sandra Day O'Connor, a Ronald Reagan Republican appointee, ruled, "We believe that reapportionment is one area where appearances do matter. A reapportionment plan that includes in one district individuals who belong to the same race, but are otherwise widely separated by geographical and political boundaries, and who may have little in common with one another but the color of their skin, bears an uncomfortable

resemblance to political apartheid." *Shaw v. Reno*, 509 U.S. 630 (1993). That case used the Voting Rights Act to overturn gerrymandering. Texas's gerrymandering can be attacked as a violation of the Voting Rights Act.

Under Article I, Section 4 of the Constitution, "The Times, Places and Manner of holding Elections for Senators and Representatives, shall be prescribed in each State by the Legislature thereof; but the Congress may at any time by Law make or alter such Regulations, except as to the Places of choosing Senators."

There have been many Congressional proposals to regulate gerrymandering, but none have passed. Most recently, Senator Amy Klobuchar introduced The Redistricting Reform Act of 2024. Unfortunately, this bill went nowhere.

While Congress probably has the power to regulate gerrymandering, it appears to have no will to do so. The courts may be open to a challenge based on race under the Voting Rights Act. The most likely solution is for a truce between the Democrats and the Republicans. If the political

parties do not have a ceasefire agreement in place, it is likely that Texas will be the first to gerrymander, followed by California, New York and Illinois.

Even though most voters are against Gerrymandering, the political parties are

likely to keep the battle going

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Tossing Out Rules Written in Blood

By DAVID McCALL

David Taft praised the district office of the U.S. Mine Safety and Health Administration (MSHA) for stepping in a couple of years ago to address a pressing maintenance issue at the Galena mine in Idaho's Silver Valley.

Officials there collaborated with workers and management to develop an innovative plan for upgrading a hoist—a device used to transport the miners—while ensuring miner safety and keeping production of silver, lead and copper on track.

"MSHA showed some flexibility in working with the company to solve the problem. They certainly didn't have to do that," said Taft, chair of United Steelworkers (USW) Local 5114-03, noting the project required carefully planned adjustments to the mine's evacuation plans.

It's the kind of expertise that Taft values from MSHA officials on the ground in one of the nation's most important mining communities.

And it's exactly what he stands to lose as Donald Trump's Department of Labor (DOL) prioritizes profits over people and abandons the workers he was elected to protect.

The agency recently announced plans to slash more than 60 regulations essential to health and safety in numerous industries. Among those on the chopping block are rules that afford district MSHA managers input

into mining companies' roof control, ventilation and safety training programs.

The DOL—overseeing MSHA and other safety agencies—says it wants to cut "red tape" for employers and ban district managers from requiring additional safeguards they consider necessary.

Taft, one of more than 100 union miners at Galena, knows what changes like these are really about—helping companies save a dollar at workers' expense.

"If they're not forced to do it, they won't," he said of the mining conglomerates, adding that depriving district MSHA officials of their discretion "certainly isn't going to make things any better. We need to have regulations."

Cutting safety puts all miners at risk. But it's an especially sharp slap in the face to people in the Silver Valley, where 91 miners perished in a 1972 fire at the Sunshine Mine.

The disaster, blamed partly on a ventilation system that spread lethal gases during the fire, led Congress to pass the groundbreaking Mine Safety and Health Act in 1977. That law established MSHA and empowered it to inspect mines, oversee safety training and keep miners safe.

Taft, who worked at the Sunshine Mine early in his career and attends an annual memorial service for the fallen, said even miners sometimes get aggravated with detail-oriented MSHA officials.

"But we need them," he said.

Marshal Cummings, president of USW Local 13214, has spent years advocating for even stronger protections, including an MSHA standard to reduce and monitor miners' exposure to toxic dust.

It infuriates him that Trump now intends not only to delay long-awaited new safe-

guards like this but drag the industry backward. It's cruel, he said, to roll back even one provision that helps miners return home safely after their shifts.

"All these rules have been written in blood," said Cummings, noting that injuries and deaths in the decades since the Sunshine tragedy all contributed to the body of regulations that the DOL wants to cut.

Miners want "responsible mining companies to attain permits and leases to create good-paying union jobs," Cummings added. "But doing so at the cost of safety and health is a recipe for disaster."

Cummings and his co-workers produce trona, a mineral 1,600 feet below ground that's used to make baking soda, soap, glass and other important products.

Trona production, decades-old and the heartbeat of the local economy, forges some of the world's most skilled miners. It also produces highly qualified regulators, some of whom not only walked in miners' boots but came out of the very mines they now oversee at MSHA.

"One of the inspectors I trust the most is a Steelworker," Cummings said, noting this official formerly oversaw safety as a local union activist at a nearby mine and now performs a similar role for thousands of miners in the region.

It's this caliber of person—not DOL and MSHA employees in Washington, D.C.—that Cummings wants to see making decisions about ventilation, roof integrity and geological issues in southwestern Wyoming.

"I don't understand how a person in a suit and tie can make decisions for the people who are running the bolts and hauling the stuff out," he said, contrasting bureaucrats in the nation's capital with co-workers who

secure the mine roof and remove trona from the mine.

As the industry expands and adopts new technology, miners' need for a strong MSHA, with district representatives empowered to leverage their knowledge of local conditions, will only increase.

That's clear in places like the Asarco mine in Arizona's Copper Triangle.

Miners there not only bargained strong health and safety language into their contract but take pride in enforcing those provisions every day.

"We run a tight ship with the company. We don't let them get away with anything," said Rick Sosa, vice president and safety chair for USW Local 5252.

Yet Sosa and his co-workers still look to MSHA for support. For example, they want agency representatives to set baseline safety requirements as autonomous vehicles roll onto the job, posing new and unique risks at their mine.

"There's got to be new regulations written," Sosa said.

Cummings talks about the Sunshine disaster while leading mine safety trainings.

He explains how the miners lost back then still help to protect those working today. And he describes safety as a daily quest and shared responsibility, one in which workers, unions, employers, federal agencies and MSHA's district offices all play vital and irreplaceable roles.

"The regional managers are there for a reason. There's a reason they have that authority," he said, calling officials like these "the last line of defense."

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

Lawfully Present Immigrants Help Stabilize ACA Plans. Why Does the GOP Want Them Out?

By BERNARD J. WOLFSON
/ KFF Health News

If you want to create a perfect storm at Covered California and other Affordable Care Act marketplaces, all you have to do is make enrollment more time-consuming, ratchet up the toll on consumers' pocketbooks, and terminate financial aid for some of the youngest and healthiest enrollees.

And presto: You've got people dropping coverage; rising costs; and a smaller, sicker group of enrollees, which translates to higher premiums.

The Trump administration and congressional Republicans have just checked that achievement off their list.

They have done it with the sprawling tax and spending law President Donald Trump signed on July 4 and a related set of new regulations released by the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services that will govern how the ACA marketplaces are run.

Among the many provisions, there's this: Large numbers of lawfully present immigrants currently enrolled in Obamacare health plans will lose their subsidies and be forced to pay full fare or drop their coverage.

Wait. What?

I understand that proponents of the new policies think the government spends too much on taxpayer subsidies, especially those who believe the ACA marketplaces are rife with fraud. It makes sense that they would support toughening enrollment and eligibility procedures and even slashing subsidies. But taking coverage away from people who live here legally is not health care policy. It's an echo of the federal immigration raids in Los Angeles and elsewhere.

"It's creating a very hostile environment for them, especially after having to leave their countries because of some very traumatic experiences," says Arturo Vargas Bustamante, a professor of health policy and management at UCLA's Fielding

School of Public Health. "For those who believe health care is a human right, this is like excluding that population from something that should be a given."

In Covered California, 112,600 immigrants, or nearly 6% of total enrollees, stand to lose their federal tax subsidies when the policy takes effect in 2027, according to data provided by the exchange. In the Massachusetts and Maryland marketplaces, the figure is closer to 14%, according to their directors, Audrey Morse Gasteier and Michele Eberle, respectively.

It's not clear exactly how much financial aid those immigrants currently receive in ACA marketplaces. But in Covered California, for example, the average for all subsidized enrollees is \$561 per month, which covers 80% of the \$698 average monthly premium per person. And immigrants, who tend to have lower-than-average incomes, are likely to get more of a subsidy.

The immigrants who will lose their subsidies include victims of human trafficking and domestic violence, as well as refugees with asylum or with some temporary protected status. And "Dreamers" will no longer be eligible for ACA marketplace health plans because they will not be considered lawfully present. Immigrants who are not in the country legally cannot get coverage through Covered California or most other ACA marketplaces.

The nearly 540,000 Dreamers in the United States arrived in the U.S. as kids without immigration papers and were granted temporary legal status by President Barack Obama in 2012. Of those, an estimated 11,000 have ACA health plans and would lose them, including 2,300 in Covered California.

Supporters of the policy changes enshrined in the CMS rule and budget law think it's high time to rein in what they say are abuses in the system that started under the Biden administration with expanded tax credits and overly flexible enrollment policies.

"It's about making Obamacare lawful and implementing it as drafted rather than what Biden turned it into, which was a fraud and a waste-infused program," says Brian Blase, president of Arlington, Virginia-based Paragon Health Institute, which produces policy papers with a free-market bent and influenced the Republican-driven policies.

But Blase doesn't have much to say about the termination of Obamacare subsi-

dies for lawfully present immigrants. He says Paragon has not focused much on that subject.

Jessica Altman, executive director of Covered California, expects most immigrants who lose subsidies will discontinue their enrollment. "If you look at where those populations fall on the income scale, the vast majority are not going to be able to afford the full cost of the premium to stay covered," she says.

Apart from the human hardship cited by Bustamante, the exodus of immigrants could compromise the financial stability of coverage for the rest of Covered California's 1.9 million enrollees. That's because immigrants tend to be younger than the average enrollee and use fewer medical resources, thus helping offset the costs of older and sicker people who are more expensive to cover.

Covered California data shows that immigrant enrollees targeted by the new federal policies pose significantly lower medical risk than U.S. citizens. And a significantly higher percentage of immigrants in the exchange are ages 26 to 44, while 55- to 64-year-olds make up a smaller percentage.

Still, it would be manageable if immigrants were the only younger people to leave the exchange. But that is unlikely to be the case. More red tape and higher out-of-pocket costs—especially if enhanced tax credits disappear—could lead a lot of young people to think twice about health insurance.

The COVID-era enhanced tax credits, which have more than doubled ACA marketplace enrollment since their advent in 2021, are set to expire at the end of December without congressional action. And, so far, Republicans in Congress do not seem inclined to renew them. Ending them would reverse much of that enrollment gain by jacking up the amount consumers would have to spend on premiums out of their own pockets by an average of 66% at Covered California and more than 75% nationally.

And an analysis by the Congressional Budget Office shows that a consequent exodus of younger, healthier people from the marketplaces would lead to even greater costs over time.

Enhanced tax credits aside, consumers face additional hurdles: The annual enrollment period for Covered California and other marketplaces will be shorter than it is now. Special enrollment periods for people

with the lowest incomes will be effectively eliminated. So will automatic renewals, which have greatly simplified the process for a majority of enrollees at Covered California and some other marketplaces. Enrollees will no longer be able to start subsidized coverage, as they can now, before all their information is fully verified.

"Who are the people who are going to decide to go through hours and hours of onerous paperwork?" says Morse Gasteier. "They're people who have chronic conditions. They have health care issues they need to manage. The folks we would expect not to wade through all that red tape would be the younger, healthier folks."

California and 20 other states in July challenged some of that red tape in a federal lawsuit to stop provisions of the CMS rule that erect "unreasonable barriers to coverage." California Attorney General Rob Bonta said he and his fellow attorneys general hoped for a court ruling before the rule takes effect on Aug. 25.

"The Trump administration claims that their final rule will prevent fraud," Bonta said. "It's obvious what this is really about. It's yet another political move to punish vulnerable communities by removing access to vital care and gutting the Affordable Care Act."

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MARY SANCHEZ



There's no turning back from photos of babies in Gaza with grotesquely protruding spines, twigs for limbs and grieving malnourished mothers.

Gaza's Starving Babies Deserve Congress' Attention

Missouri GOP Sen. Josh Hawley couldn't have known it at the time, but in one quick moment, he faced accusations that would soon echo worldwide. It's a query that U.S. politicians best get their collective heads around or face dramatic humanitarian and political outcomes.

The world's disdain has erupted over the starvation of Palestinian children in Gaza. And it's unlikely to recede.

There's no turning back from the widely available photos of babies with grotesquely protruding spines, twigs for limbs, being held by their grieving mothers, who are also malnourished.

International relief agencies are discussing when to label the situation a famine or a mass, forced starvation.

Increasingly, leaders like Hawley will be asked to take a stand and to sustain pressure on the Israeli government, which in late July began what it termed a tactical pause to the fighting, allowing more aid into Gaza.

A tactical pause sounds pathetically inadequate.

Here's what happened to Hawley:

The senator experienced a canary in the coalmine scenario, likely to be repeated. As Hawley sat for an interview, a protester rushed the stage during the July 23 Axios News Shapers forum.

Hawley calmly took a sip of water, ready to wait out the disruption. "Josh Hawley does not possibly care about people and the planet in this country because he is supporting the forced starvation of 2.2 million people," the woman shouted, before being hustled away by security.

Hawley was then briefly guided off the stage as security teams dealt with that first, then a second protester.

Both protesters were later self-identified as part of CODEPINK, a feminist, grassroots social justice organization that has long demonstrated against the deaths of Palestinians in Gaza.

Getting Hawley safely aside was smart protocol, wisely initiated by the Axios reporter who was interviewing him. The event was billed as a discussion on policy and the 2026 midterm elections.

Event planners can't take chances these days. The near slaying of author

Salman Rushdie in 2022 gruesomely taught that lesson. A deranged man had rushed the stage as the author spoke, slashing at Rushdie's neck with a knife and severely wounding him in the face (Rushdie lost an eye as a result).

After the late July forum, Hawley later belittled the protesters on X, calling them "pro-Hamas CRAZIES and "nutcases."

"I'm proud as ever to stand for America and our ally Israel," he posted. He might not like CODEPINK's tactics, but Hawley's reply dodged the issue.

Gaza is man-made suffering, calibrated by the inability to find a resolution to the Israeli-Hamas conflict that continues to take Palestinian lives.

Time's up for politicians and other leaders who have sheepishly opted out, or seemingly remain unbothered by the humanitarian costs.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's attempt to eliminate Hamas through military force is failing. More than 55,000 Palestinians are dead, and many were civilians, not militants. Exact figures are difficult to verify, with many media relying on the Gaza Health Ministry.

Nearly 900 Israeli soldiers have also died since the retaliation began, after Hamas slaughtered more than 1,200 people in southern Israel, primarily Israeli citizens on Oct 7, 2023.

Knowing right from wrong doesn't require a nuanced understanding of the far-right influencers surrounding Netanyahu, or his calculations to protect himself in upcoming elections.

Complicity is choosing to remain silent,

unmoved by the starvations.

The Israeli government needs to allow more aid to enter – yes, even without securing the release of the last 50 hostages who were taken on Oct. 7. About 20 are believed to be alive, no doubt enduring unimaginable fear and conditions.

Limiting the aid into Gaza has not brought their release. International aid and humanitarian agencies are all coming to the same conclusions.

Hamas has shunned the efforts of the Trump White House to broker a peace deal. Hamas is intent on letting Palestinians die of malnutrition, or to be killed as collateral damage in Israeli military strikes.

Hawley, as well as many members of the GOP, need to be convinced that dodging questions about U.S. military support for Israel is not the same as taking a stand against antisemitism, which has shockingly been rising for decades globally, long before Oct. 7.

Photos and other news coverage of the suffering in Gaza should not be avoided for anyone's political comfort.

The children and mothers of Gaza are starving. They need the world to speak up, to pay attention, to consistently insist that their suffering ends.

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The NIH Funding Wars

Are Republican senators more loyal to Trump, or to their home-state economies?

By ROBERT KUTTNER

On July 25, a surprising group of 14 Republican senators sent Donald Trump OMB chief Russell Vought a letter demanding that the administration release upwards of \$2 billion in NIH grants that were frozen or canceled in early March on entirely bogus and illegal grounds of excessive DEI. The signers included such usual Trump stalwarts as Lindsey Graham of South Carolina and Katie Britt of Alabama, who composed the letter.

"Suspension of these appropriated funds—whether formally withheld or functionally delayed—could threaten Americans' ability to access better treatments and limit our nation's leadership in biomedical science," Britt and her colleagues warned. "It also risks inadvertently severing ongoing NIH-funded research prior to actionable results."

The other signers included Sens. John Boozman of Arkansas, Bill Cassidy of

Louisiana, Tim Scott of South Carolina, Shelley Moore Capito of West Virginia, Jerry Moran of Kansas, and Todd Young of Indiana, all of whom have universities in their states that have lost funding.

So far, the administration has done nothing in response. Some NIH funding has been released, but only in response to direct court orders, only in other states, and only in part. This deep dive by *The Chronicle of Higher Education* explains just how researchers have been jerked around and their work ruined.

On June 16, U.S. District Court Judge William Young, based in Boston, issued a ruling ordering that most of the grants be restored. Judge Young, a Reagan appointee, said that he had never seen such discrimination in 40 years on the bench, adding, "Have we no shame?"

But the order applies only to the 16 Democrat-led states that filed the lawsuit challenging the freeze. The administration has responded by slow-walking its compliance and appealing the ruling.

On July 24, the administration made one of its emergency appeals to the Supreme Court, asking that the lower-court order be suspended until the high court could address the substance of the issue. The Supreme Court has not acted yet, but its pattern has been to grant such stays and to keep delay-

ing a definitive ruling.

You might conclude that the group of 14 Republican senators were making their stand for home consumption and were not politically serious. If they had been, they would have made their demand while the fate of Trump's budget bill was hanging fire and needed their support, rather than after the fact when they had no leverage.

Actually, they do have some leverage. Within just two months, Congress has to act to extend the debt ceiling again, and appropriations bills must pass, both by Oct. 1. So we will soon find out if they are serious.

Because of the Boston district court ruling, the universities that have had NIH funding even partially restored are all in blue or purple states. Last year, the University of Alabama received about \$350 million in NIH funding. That's serious money. Several universities in South Carolina got a total of about \$225 million. None of that funding has been restored.

NIH, for its entire history, has been one of the most principled of federal agencies. Its grants and contracts are awarded on the basis of peer-reviewed science. Yet even NIH, which dwells in the real world, has not been oblivious to the logic of what might be delicately called pork barrel. If NIH awarded the lion's share of its funds to Harvard, MIT, Stanford, and the like, the current broad sup-

port that NIH enjoys in Congress would evaporate. NIH manages to spread its largesse around, presumably on the merits.

Industrial policy has been controversial for half a century. Joe Biden was the first modern president to openly embrace it, with subsidy programs like the Inflation Reduction Act and the CHIPS and Science Act—which Trump is rapidly destroying.

When you think about it, NIH and the industries that it supports offer a splendid example of successful industrial policy. America's lead in pharmaceuticals, biotech, medical devices, and lifesaving therapies is built on NIH's research grants. The phrase "industrial policy" connotes the old factory economy, but the NIH version is cutting-edge, postindustrial science policy. It takes a real moron to want to squander that.

Trump's mash-up of anti-science and anti-DEI comes together in the freezing of these NIH grants and his attempted destruction of NIH itself. We will soon find out if Republican Senate supporters of Trump are serious about defending their home-state economies.

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SATIRE/Rosie Sorenson

So Much for Pink Salt

It was bound to happen—reporters noticing a new, slimmer Donald. No more fat blobs beneath his too-tighty whitey golf shorts. Chins disappearing into a singular mound. Fat belly more like flat belly. It seemed as though he was disappearing before their very eyes. Some could be heard sighing quietly at the thought. Rumors flew. Could this be due to his recent diagnosis of venous insufficiency? No one was talking.

Melania, they also noticed, was also undergoing a metamorphosis of her own—from her Stalinesque military chick look with signature scowl to that of a pink and white-checked gingham Trad wife. Her hair now coiffed into a pixie cut, she was actually smiling. Melania! Smiling!

What the heck?

At last, a Fox News reporter worked up the courage to raise his hand at a press conference and asked, "Uh, Sir," he said, glancing around at the reporter pool before speaking, "You're looking mighty slim these days. Care to comment?"

"No. Next question." Scowl.

A CNN reporter piped up, "Well, Sir, it's obvious that something's going on. Don't you feel the American people have a right to know?"

"No. Next."

Rumors were floating that Melania was angling for her own cooking show, but no one knew if she even knew her way around the kitchen.

Weeks went by. More and more of Trump disappeared. Most people did have to admit, though, that he looked pretty good.

"Who knew that Trump could actually be handsome without all that Big Mac Blubber?" said an anonymous woman in the secular pool.

But then, the unthinkable. His walking became much slower, his talking more jerky, still making no sense. His attempts at bon mots failed spectacularly.

And then . . .

On a Tuesday morning, Trump was found slumped over the Resolute Desk, dead.

Police were called, Stephen Miller was called. Melania was nowhere in the building. Her assistant said she'd fled to New York.

"Can you call her?" hollered Detective York. "We've got to talk to her!"

"Oh no, oh no," she cried when Detective York was on the line. "I can't believe it. He was so young, so fun, so virile. Why somebody have to go kill him?"

When informed there was no murder, she cried again. "Well, good. At least we won't have war with anyone."

When told she'd have to return to Washington, she cried, "No. I stay with Barron. He's terribly upset."

Since there was no protocol for forcing a First Lady to do anything, the Detective let it go.

Still not satisfied, he ordered her quarters to be searched.

The only odd things that turned up were a gallon bag of Himalayan pink salt, a quart of raw honey, cayenne pepper and

several cans of Diet Coke.

When questioned about these things, Melania replied, "Well, yes. Doctor say he need to lose weight. I know he can't do it by himself; so I sneaked some into his Diet Coke. Just like those girls on the YouTube, he got very skinny. I couldn't stop him. His Venus Insufficiency and all."

"You mean venous?" said Detective York.

"Yes, yes, that, too."

"The doctor said he got so thin his heart just gave out." said the Detective.

"Ah, so sad. And he had such a big one, too," said Melania.

"Will you return for the funeral?"

"Susie can take care of it. She know him better than I do."

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

Trump May Have a Magical Immunity Shield, But DOJ Lawyers Sure Don't

By LISA NEEDHAM

The District of Columbia Board on Professional Responsibility recently dropped a 111-page tome recommending that Jeffrey Clark be disbarred for his actions while at the Department of Justice during President Donald Trump's first term. In a development that should hopefully cause consternation for current DOJ attorneys, Clark is being disciplined for his actions undertaken in his official role at the DOJ.

With all the chaos of Trump's current occupation of the White House, Clark may have slipped your mind. However, Clark was no slouch in the Big Lie era. For most of Trump's first term, Clark was the assistant attorney general for the Environment and Natural Resources Division. He became the acting head of the Civil Division in the fall of 2020 and gave Trump a helping hand in trying to overturn the 2020 election.

He's the one who tried to get the DOJ to issue a letter he wrote, saying the department was aware of election fraud in multiple states, including Georgia. This resulted in Clark having to appear before the Jan. 6 committee, where he pleaded the Fifth Amendment, and being criminally charged in Georgia state court along with Trump and a dozen-plus others. It also resulted in the Washington, D.C., bar opening disciplinary proceedings against Clark, leading to the July 31 recommendation that he be disbarred.

It might be because Clark was already facing a bar investigation that he wasn't re-

warded with a high-level DOJ job like Trump's former personal criminal defense attorneys. Too bad, since that appears to be one pathway to a lifetime seat on the federal bench, at least for Emil Bove, whom Senate Republicans confirmed to the 3rd US Circuit Court of Appeals on July 29. Clark does get to be the acting administrator for the Office of Information and Regulatory Affairs within the Office of Management and Budget, where it presumably doesn't matter if he is allowed to practice law.

No matter how loyal Clark is to Trump, no matter how much power Trump amasses, Trump can't force the D.C. bar to let Clark keep his license. It's the same thing for John Eastman, one of the inventors of the fake elector scheme, who is facing disbarment in California.

Admission to the bar is regulated at the state level, and the federal government has no role in licensing attorneys. However, DOJ attorneys have to maintain an active bar membership in a state, territory, or the District of Columbia.

These days, what Clark is getting sanctioned for seems almost quaint. While the D.C. bar acknowledged that Clark may have had "sincere personal concerns" about the 2020 election, he still attempted to make intentionally false statements by urging the Justice Department to issue his Big Lie letter, as he knew that the Department had not identified any election fraud issues in Georgia or other states.

For the D.C. bar, this is both a slam dunk and a necessity: Clark "was prepared to cause the Justice Department to tell a lie about the status of its investigation of an important national issue (the integrity of the 2020 presidential election). Lawyers cannot advocate for any outcome based on false statements, and they certainly cannot urge others to do so. Respondent persistently and energetically sought to do just that on an important national issue. He should be disbarred as a consequence and to send

a message to the rest of the Bar and to the public that this behavior will not be tolerated."

The possibility that DOJ attorneys could face attorney discipline for false statements about an important national issue made in the course of their employment should strike the current denizens of that department as an existential threat, one that Trump can't make go away. That didn't stop Clark from trying, however, alleging that D.C.'s attorney discipline scheme is unconstitutional and that Trump's immunity from prosecution somehow also covered him. Needless to say, the D.C. Bar did not seem inclined to apply Trump's presidential immunity to Clark.

Clark also tried a Trumpy little separation of powers gambit, saying that the D.C. government had no right to be "second-guessing confidential internal deliberations at the highest level of the Executive Branch, including directly with the President himself in the Oval Office, regarding how to carry out the President's core authorities under Article II."

As the D.C. Board's recommendation explains, though, nothing about disciplining Clark is about second-guessing any executive branch decisions. It's about whether Clark violated the D.C. Rules of Professional Conduct, which apply to every lawyer admitted to the D.C. bar.

What has to be so maddening for Clark is that this sort of distraction and obfuscation works perfectly well for Trump, who continues to skirt any consequences whatsoever and who seems to be able to just yell "ARTICLE II" at the Supreme Court to get his way. But since the D.C. courts aren't part of the federal judiciary, Clark is out of luck there.

Clark also tried to get the D.C. bar to let him turn everything into a Trumpian sideshow about election fraud versus Clark's behavior. He asked that the disciplinary board reopen the record to permit discovery

about whether "the lawfare-style weaponization of government against Mr. Clark by the Biden FBI, the January 6 Select Committee, the Jack Smith investigation, and ODC [the D.C. Office of Disciplinary Counsel] was coordinated." He also wanted to subpoena an FBI investigative database.

You can almost hear the exasperation of the D.C. panel leaping off the page: "Whether the FBI should have investigated President Trump regarding the alternate slates of electors has nothing whatever to do with any of the facts relevant to Disciplinary Counsel's charges."

No matter how Clark dresses it up, lawyers get in trouble for violating their jurisdiction's rules of professional conduct. Clark was dinged with violations of Rule 8.4 of the D.C. Rules of Professional Conduct. Lawyers are prohibited from engaging in "conduct involving dishonesty, fraud, deceit, or misrepresentation."

What's happening to Clark should serve as a cautionary tale: being at the DOJ does not guarantee protection from disciplinary action. Rather, the fact that Clark was informed by the DOJ employees actually in charge of such things that the DOJ had not uncovered any election fraud meant that continuing to get a letter out the door saying the opposite was, well, a lie.

That's a violation of an attorney's ethical duties, no matter how much Clark wants there to be some special carveout for attorneys who are lying on behalf of Trump. Current DOJ attorneys might wish to keep that in mind as they are dragged into harassing "investigations" manufactured by current Civil Rights Division head Harmeet Dhillon based on whatever she sees on X when she wakes up. Trump might have a magic shield, but no one else does.

Lisa Needham is an attorney who writes about federal courts, LGBTQ issues, and reproductive justice at Daily Kos. She can also be found at Balls and Strikes, Public Notice, and Rewire.

Why Assisted Living Facilities Are in Crisis

As Americans live longer, there's a greater demand for assisted living facilities. But they need to be well-regulated and well-funded.

By SONALI KOLHATKAR

A deadly fire at Gabriel House, an assisted living facility in Fall River, Massachusetts, claimed 10 lives this July.

In the aftermath, horrific scenes emerged of elderly residents trapped inside smoke-filled rooms and hanging out of windows, desperate for rescue. Victims ranged in age from 61 to 86.

Over the years, Gabriel House owner Dennis Etkorn has faced several charges over sexual harassment and kickbacks, but was not indicted. Regulators cited the facility for violations around staffing and emergency preparedness but never followed up. Former staffer Debbie Johnson told CBS Boston that the facility was "horrible," dirty, and understaffed.

Etkorn reportedly owns several care facilities for elders in Massachusetts. This sort of consolidation in ownership of assisted living and other senior-centered facilities is increasingly common across the country.

And that, says author Judy Karofsky, is a serious problem — even when the owners are nonprofit corporations. "There really is no difference in the performance [whether they are nonprofit or for-profit]," Karofsky told me.

Her book, "DisElderly Conduct: The Flawed Business of Assisted Living and Hospice" explores her personal experience navigating the system to care for her mother. "My mother was injured, my mother was sexually assaulted. My mother had many, many falls because there just wasn't enough staffing," said Karofsky.

The assisted living industry relies heavily on immigrant laborers who are overworked and underpaid. According to Karofsky, "We need to honor them, understand who they are, what they're willing to do."

Karofsky's mother loved many of the people who cared for her, but "some of them ... were so unhappy or frustrated in their situation, they really couldn't give the kind of care that she needed." Many held multiple jobs, moved from one facility to another, and were offered only temporary positions.

The crisis of care in assisted living boils down to funding — or lack thereof.

Because these are a relatively new sort of institution — different from nursing homes or hospice care facilities — assisted living facilities are ruthlessly frugal and notorious for cutting corners. There's little federal regulation, and not enough funding for staff training or the sort of memory care that elderly people increasingly need.

"Yes, we are living longer — good for us," said Karofsky. "Now we have an obligation to provide health facilities, care facilities till the end of our days and not cut back on the sources of funds that would ease our passage."

There's a powerful analogy with childcare. Most parents rely on the childcare industry, and yet it's increasingly unaffordable, even though most childcare workers are underpaid. Yet the well-being of children is at stake.

"It's profiteering. It's exploitation," said Karofsky of the assisted living industry, whose facilities are growing more expensive each year even as workers struggle for fair pay.

How is it that industries like these are simultaneously in high demand, exploitative to workers, and unaffordable?

It takes an enormous amount of work for humans to take care of other humans. That's one of the best reasons for public taxation — to consolidate resources so we can pay people like us fair wages to care for people like us.

Instead of using our tax dollars for things like eldercare (and childcare), politicians are increasingly cutting funds from programs like Medicaid, as President Don-

ald Trump and the GOP's so-called "Big, Beautiful Bill" recently did.

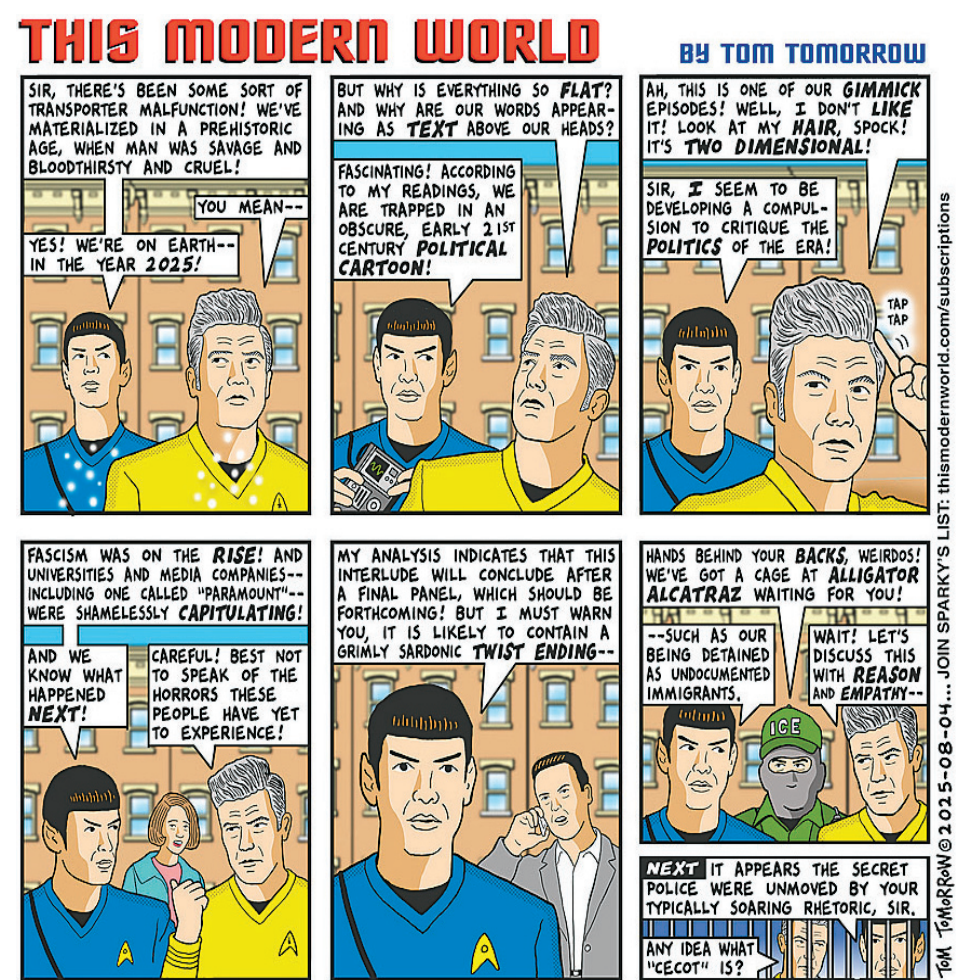
Wealthy elders will get the luxury care they need. The rest of us — if we're lucky enough to live into our 70s and 80s — may find ourselves living in assisted living facilities in our golden years.

Don't we deserve well-regulated, well-funded institutions where we can enjoy independence, safety, and robust care — rather than abuse, accidents, and tragic deaths like the ones at Gabriel House?

"We need to be more concerned about

our elders," said Karofsky. "We can offer better care and more... compassionate care."

Sonali Kolhatkar is host and executive producer of Rising Up With Sonali, an independent, subscriber-based syndicated TV and radio show. She's an award winning journalist and author of "Talking About Abolition: A Police Free World is Possible," and "Rising Up: The Power of Narrative in Pursuing Racial Justice." This op-ed was distributed by OtherWords.org.



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The Coming Republican Depression: How the GOP Turned America Into a Powder Keg, and Is About to Light the Match

Housing bubbles, financial scams, and political sabotage are converging into a historic, preventable disaster.

By THOM HARTMANN

Republicans may be fixing to crash the economy again — Republican presidents oversaw 10 of the last 11 recessions and the Republican Great Depression — and they're doing it to satisfy the greed of the billionaires they serve.

Today (Aug. 1), for example, was the day that some of Trump's worst tariffs are supposed to go into effect, and many folks on Wall Street are deciding where they want to hide when the ceiling starts falling in. The horrible jobs report just released highlights not only how bad things were in July, but they had to "revise downward by 285,000 jobs" previous reports; it looks like Trump's people have been cooking the books.

The Financial Times is on it; they published an article titled, "The US economy is more fragile than it appears." It's author, Tej Parikh, points out that our housing market is in trouble and starting to look like it did around the time of the Bush Housing Crash in 2008, that spending patterns are changing in alarming ways (my phrase, not his), and that both the labor and stock markets are vulnerable. The article is frankly alarming.

And former labor secretary Robert Reich titled his brilliant newsletter July 31: "Be Warned: The Financial Bubble Will Soon Burst." The former Clinton cabinet member writes:

"The financial economy — stocks, bonds, and their derivatives — is in for a big reality check, and I think it will happen soon."

America has stared into this abyss before; three times, in fact. In the 1770s, a brutal financial crisis driven by colonial overextension, monopolistic control by the British East India Company, and political corruption helped spark the American Revolution. In the 1850s, it was wildcat banking, land speculation, and a collapse in trust that helped produce the Panic of 1857 and push the nation toward civil war. And in 1929, Republican deregulation, tax cuts for the rich, financial speculation, and an all-out assault on labor exploded into the Republican Great Depression.

Today, every one of the fuse lines that set off those explosions is once again being laid by a Republican president and Party that has abandoned any pretense of economic stewardship or patriotism.

They are actively destabilizing the pillars of our economy, undermining our democracy, and gutting the social

contract that held us together for nearly a century. And unless we act — forcefully, quickly, and collectively — we may soon experience a collapse that makes 2008 look like a speed bump.

The risk of a modern economic depression is not academic or merely theoretical. It's also not fearmongering. It is real, it is avoidable, and it is being amplified by a political movement that openly disdains regulation, despises democracy, and seeks to roll back every gain the American middle class has made since FDR dragged this country out of the last Republican-created catastrophe.

We are now living under a Republican president whose party has:

- Repeatedly held the full faith and credit of the United States hostage in debt ceiling standoffs designed to force cruel cuts to programs that serve ordinary people;
- Demanded the Fed lower interest rates in a way that could push the nation into an inflationary spiral even as wages stagnate and housing becomes unaffordable for the bottom 90%;
- Pushed for the end of regulations on banks, fossil fuel companies, tech monopolies, and Wall Street speculators, even as their recklessness increases systemic risk;
- Championed massive tax cuts for billionaires and multinational corporations, ballooning the deficit while cutting benefits and raising taxes on working people;
- Enabled trade wars and supply chain disruptions while cutting support for green manufacturing and public investment;
- Promoted and made billions from crypto;
- And perhaps most grotesquely, embraced open authoritarianism and white nationalism, eroding the rule of law and the very stability on which economic confidence depends.

Every one of these moves destabilizes the foundation of modern prosperity. And every one of them echoes the warning signs of past collapses. The mechanisms of economic catastrophe are not mysterious. We've seen them before.

Start with sovereign debt and fiscal dysfunction.

In 2023 and 2024, House Republicans repeatedly brought us to the brink of default just to slash food aid, gut Medicaid, and kill green jobs. Now, in 2025, they're salivating over a new "Balanced Budget Amendment" that would make countercyclical investment during recessions illegal. That's economic suicide.

When demand collapses, the government must spend to stabilize the system. That's Econ 101. But the GOP wants a permanent austerity straitjacket. Why? Because billionaires don't suffer in recessions: they buy everything at a discount and radically increase their own wealth when things rebound. For the morbidly rich, Republican recessions and depressions are "buying opportunities": it's class war, plain and simple.

Then there's financial speculation and asset bubbles.

We're once again living in an era of rampant unregulated financial engineering:

- Crypto Ponzi schemes.
- AI stock frenzies.

— Private equity gutting essential companies and loading them with debt.

— Trillions of dollars sloshing around the system chasing yield, while regulators like the SEC and FTC are neutered by courts stacked with right-wing ideologues.

Remember what happened in 1929? The same "let the market police itself" ideology brought the whole thing crashing down. The difference now is that the contagion would be global and could even be instantaneous.

Trade shocks and de-dollarization are looming risks, too.

Trump's tariffs hurt American farmers and manufacturers. His talk of a new 10% universal tariff could ignite a global trade war and could push countries like China, Brazil, or Saudi Arabia to finally abandon the dollar as the reserve currency.

If that happens — if Treasury bonds stop being the world's safe haven — we're looking at a collapse in our ability to finance debt, a surge in interest rates, a crash in the housing market, and mass layoffs. And the Republicans? They cheer it on. They think chaos is good politics.

And then there are tariffs: there's a reason the Founders of this country and Framers of the Constitution gave the power to enact tariffs exclusively to Congress. They knew that nobody would build a factory here unless they knew that a tariff defending their manufacturing would be in place for the decades it would take to recover their investment costs.

When tariffs are simply slapped here and there willy-nilly by a single man and can be easily repealed by the next president, no competent business manager would take them seriously: the only thing tariffs do, under these circumstances, is damage the economy. Meanwhile, Trump's tariffs so far are going to cost the average American family \$2,400 this year.

And, from Donald Trump's point of view, they force foreign leaders to come grovel in front of him, which absolutely delights him. He brags about it, once noting that, "They are kissing my ass." This is not trade policy; he's just doing this for his ego.

And what about public confidence and how the loss of it could cause a depression?

You can't have a functioning economy without trust in government, in institutions, in money itself. But the GOP has made destroying trust its central project.

They lie about elections. They undermine the courts. They spread conspiracy theories. They smear career civil servants. They openly praise authoritarianism.

When half the population no longer believes in the legitimacy of its own government, and when the other half sees that government captured by billionaires and zealots, economic confidence evaporates.

People stop spending. They stop investing. They retreat into cash and hoarding. That's how depressions spiral out of control.

Now layer on climate instability and its ability to wreck an economy and you have a real mess.

The GOP's climate denialism is not just immoral, it's

Continued on next page

ROBERT REICH



How can anyone in the future trust information that emerges from BLS when it must come up with data to Trump's liking? They cannot.

Trump Destroys Our Source of Information About Jobs. This Is Beyond Irresponsible.

I spent much of the 1990s as secretary of labor. One unit of the Labor Department is the Bureau of Labor Statistics.

I was instructed by my predecessors as well as by the White House, and by every labor economist and statistician I came in contact with, that one of my cardinal responsibilities was to guard the independence of the Bureau of Labor Statistics.

Otherwise, this crown jewel of knowledge about jobs and the economy would be compromised. If politicized, it would no longer be trusted as a source of information.

So what does Trump do? In one fell

swoop on Friday, Aug. 1, he essentially destroyed the credibility of the BLS.

Trump didn't like the fact that the BLS revised downward its jobs reports for April and May.

Well, that's too bad. Revisions in monthly jobs reports are nothing new. They're made when the bureau gets more or better information over time, which it often does.

Yet with no basis in fact, Trump charged that Erika McEntarfer, the commissioner of labor statistics, "rigged" the data "to make the Republicans, and ME, look bad." Then he ordered her fired and replaced with someone else — presumably someone whose data Trump will approve of.

How can anyone in the future trust the information that emerges from the Bureau of Labor Statistics when the person in charge of the agency has to come up with data to Trump's liking in order to stay in the job? Answer: They cannot.

Trump has destroyed the credibility of this extraordinarily important source of information.

When Trump doesn't like the message, he shoots the messenger and replaces them with someone who will come up with messages he approves of. So we're left without credible sources of information about what is really occurring.

Trump is in the process of trying to do the same with the Federal Reserve — demanding that Jerome Powell, the Fed's chair, cut interest rates. Trump is even threatening Powell with a Trumped-up expose of Powell's supposed extravagance in refurbishing the Fed as a means of forcing Powell to do his bidding or resign.

What happens to the Fed's credibility if Powell gives in to Trump? It evaporates.

In the future, we wouldn't have confidence that the Fed is fighting inflation as rigorously as it should. And without that confidence, longer-term interest rates will spike, because investors will assume that there's no inflation cop on the beat and therefore will demand a higher risk premium.

Trump hates facts that he disagrees with. That's why he's dismembering the Environmental Protection Agency, which has repeatedly shown that climate change isn't a "hoax," as Trump claims, but more like a national emergency.

It's why Trump is attacking American universities, whose scientists are developing wind and solar energy and whose historians have revealed America's tragic history of racism and genocide of indigenous people.

He is killing off the Centers for Disease Control and the National Institutes of

Health, which are showing the sources of sickness and disease and how we can guard against them.

This is a man and a regime that doesn't want the public to know the truth. He is turning America into George Orwell's dystopian "1984."

The Trumping of America is happening so fast and in so many places that it's hard to see the whole. Which partly explains why he doesn't want the facts out. He doesn't want us to know how bad it really is.

Help spread the truth. Help organize and mobilize against this calamity.

Robert Reich, former secretary of labor during the Clinton administration, is professor of public policy at the University of California at Berkeley and author of "The System: Who Rigged It, How We Fix It." See robertreich.substack.com.



Trump Drives Wedges Into His Own Movement

By CLARENCE PAGE

Remember when then-candidate Donald Trump said during an Iowa campaign rally in 2016 that he “could stand in the middle of Fifth Avenue and shoot somebody, and I wouldn’t lose any voters, OK?”

I quickly put that aside as just another example of the New Yorker’s outlandish braggadocio, but like other political observers I have since been impressed by Trump’s seeming wall of invulnerability to scandal.

However, as the Jeffrey Epstein scandal boils up around our ears, I have begun to notice some cracks.

The difference is apparent as new questions about Trump’s relationship with the late financier and convicted sex offender Jeffrey Epstein, who died by suicide in 2019 while in jail awaiting trial on charges that he had sex-trafficked teenage girls.

Instead of calming the waters, demands from skeptical corners of the public have led to more curiosity, particularly from Trump’s

most deeply committed MAGA (“Make America Great Again”) base of supporters.

The irony for Trump is the fervor of the conviction that Epstein’s crimes are the rotten core of the U.S. political power structure. It’s a belief that Trump and his surrogates promoted when they suggested that Epstein’s political associates were Democrats. It was one of a rich array of conspiracy theories that Trump has used to whip up his populist movement.

The MAGA faithful have clung to Trump throughout the many tribulations of his first term and interregnum: the impeachments, the failed insurrection at the Capitol, the stolen documents investigation and sexual assault lawsuit.

But that steadfast support seems to be weakening. For example, recent polling from CBS News and YouGov found nearly 90% of Americans — including 83% of Republicans — think the Department of Justice should release all the information it has regarding the case against Epstein. That’s the opposite of what Trump, already busy with trade talks, warfare in the Middle East and other challenges, wants to talk about now.

After *The Wall Street Journal* report described a risqué drawing that Trump was said to have sent to Epstein decades ago, Trump sued the paper, its owner and reporters. Add to that the *Journal*’s report that Trump was informed that his name appeared in the Justice Department’s investi-

gation of Epstein, and it should be no surprise that Americans on all sides of the political spectrum have questions.

You could even say that the Epstein scandal has led to one of the most unified moments in recent political history — unified, that is, against Trump’s handling of the mess.

The discontent shows up in the ranks of his own party, which has been a big source of strength. For example, a poll from Quinnipiac University found that only 40% of Republicans approve of Trump’s handling of the release of the files on Epstein, while more than a third of them (36%) disapprove.

Quite frankly, if I were advising Trump’s campaign, a highly unlikely possibility, I would make a recommendation to which I am confident he would not listen: Stop talking so much.

Sure, he can’t seem to help himself. Anyone who has been in a press pool covering Trump will tell you that the man loves the sound of his own voice.

But this time, Trump’s critics in the media are not only coming from the center and left. Some of Trump’s usually loyal supporters have been outraged by the possibility that Team Trump is holding out on them or outright misleading them.

For example, many were disappointed after the Justice Department said Epstein did not leave behind a “client list,” contradicting a narrative that has been a mainstay on the

right’s conspiracy theorists’ circuit. Attorney General Pam Bondi suggested in February that the list was on her desk, although she later explained, unconvincingly to many, that she was referring to the overall case file.

Plus, she said DOJ staff were sifting through a “truckload” of previously withheld evidence. But the Justice Department ultimately decided not to disclose any more material on the case.

That has angered right-wing influencers and other commentators who had been encouraged by no less than the president himself.

In mid-July, influential Trumpistas such as Tucker Carlson, Laura Loomer and Steve Bannon were huffing and fuming over the lack of transparency, and some observers wondered whether anger over Epstein would divide the MAGA faithful.

Well, I wouldn’t bet on it. Democrats and others on the left still have a lot of work ahead to get their own acts — and activism — together.

But when I see Trump scurrying around to put out fires in his own MAGA movement, I can’t help but wonder how long he can reunite a movement that seems increasingly divided by the array of fears and paranoid notions of which he never seems to get enough.

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

GRASSROOTS/*Hank Kalet*

Cherry-Picking for Propaganda and Politics

A starving child with cystic fibrosis, one of thousands of starving children in Gaza, is suddenly cast by the right as proof that famine is being overblown.

An undocumented Dominican is accused of slashing a police officer — and used as evidence that “criminal aliens” are running rampant, fueling crime waves in so-called sanctuary cities.

A singular (so far) “bad” jobs report, rather than being viewed as a warning, is recast as nefarious, “cooked books” designed to make the president look bad.

Three separate and, seemingly, unrelated news items from late July and early August. Three cases, however, that are intimately connected — because of what they say about how we process facts and especially how the conspiratorial right uses and misuses information as it crafts narratives designed to prop up President Donald Trump.

In each case, a single “fact” wielded as a cudgel, a weapon to make a case that the broad array of evidence tells us cannot be made. The famine in Gaza — and its roots in the Israeli war on Palestinians in the strip — is undeniable. Immigrants, as dozens of studies show, commit far fewer crimes than American-born citizens. Data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics has widespread trust among both the political and academic classes.

But the identification of a single outlier or single piece of information — what is called “cherry-picking” — can be powerful when it is used to support already agreed-upon rightwing talking points. It is what the Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy (<https://iep.utm.edu>) describes as “an informal fallacy,” or an error “of reasoning that cannot easily be expressed in our standard system of formal logic.”

Cherry-picking — otherwise known as “Suppressed Ev-

idence” — is “intentionally failing to use information suspected of being relevant and significant,” using nominally relevant but tangential information, or purposefully (or inadvertently) suppressing anything that might contradict the story being told.

Cherry-picking works on an emotional level, at least partly because we are all susceptible to “confirmation bias,” or the “favouring or focusing on information that confirms your existing beliefs and preconceptions.”

This kind of bias grows, apparently, from an evolutionary need, according to the Farnham Street blog (<https://fs.blog/confirmation-bias/>).

“Our use of this cognitive shortcut is understandable. Evaluating evidence (especially when it is complicated or unclear) requires a great deal of mental energy. Our brains prefer to take shortcuts. This saves the time needed to make decisions, especially when we’re under pressure.”

The complications of the modern world, however, have created a different set of challenges. Because “our minds are unequipped to handle the modern world,” and “we are constantly receiving new information and have to make numerous complex choices each day,” we “have a natural tendency to take shortcuts.” These shortcuts leave us struggling. It is simpler and easier to strip the context from the data and plug it into what we already believe.

This, as The Decision Lab (<https://thedeclaration.com/biases/confirmation-bias>) writes “can have troubling implications.”

“The more we become entrenched in our preconceptions, the greater influence confirmation bias has on our behavior and, consequently, the people we choose to surround ourselves with. We can trap ourselves in a sort-of echo-chamber, and without being challenged, the biased thoughts prevail.”

This matters because it leaves larger and larger swathes of the public vulnerable to the various forms propaganda that find our echo chambers fertile grounds for growth. The Republican Party for most of my adult life has engaged in this kind of activity, attacking the legitimate press, defining reality to suit its aims. The Reagan and first Bush White Houses were obsessed with image, which was not unusual for presidents. George W. Bush’s post-9/11 presidency added a new twist — as reported by Ron Suskind:

ment from the rich to the working class. And then they blamed the victims of their policies for the resulting inequality and instability.

Now they’re going for the kill shot.

Trump and his Republican Party are not just misguided; they are dangerous. Their policies are not just bad; they are existential threats to economic stability. They’ve created the conditions for collapse, and they’ll blame immigrants, Democrats, or queer kids when it happens.

We can’t let them. We have to take our country back, economically, politically, morally.

That means rejecting trickle-down nonsense and restoring Keynesian demand-side policies. It means breaking up monopolies and rebuilding a regulatory state that works. It means bringing back progressive taxation and closing loopholes for billionaires. It

means massive investment in clean energy, public health, education, and infrastructure. It means rebuilding trust in democracy by reversing Citizens United, defending voting rights, rooting out corruption, and calling out fascism where we see it.

This must be at the core of the platform Democrats run on this fall and during next year’s midterms.

The risk of a depression is real. But the solution is in our hands. We just have to stop letting the Republican Party light the matches.

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. See the online version, with links, at hartmannreport.com.

Hartmann...

Continued from previous page

economically suicidal. Hurricanes, wildfires, floods, and heat waves are destroying billions in assets every year.

Insurance markets are collapsing in California, Florida, and Louisiana. Agricultural yields are falling. Water shortages are hitting the Southwest. Floods are wiping out the Midwest and the South while wildfires torch the West. But Republicans keep slashing climate research, killing green energy subsidies, and banning ESG investment strategies. They are literally outlawing the future.

It’s a five-alarm fire, and the Republican arsonists are demanding more gasoline.

There is, however, a way out. We’ve done it before.

After the last Republican-created depression, Franklin Roosevelt rejected the

dogma of austerity and implemented the most ambitious suite of Keynesian policies in world history. He put people to work. He regulated the banks. He taxed the rich. He unionized the workforce. He broke up monopolies. He guaranteed Social Security, unemployment insurance, and the right to organize.

That system — Keynesian demand-side economics — created the greatest middle class the world has ever seen. It lifted millions out of poverty, stabilized capitalism, and gave rise to the postwar economic boom. It literally created the modern American middle class.

But starting in 1981, Reagan and the GOP declared war on that system. They gutted antitrust enforcement. They slashed top tax rates. They crushed unions. They deregulated finance. They privatized public goods. They shifted the burden of funding govern-

Misery Meets Greed: Private Equity Discovers the Disabled

Misery, the Roman goddess of misery, woe, anxiety, and suffering, reigns. President Trump has brought her wrath down, but with a twist. Misery for some, wealth for others. This administration's motto: profits uber alles. The Big Beautiful Cuts have spurred trickle-down misery: 17 million of us will lose health insurance; no federal infrastructure will forewarn us of disasters, like floods; measles is ascendant, with a predicted rise in whooping cough; the decimation of environmental safeguard agencies will surely spur a spike in environmental diseases. The noxious tabulation goes on.

All is not glum, though. The Big Beautiful Cuts will enrich the richest.

Consider children with severe disabilities. Currently at least 10 million people with disabilities live at home, with a cadre of specialists and aides. They live with families who do the herculean task of keeping their dependents at home. The care is often round-the-clock; the equipment is specialized; the medical diagnoses, and treatments, complex. The per-child tab comes to thousands of dollars annually.

Parents - whether or not they stop working to help with care, or keep working - cannot pay the thousands of dollars annually to keep their children home. Their private insurance will not cover it.

So a benevolent Uncle Sam, via Medicaid, has stepped in to cover the costs, letting these children stay at home. One Ronald Reagan-era initiative - Katie Beckett waivers - expressly authorizes Medicaid payments for parents who are not "poor" enough for Medicaid, yet need home care to keep their children out of institutions. Since 1982, a Katie Beckett waiver has allowed Medicaid to waive considerations of income, letting severely disabled children receive services at home.

President Trump has targeted these expenditures as cesspools of fraud and abuse. His Administration will drain the cesspool.

The data do not support that allegation.

A 2023 report from the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services said that the "improper payment rate" under Medicaid is \$50.3 billion. Yet the majority of errors weren't fraudulent; most (82%) stemmed from improper documentation. The caregiving staff who serve these children do not earn mega-salaries; some earn little more than minimum wage.

The alternative to home care is institutional care.

Eventually most of the children will outlast their families' energies; and eventually many will go to group homes or specialized hospitals. But the Medicaid home-care funds are delaying that "eventually," keeping dependents out of institutions so long as their families can manage.

From one statistical vantage, institutional care can at times be cheaper.

From another vantage, institutional care can enrich the coffers of a slew of private investors.

Private equity stands in the wings, waiting to pounce. Private equity has been gobbling up hospitals, hospices and physician practices with a speed that rivals Pac-Man. Now it sees disabled children not as people deserving kindness and care, but as profit-centers. So it is turning with impunity to the hospitals and group homes for disabled children.

And this Big Beautiful Bill is abetting the greed of Venture Capital.

If those expected cuts take place, "eventually" will come sooner. Families, unable to afford the thousands of dollars in home care, will gravitate to special institutions, where Medicaid will pay the tab.

Medicaid will not just be paying for services, but enriching the investors wading into the lucrative "disability care" industry. In the not-so-long ago past, the "disability care" industry relied on nonprofits, often with ties to religious organizations. That era is ending, as venture capitalists discover an industry that receives government funds, that has a steady supply of clients, that has less-than-stringent government oversight, and that serves a vulnerable constituency, unlikely to protest.

Looking at this industry, investors recognize profits. Under the guise of efficiency, the rulebook is clear: replace more skilled with less-skilled staff; increase the patient-helper ratio; cut costs in the most creative ways that the MBAs can find. After the cuts, the watchdog groups, like the Private Equity Stakeholder Project (pestakeholder.org) will rise up, with statistics and scandals.

The ultimate victims: children. The ultimate winners: venture capitalists. And the "facilitator": this administration. Misery, allied with Mammon, smile.

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Making Sense of Prescription Drugs

By SAM URETSKY

“Since stepping into the helm at the Department of Health and Human Services, Robert F. Kennedy Jr. has done his best to challenge traditional medicine. He has loosened vaccine recommendations for children and pregnant women, peddled baseless claims about the causes of chronic diseases, and championed alternative therapies such as 'healing farms.'”

“Now, he is considering two proposals that would make it much more difficult for companies to air television advertisements promoting their drugs to consumers. One would require that ads include longer warnings about side effects, making them more expensive to run. The other would prevent drug companies from deducting advertising costs as business expenses for tax purposes.” - Editorial Board, Washington Post July 28, 2025

“The advertising quack who wearies with tales of countless cures/ His teeth I've enacted shall all be extracted by terrified amateurs.” - W. S. Gilbert (The Mikado)

For decades the federal regulations have tried to make drugs safer and less expensive. The first attempt to regulate drug safety was the Pure Food and Drug Act of 1906, but that was primarily a truth in labeling law which made it illegal to sell products that were "adulterated" or "misbranded." The Food, Drug and Cosmetic Act was passed in 1938 expanded the scope and responsibilities of the Food and Drug Administration, which was essentially a guarantee of drug safety. The Durham-Humphrey amendment of 1951 strengthened the safety provisions and also, by requiring a prescription from a physician or other licensed practitioner, controlled the cost of drugs.

The rules for drug prescribing and dispensing have been tightened considerably since then. Physicians may need to complete an educational course or be certified in a specific REMS program. (Risk Evaluation and Mitigation Strategies.) Prescribers and even pharmacies may be required to enroll in a registry and follow specific protocols before the drug can be prescribed or dispensed. For example, clozapine, an antipsychotic medication carries the risk of a dangerous drop in white blood cells. Prescribers must be certified in the Clozapine REMS program. Some states have their own

special requirements for some drugs.

There are requirements for drug advertising as well. The advertisements must contain the advice "ask your doctor if (insert the name of the drug) is right for you." The drug must be sold to the pharmacy by a "full disclosure," which is probably not all that much use, since it's also known as the "package insert." This is a sheet with information about the drug, but since it's included with the package that's sent to the pharmacy, it doesn't reach the prescriber. It was a sincere attempt to make drugs safer, but it usually winds up in the pharmacy waste basket. Still, ads for prescription drugs printed in medical journals must have the package insert printed with the ad. Look at an internet ad for a prescription medication and there will be two sections, one for patients (or prospective patients) and another for US healthcare providers. The PPI (patient package insert) is easier to understand and is generally given to the patient with the filled prescription.

As for the price of drugs, the price may be controlled by the health insurer, which has its own formulary, a list of drugs that are covered by insurance. The insurer decides what drug will be covered and which won't.

But advertising directly to patients is

and *New York Times* stories about all of that, or to pass them on to their audiences without a college education between them.

To secure a deal with Skydance, the board and stock holders at Paramount may have cashed in on firing Stephen Colbert and destroying CBS News. But if this ends how most actual experts think it will, they will not get the last laugh. The joke will be on them.

But it might be too late to save American democracy. So they better keep their golden parachute close to their chest and get ready to flee to Canada, where it might not be so cold soon if Trump's plan to gut the science for protecting the environment and combating climate change due to global warming from the burning of fossil fuels for energy and transportation continues to warm the planet and melts all the glaciers, creating beaches in many places where they never existed before.

Maybe some of them can seek refuge with Mark Zuckerberg in his underground survivalist bunker in Hawaii, after Meta's A.I. bots take over the government and render most workers obsolete, including most journalists.

Apparently no one in this administration has a plan to feed what's left of the country after they deport all the fruit and vegetable pickers to El Salvador.

They must figure everyone will be happy to survive on McDonald's hamburg-

not necessarily a bad thing, since patients don't know what their symptoms are - serious or not serious. For example, a heart attack in a woman is frequently different from a heart attack in a man. Men are more likely to have pain in the left arm, while women may have symptoms of gastrointestinal upset and fatigue. By giving information about what to look out for, patients may know whether to take an OTC (non-prescription) drug, or go to an MD or even emergency room.

The challenge is to have access to a physician. More and more physicians are choosing to join groups with annual fees for patients, and will not see Medicaid patients (patients whose coverage is based on income.) KFF.org reported, "About 17 Million More People Could be Uninsured due to the Big Beautiful Bill and other Policy Changes."

Drug advertisements aimed at patients may, just may, increase the number of people recognizing the need for qualified medical attention. At least direct-to-patient advertising can give information about when an MD is essential at a price that everybody can afford.

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THE BIG PICTURE/*Glynn Wilson*

A Tin Pot Dictator in a Banana Republic

WASHINGTON, D.C. - If Donald Trump was not so dangerous, it would be easy to laugh out loud at how silly he is, with his small hands and cold heart in bed with Satan on the cartoon show South Park.

"No God and no religion can survive ridicule," Mark Twain once wrote. "No political church, no nobility, no royalty or other fraud, can face ridicule in a fair field, and live."

But Trump is proving all previous political punditry pathetically wrong, the first autocratic tin pot dictator in American history with little political credibility and delusions of grandeur, trying to run the United States like a banana republic.

It is wildly ironic that the only criminal case he was convicted in involved his having sex with porn star Stormy Daniels, and

the only story to weaken his credibility with his MAGA base is his long time friendship with convicted pedophile pimp Jeffrey Epstein.

Back when QAnon was accusing Democrats of running a deep state pedophile ring, it was Epstein who had the pedophile party island in the "Virgin Islands," and the party mansion in New York with 14-year-old girls servicing the likes of Trump, Prince Andrew, Bill Gates and yes, America's horn dog president, Bill Clinton.

But the facts show Hillary and Pizzagate had nothing to do with it.

Vladimir Putin must have known, back when Trump was in his country imposing his golden shower fantasies on the contestants for Ms. Universe. It is widely known that the Russian Mob bailed Trump out when his Atlantic City casinos were going bankrupt, and no American bank would loan him money.

Is this payback? Trump giving Putin what he's always wanted? An America in constant crisis, with an economy on the rocks and chaos in the streets.

But no one at Breitbart News, the Drudge Report or Fox News took the time to read the Bloomberg, *Wall Street Journal*

WAYNE O'LEARY

Shock and Aw Shucks

In the end, it was a bit of a disappointment, even, no doubt, to the MAGA faithful. America showed its military might and technical proficiency in June's bombing of Iran on behalf of Israel, but Iran is still there. There was no "unconditional surrender," as called for by Donald Trump, and no *coup de grace*.

Administration talking heads repeated the words "totally obliterated" like a mantra in regard to the fate of Iran's nuclear capacity, but until they were pressured to conform or else by the outraged Trump and his Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth, Washington intelligence officials weren't so sure. Objective international estimates of the Iranians' ability to reconstitute their program still range from months to years — six months to a year was the initial conclusion of the U.N.'s International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA)

Benjamin "Bibi" Netanyahu was disappointed, too. Reports suggest he wanted Trump to dispense with his one-and-done strategy and continue massive bombing. Netanyahu worked assiduously for several decades and through several U.S. presidents to achieve his heart's desire: incapacitating Iran with American help. Trump was the one eventually sold on the idea, and then he stopped short of totally destroying Bibi's nemesis once and for all, calling instead for a cease-fire and putting his dibs in for the

Nobel Peace Prize. This must have galled the Israeli prime minister no end; after all, he'd attacked Iran himself with the apparent idea of drawing the Americans in to finish the job with their superior technology.

Another unfortunate ingredient spoiled the stew. Instead of waiting for the Iranians to strike first, which they apparently had no intention of doing, Netanyahu, followed by Trump, initiated what were euphemistically called "preemptive strikes." Since when have sneak attacks — that's what they were — become sanitized by calling them preemptive strikes?

When the Japanese empire bombed Pearl Harbor on Dec. 7, 1941, the action was called an unprovoked sneak attack and roundly condemned. FDR labeled the occasion a "day of infamy," especially since the Japanese were in Washington talking peace until the very last minute, while their fleet was gathering within range of Pearl Harbor. Similarly, Donald Trump appeared to give Iran two-weeks' grace to consider its options, then struck without warning.

The question remains as to whether the entire expensive demonstration of American air power — it involved 125 participating aircraft — was even necessary, whether Iran was actually close to developing an offensive nuclear capability. Director of National Intelligence Tulsi Gabbard, presumably channeling the professional analysts under her command, first said it wasn't; she backtracked somewhat, along with CIA Director John Ratcliffe, when the president, relying on his own gut instinct and/or Benjamin Netanyahu's intelligence service Mossad, contemptuously refuted her and froze her out of all subsequent discussions. In any case, despite the Donald's victory dance, the final result of "Operation Midnight Hammer" is as yet unknown and

will not be for some time.

Netanyahu's malign influence was probably key to the whole exercise. The Israeli autocrat has been scheming and maneuvering for years to arrange active U.S. participation in his crusade against Iran. Those on the American right tend to accept whatever he puts forth on intelligence; it always provides the worst-case scenario, which they want to believe. Iran, he said, was about ready to strike. He's been saying this, off and on, for two decades or more, the better to keep that U.S. military aid (\$3.8 billion per year) coming. Bibi's been the boy who cried wolf, but this time, he was believed.

Yet, Israeli military intelligence is itself suspect. The Tel Aviv government and its defense forces (the IDF) have, for instance, been releasing questionable or misleading information on the war in Gaza for about two years, claiming United Nations and NGO (nongovernmental agency) humanitarian efforts were actually surreptitious Hamas operations. They've also minimized civilian casualties and misrepresented civilian victims as Hamas fighters. (In fact, Palestinian deaths in Gaza now total 58,000, the vast majority of them noncombatants.) But Trump and his war-hawk cabinet were willing to take Netanyahu's word on Iran's intentions, just as the Biden administration routinely accepted IDF assessments of the Gaza situation, casualty figures included.

Israeli intelligence on Iran, good or bad, fit Trump's needs; it provided the rationale for a desired application of American force. This allowed the president to share in Netanyahu's martial glory, even surpass it, by pummeling Iran with the Pentagon's latest toy, the \$2.1 billion B-2 stealth bomber (deployed at an estimated cost of hundreds of millions of dollars), then one-up the Israeli

leader by prematurely declaring total victory and presiding over a (temporary?) cease-fire.

U.S. intervention also allowed for a one-upping of Barack Obama, whose nuclear-limitation agreement with Iran Trump had torn up in 2018. Obama, of course, brought the Iranians to the negotiating table by diplomatic means; that's for wimps. Donald did it (or thinks he's done it) by force of arms — much more satisfying to MAGA world.

Now, the self-proclaimed conqueror of Fordo wants a Nobel Peace Prize for his trouble (and to match Obama's); he's all but demanding it. Not to worry; Bibi Netanyahu, a kindred spirit, has placed his name in nomination. Peace through war, as we've seen, is the preferred Republican way. Why, after all, have the world's largest, most lethal military, if you're not going to use it?

Meanwhile, if elections have consequences, so do wars — sometimes intended, sometimes not. The latest spate of conflicts pitting Israel against Iran and Iran's proxies (principally Hezbollah in Lebanon), kicked off by the Hamas terrorist attack on Israelis staged from Gaza on Oct. 7, 2023, have re-ordered the Middle East and not necessarily for the better. In the process, the U.S., which according to Brown University's Watson Institute of International and Public Affairs has spent over \$250 billion funding Israel's military since 1959, has been dragged ever deeper into the region's maelstrom.

[To be continued]

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.

Marco Rubio and Global Debt

By JOSEPH B. ATKINS

OXFORD, Miss. - Marco Rubio today may be the head honcho at the U.S. State Department, but it was just a few years ago that he was pounding on the door of that same government entity, demanding that it force the government of Argentina to pay Wall Street hedge fund vulture Paul Singer billions in interest on outstanding loans even at the risk of the country going into default.

Due to the largesse of his erstwhile political foe, Donald Trump, Rubio today gets to hop-scotch around the world, scold other countries for their moral failures, and promote the neoliberal economic model that has made debt a major issue around the world, forcing countries like Argentina to slice pensions, eliminate teacher jobs, and destroy safety nets for the poor so that they can pay Shylocks like Singer their usury.

"He is accustomed to thinking about American foreign policy as a responsible policy maker," Singer said back in 2015 when

he threw his substantial financial support to Rubio's presidential campaign. "He is ready to be an informed and assertive decision-maker."

Today Argentina, under its Trump wannabe leader Javier Milei, is not only still reeling in debt (\$40 billion to the International Monetary Fund, and Milei is seeking another \$20 billion from the United States) but also from deepening poverty, disappearing government services, and from the fact that some 40,000 former government workers are out of a job due to the chainsaw-wielding Milei.

Milei has cut inflation down from a monthly 25 percent to just 2 percent, but prices are still high in tango land, and pensioners in particular are suffering from the combination of high cost of living and reduced services.

Rubio's friends on Wall Street actually have forced Argentina into default twice—once in 2001 and again in 2014. Here's how it works: Hedge fund operators purchase the bonded debts of struggling nations and then eventually demand full payment, which with interest can be 10 to 15 times the original debt. With the backing of friendly judges, these "vultures"—tagged that name by Pero-

nist former Argentine leader Christina Fernández de Kirchner—can ignore debt restructuring plans and warnings of default with their insistence on full payment.

Argentina actually had worked out a deal with most of its bondholders that would have created a repayment plan albeit with some losses on their investments. Hedge fund operators, however, got involved, bought the bonds at a hugely reduced price (due to the 2001 default), and rejected any such deal. They were backed by U.S. courts.

Singer's hedge fund, Elliott Management, is estimated to have taken in \$2.4 billion from Argentina, as much as 15 times the original debt. The fund bought \$50 million in Argentine bonds and essentially sold them back for \$2.4 billion.

It was Rubio, as a U.S. senator from Florida, who kept "banging on the State Department" door, according to journalist Greg Palast, to let Singer have his way in Argentina. "This was money screaming," Palast said in an interview with *Democracy Now*.

These financial wheeling and dealings aren't just in Argentina. Global debt is a huge crisis. According to *Maryknoll* magazine writer Thomas Gould, nearly half of the world's population "lives in countries that

spend more on debt than on either education or healthcare."

The debt arises out of loans provided by the International Monetary Fund, World Bank, and private lenders. The Oxfam organization estimates those private lenders control more than 50% of this debt.

Maryknoll, a Catholic publication, notes that the late Pope Francis made debt cancellation a primary focus of his papacy.

"The usurer is worse than Judas," St. Anthony of Padua said back in the 13th century. "The traitor, having sold the Blood of his Divine Master, brought back to the priests and princes the thirty pieces he had received, but the usurer guards and keeps his unjust gains."

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Settling the Ukraine War

By JASON SIBERT

The Ukraine War is the latest battleground in the current Cold War between the United States-led orbit and the China/Russia orbit.

The war is in its third year and has already cost a significant amount in terms of blood and treasure; it is also a battleground in Cold War II. The three major powers in the world—namely, the US (first), China (a close second), and Russia (a distant third)—are squaring off in this geopolitical contest. The results will undoubtedly be deadly if there's a military showdown between the two orbits.

How do we defuse tensions? Writer Carter Malkasian offered a suggestion in his story "The Korea Model: Why an Armistice Offers the Best Hope for Peace in Ukraine." In 1950, US troops, led by US General Douglas MacArthur, pushed into North Korea, but then China intervened. By the

middle of 1951, there was a stalemate along the 38th parallel. Negotiations between the two sides began in the summer of 1951. Heavy bombing of the northern portion of Korea in 1952 destroyed factories and farms, food was scarce, and North Korean leader Kim Il Sung was ready for a ceasefire because he understood the situation. The diplomacy that ended the Korean War occurred amid considerable fighting, like what's happening in Ukraine today.

As Malkasian states, the Korean Peninsula remains a focal point of intense geopolitical tension. A ruthless dictator rules North Korea, but South Korea has a robust economy and democracy. On a positive note, the carnage of the Korean War has been over for decades. He also pointed out that the Ukraine War resembles the Korean War and used it as a guide for a plan to end the conflict. Would Ukraine, or even a portion of it, prosper like South Korea after a ceasefire? Malkasian thinks that the answer is yes. He advocated a multilateral solution: "They should include the United Nations in any negotiations, since neutral arbiters are

an asset. Finally, they should condition future security assistance and post-conflict support for Ukraine on Kyiv's willingness to make some concessions." Malkasian also advocated the involvement of the US, Ukraine's supporters, and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization.

He said an agreement is most likely to be struck when the conflict becomes frozen. It's in a frozen state currently, with Russia bogged down in what it thought would be an easy war and Ukraine feeling the burdens of a war it didn't start. President Donald Trump sought an end to the war in the election of 2024, but so far, Putin hasn't been willing to stop the war, regardless of Trump's proposals. The writer admits that there are challenges in ending the war: "Yet if pursuing negotiations is a gamble, it is one with low risks and high potential rewards. Failure would merely yield the same result as doing nothing. Success, however, could preserve Ukraine, allay wider fears for democracy, deter further Russian aggression, and put fears of escalation to rest. The kind of stable, durable peace the Korean

armistice produced would be a victory not just for Ukraine and its supporters but for the entire world, as well."

Peace brings many benefits—lower security costs (military spending), reduced interference with the liberty of citizens of any one nation (no draft), and a focus on things other than war. The world's power centers (Russia, China and the US) could cooperate in a world defined by international law and peace. However, we must find a way to leave the Cold War we're in because it puts the world's power centers in an adversarial relationship, a subject that's beyond the scope of this story. Would a peace deal in Ukraine be a good starting point? Could a group of arms control deals that follow a Ukraine deal further de-escalate the current Cold War? One could argue that the Korean War brought a simmer to the first Cold War, to some extent. Our country, and others, could chart a new future if we can find the right path.

Jason Sibert of St. Louis, Mo., is the Lead Writer of the Peace Economy Project

We're All Palestinians Now: How Trump is Middle-Easternizing the United States

By JUAN COLE

The United States has focused on the Middle East since World War II, seeking its oil, gas, and other mineral resources and coveting control of its strategic waterways. The old colonial powers and the superpowers of the Cold War era most often backed dictatorial regimes there, because they were easier to control than democracies, and this country also supported the Israeli settler colony as a bulwark of Western interests. President George W. Bush was the first president to depart (at least rhetorically) from America's romance with regional authoritarians, pledging to "democratize" the Middle East, though he left office with little to show for it. Now, you have to wonder whether, in some strange sense, the shoe is on the other foot and the pathological U.S. support for dictatorships there is now spreading across the Atlantic Ocean, just as the trade winds blow Saharan sand and dust toward the American Southwest.

Democratic Backsliding

Here's something that should sound familiar in the United States today: Qais Saied of Tunisia, elected president in 2019, campaigned against homosexuality and — yes! — African immigrants. In 2021, he lawlessly dismissed his prime minister and parliament and went on to rewrite the country's constitution so that he could appoint yes-men to its Supreme Court. Then he began jailing his political opponents. In four short years, Saied undid all the political progress Tunisia had made in the previous decade, creating a dictatorship arguably worse than that of Zine El Abidine Ben Ali, who was overthrown in January 2011 in the first of several major Arab Spring youth revolts.

Worse yet — and this should sound familiar, too — Tunisia seemed to sleepwalk into authoritarianism. Trade unionists hoped the president would reject the neoliberalism of the International Monetary Fund, while civil society organizations hoped he would curb the Interior Ministry's past repressiveness. No such luck. Europe declined to punish the newly developing dictatorship by cutting off aid, instead rewarding Saied with an economic deal in return for his willingness to crack down on African emigration. Of course, such democratic backsliding has been a feature of the Middle East for decades, since local civil society remains weak, pro-regime billionaires have proliferated, and Western governments have seldom reacted negatively to (and all too often rewarded) any move toward dictatorship.

Now, you might say that the shoe is on the other foot. What Saied did to Tunisia might as well have been a blueprint for Donald Trump. Although he hasn't yet actually tried to rewrite the constitution, the MAGA leader has been the beneficiary of a decades-long \$250 million dark-money plot, led by obscure Federalist Society apparatchik Leonard Leo, to reshape the Supreme Court. The result: a set of justices who are distinctly inclined to let Trump do his damndest — even expel undocumented residents of the United States to gulags in third-world countries with no court process. Meanwhile, labor union members have too often placed faith in Trump's pledges to bring back industry by using tariffs to reduce competition. And the centrists of the Democratic Party are the proverbial deer-in-the-headlights, too paralyzed to react effectively as he transforms this country into an ever more autocratic state. They also seem all too inclined to let our democracy slip away, while placing their hopes in a 2026 congressional blue wave that, even if it happens, may be too late to stop Trump from creating his version of a one-party state.

Raw Milk and Vitamin A

Consider it typical of our times that Field Marshall Abdelfattah al-Sisi's 2013 coup against the only freely elected Egyptian government since the country's monarchy was toppled in 1952 had no significant adverse consequences in Washington. In 2014, a leading officer in the Egyptian army, which receives \$1.3 billion a year in American aid, made quixotic health claims. Major General Ibrahim Abdel-Atti announced that he had personally "defeated AIDS with the grace of my God at the rate of 100%. And I defeated hepatitis C." In the process, he confused the foundational nucleic acids DNA and RNA, provoking one Egyptian comedian to suggest that the country's medical schools should never again accept anyone from Abdel-Atti's village. However, the North Korean-like pall that has blanketed freedom of speech in Egypt was precisely what permitted such bizarre official behavior, since there was little way for the public to respond to even his most absurd claims.

Yet, imagine this: Abdel-Atti appears almost sane and sober in comparison with the antics of U.S. Secretary of Health and Human Services Robert F. Kennedy, Jr., who has discouraged vaccinations even as a measles outbreak has begun to run wild (and prove fatal in a few cases) 25 years after the U.S. officially eliminated the disease. Kennedy's proposed treatment for measles? Raw milk and vitamin A. Sadly, overdoses of the latter have caused liver disease in some children.

Kennedy is also working hard to gut the Department of Health and Human Services and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. The damage he's doing in the Trump era to America's vital and effective vaccination infrastructure could unleash serial plagues upon the public. And it's not likely to get better any time soon, given the irrational demagogue now in the White House, just as Egyptians suffer under megalomaniacal generals.

A Kafala System

And here's another Middle Eastern peculiarity inherited from Western colonialism that will sound all too familiar in Donald Trump's America: the large numbers of non-citizens and stateless people who suffer from a lack of basic civil and human rights. In the 19th and early 20th centuries, imperial Great Britain made treaties with small sheikhdoms along the coast of the Persian Gulf to ensure the security of its shipping and check rivals like the Ottoman Empire. When the British finally withdrew completely from the Gulf in 1972, they left behind postage-stamp countries with vast oil and gas wealth, which did not have a sufficient native-born population to work the rigs or staff the energy companies. The British Empire had often brought into its colonies, like Kuwait and Bahrain, subjects from British India.

After decolonization, such workers from India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh were coded as foreigners in the Arab Gulf. They began laboring under a "guarantor" (kafala) system in which a local entrepreneur would take responsibility for migrant laborers who often surrendered their passports to him for as long as they were in the country. The guarantor would then take a cut of their wages or business profits. No matter how long such migrants lived in those countries, they and their children almost never became eligible for citizenship, and they could have their visas revoked at any time. Others now have trouble even getting in. Typically, the United Arab Emirates (UAE) in January announced a ban on visas (for Afghans, Libyans, Yemenis, Somalians, Lebanese, Bangladeshi, Cameroonians, Sudanis, and Ugandans). And that should sound familiar, since the Trump regime has already implemented a visa ban on 19 mainly African and Middle Eastern countries. In short, the policies toward immigrant labor in the two regions seem to be converging.

Countries like the United Arab Emirates have a little more than a million citizens and 10 million mostly South Asian guest workers, some of whom have lived there all their lives or are even second or

third generation residents. Such migrant workers, however, have no right to form unions or strike. Any encounter with law enforcement, even a fender-bender, can result in their expulsion. New York University Professor Andrew Ross was typically banned from the country simply for researching labor conditions. British academic Matthew Hedges was imprisoned on false espionage charges in 2018, tortured, and threatened with deportation to a UAE black site in Yemen before ultimately being released. New York University has a branch in Abu Dhabi, where the students and faculty have had run-ins with the government of President Mohammed Bin Zayed, which surged in the past two years because the country does not permit social media posts criticizing Israel's atrocities in Gaza.

And it's not only migrant laborers in the Middle East who can be denied citizenship despite long residence. Indigenous people, too, sometimes become non-citizens (just as Native Americans were denied U.S. citizenship until 1924). The Arab nationalists of Syria denaturalized some 100,000 Kurdish Syrians in Hasakah Province in 1962 and, over time, that figure grew to several hundred thousand. The Middle East is a patchwork of citizenship hierarchies, where the line can be drawn capriciously by nationalists, fundamentalists, or monarchs.

It does not take much familiarity with Donald Trump's policies in the past six months to see the ways in which his administration seemingly yearns for similar levels of citizenship and limited residency to be imposed in this country. He has even threatened to deport naturalized American citizens like (can you believe it?) Elon Musk or Zohran Mamdani, the Democratic candidate for mayor of New York City, for their criticisms of him. If his fondest wishes were fulfilled, he might even prefer his country to be more like Israel when it came to anyone he didn't like living there.

Expelled for Gandhism

An analogy could also be made between the "foreign" migrant workers in the Gulf, who have no local citizenship or rights, and the Palestinians under Israeli rule in the West Bank or Gaza. Like the Syrian Kurds of Hasakah, they have been made stateless in their own country. They lack a national government and the rights and passport it would give them. Palestinians in Area C, the 60% of the West Bank that is directly ruled by the Israeli military, see rights like unionizing or striking routinely curbed. Like Gulf workers, Palestinians are subject to expulsion at the whim of the Israeli military. And keep in mind that, when Israel seized the West Bank and Gaza in 1967, some 300,000 Palestinians were expelled from it or, if working abroad, forbidden to return home.

Some of those trapped by the decades-long occupation have also been subject to arbitrary removal. The Israeli authorities illegally expelled Palestinian pacifist Mubarak Awad from his homeland in 1988 for advocating Gandhi-style nonviolent noncooperation. Tens of thousands of West Bank Palestinians have been forced from their homes in the past two years, as entire refugee camps have been razed, the Israeli military has destroyed homes, and Israeli squatters on Palestinian land have enacted pogroms. Since the Hamas assault on Israel in October 2023, at least 100,000 Gazans have been forced out of Palestine entirely by Israeli commanders, who have ordered that some 90% of the housing stock there be damaged or destroyed.

Inside the Jewish ethnostate of Israel, the 21% of the population who are of Palestinian heritage are distinctly second-class citizens. Human Rights Organizations like Adalah have identified 65 Israeli laws that discriminate against Palestinian-Israelis. In 2018, the Israeli parliament declared that national sovereignty is invested solely in the country's Jews. Since October 2023, Palestinian-Israelis have been under strict surveillance and have to be careful about their Internet postings. The Israeli Supreme Court ruled in 2022 that they can be stripped of their citizenship and expelled for breach of loyalty to the Israeli state.

SEVIS Hits

Like the rulers of some Gulf states, Trump and his crew want to treat all noncitizens on visas in the U.S. — and even some naturalized citizens — arbitrarily. Since he returned to power in January, thousands of visas have been revoked for even minor contact with law enforcement, just as happens to hapless migrants in the UAE. Trump officials ran the data in the Student and Exchange Visitor Information System (SEVIS) against police reports and zeroed in on 6,400 of them, terminating their SEVIS entries without notice. That was, of course, in contravention of government regulations. Most of the hits involved cases where charges had been dropped or were minor. Affected students filed more than 60 lawsuits and consistently prevailed in court, forcing ICE to restore the SEVIS records, at least for now.

In addition, Trump and Secretary of State Marco Rubio attempted to revoke the visas of students who had been active in protests against the Israeli genocide in Gaza (in precisely the same way and on the same grounds as the Emirati government does). Among such high-profile cases, the State Department targeted figures like Columbia University graduate and pro-Palestinian protester Mahmoud Khalil, who had permanent resident status in the country but was arrested anyway and sent to a Louisiana prison. Tufts graduate student Rumeysa Öztürk, who had written a mild opinion piece for her student newspaper criticizing her school's response to events in Gaza, was similarly seized. Apparently, the plan was to avoid letting them appear before a judge and instead summarily deport them, but the courts insisted they be given hearings, upholding the apparently imperiled principle of habeas corpus. Chapters of the American Association of University Professors, along with the Middle East Studies Association, have sued on First Amendment grounds to overturn Rubio's policy of declaring speech to be a national security emergency, permitting the deportation of visa and green card holders.

In 1945, the case of *Bridges v. Wixon* established that not just citizens but all people residing in the United States enjoy the protection of the Bill of Rights. As the Cold War heated up in the 1950s, however, the court did allow a few deportations of non-citizens due to their membership in the Communist Party (as in *Harisiades v. Shaughnessy* in 1952). Eighty years later, in a distinctly new world, Rubio and his colleagues wish to reverse *Bridges* and make the U.S. a giant version of the United Arab Emirates, functionally an absolute (Trumpian) monarchy. Instead of emulating the best of Middle Eastern values such as generosity to guests and love of learning, Trump and crew seem to admire only Western-imposed authoritarianism.

Ironically, in the second Trump era, America's billionaires and corporate elites have decided that this country should be ruled with some of the same techniques that they and their Middle Eastern proxies have long used abroad. Instead of America democratizing the Middle East, it's increasingly clear that Trump and crew have decided to Middle-Easternize the United States.

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Trump's Rap Sheet vs. the People

By JAMIE STIEHM

Donald Trump's conquering of the country is complete. The blows he's inflicted on American democracy will take a lifetime to heal.

The president fired the Bureau of Labor Statistics chief, a woman, for a poor jobs and growth report. That is a death knell — or a deep chill — for honest government officials.

He shut the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, headed by a woman.

He'll no longer enforce pollution laws, giving fossil fuels open season.

He fired the Black chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and a woman admiral.

He decimated the federal workforce.

He slashed climate and weather national services as the air gets hotter, floods rise faster, blazes burn longer, and hurricanes cause havoc. He's threatened to curb the Federal Emergency Management Agency.

His volatile tariffs are hurting consumer prices and jarring the world trade system, creating uncertainty. Yet aide Peter Navarro suggested Trump could win the Nobel Prize

in Economic Sciences.

Trump compelled the Senate to confirm his criminal defense lawyer, Emil Bove, to the federal bench, 50-49.

He's taking away health care for at least 11 million people (after the 2026 midterms).

He fired the librarian of Congress, a Black woman, and the Kennedy Center president, a woman — in overnight emails.

He dismantled our helping hand around the world, the U.S. Agency for International Development.

He's seizing federal funds from top universities.

The mainstream media bends over backward, mainly in legal payoffs, to pacify his rage.

He's abducting residents with no criminal record.

And in one fell blow, Trump murdered the Kennedy Rose Garden, paving over it. The unkindest cut of all, for the flowers never had a chance.

Oh, but there's more.

I see with my own eyes senators in search of their souls. Southern Republicans Thom Tillis (N.C.) and Bill Cassidy (La.) felt forced to support Pete Hegseth and Bobby Kennedy Jr. for defense secretary and health and human services secretary, respectively.

They knew better but cast deciding votes for those outlandish picks, now at war with their agencies.

You may think the outrages and coer-

ctions would cross a line of "Enough!" in congressional Republicans.

Just the opposite is true. The more Trump lashes out at institutions, even the hallowed Smithsonian, the more timid they are toward the man the House impeached twice.

Congress is much more wary of Trump in his second term, and he likes to keep it that way.

The first president to come to power peddling lies and insults on "social" media, Trump has a sordid past, with friends like Jeffrey Epstein, the press managed to ignore.

And he sure made mincemeat of the two women he ran against. He has no idea of acting like a sport or a gentleman.

Andrew Jackson, the seventh president, is Trump's doppelganger: He defeated a one-term president, John Quincy Adams, in a grudge match in 1828. Jackson's unruly mob sacked the White House mansion on Inauguration Day.

Trump and Jackson are strikingly similar in their ferocity. A pro-slavery Southerner, Jackson expelled five Indian tribes from rich ancestral lands so slavery could expand.

The Army force-marched thousands from the Southeast to dusty Oklahoma. We know it as the Trail of Tears. Trump would like to take over Canada and Greenland.

Like Trump, Jackson survived a bullet. It lodged in "Old Hickory's" chest. Unlike Trump, Jackson displayed military valor,

whipping the British in the Battle of New Orleans even after the War of 1812 was over.

Jackson closed the Second Bank of the United States, setting off an economic disruption like Trump's. The Panic of 1837, a severe depression, happened soon after Jackson left office.

Jackson named Roger Taney chief justice at the urging of Francis Scott Key. (Yes, that one.) Author of the 1857 Dred Scott ruling, Taney went down in history as the worst racist in judicial history. Blacks could never have rights or become citizens, he decreed.

Trump's Supreme Court stripped a constitutional right — reproductive rights — away from citizens for the first time in history.

One Adams biographer, Fred Kaplan, noted a lack of expertise in Jackson's cabinet. Worse, he criticized Jackson's "executive authoritarianism," "harsh racism" and "anti-intellectual ignorance."

Ring a bell?

As Shakespeare's Mark Antony proclaimed, "the evil that men do lives after them."

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It's Not The Message. Or The Messenger

By BARRY FRIEDMAN

This past July, former President Barack Obama told Democrats to "toughen up" and "stop navel-gazing." Earlier in the month, failed presidential, senatorial, and gubernatorial candidate Beto O'Rourke told Democrats to "meet fire with fire" when it comes to Republicans, and asked: "Why the f— are we responding and reacting to the other side instead of taking the offense on these things? Democrats are more interested in being right than being in power."

To his credit, when he ran for governor in 2022 against incumbent Greg Abbott — and this was after the carnage of the shootings in Uvalde, Texas — he confronted the governor: "The time to stop the next shooting is right now and you are doing nothing. You said this is not predictable. This is totally predictable."

O'Rourke lost by more than 11 points that election.

He would have lost by 11 had he given Abbott a hug for protecting our Second Amendment freedoms.

Obama, meanwhile, made his comments at a private fundraiser at the \$2.5 million home of New Jersey Gov. Phil Murphy, telling invited guests to stop "whining" and spending time in "fetal positions."

(Tough love before the lobster canapés are served.)

In 2004, as keynote speaker at the Democratic National Convention, Obama said the country wasn't divided into red and blue states: "There's not a Black America and White America and Latino America and Asian America; there's the United States of America." At the end of his presidency, 72% of registered Republicans still doubted his citizenship.

One America, though.

WHEN OBAMA'S CHOICE, Merrick Garland, to replace Antonin Scalia on SCOTUS was thwarted by then-Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, Obama said of Republican opposition, "I hope they're fair. That's all. I hope they're fair."

He did everything but say, "Pretty please."

After Trump on in 2016 election, Obama said, "I don't think he is ideological. I think ultimately he's pragmatic in that way that can serve him well as long as he's got good people around him."

And he's giving Democrats advice?

Do O'Rourke and Obama believe with better messaging, a Democrat would be sitting in the White House, and/or the party would be in control of either the House or Senate, and/or the Democratic brand would be more popular? Did Hillary Clinton and Kamala Harris not sufficiently go after Trump? (They did a better job of it than Obama did.) Clinton proposed free college tuition at state institutions for families making under \$125,000 per year and raising the minimum wage (from \$7.25/hour, where it still is, to \$12/hour). Harris proposed that Medicare cover long-term home-care services and \$25,000 in down-payment support for first-time homeowners. Joe Biden forgave student debt and sent billions to red states to rebuild infrastructure.

During his campaigns, Donald Trump talked about his love letters from North Korea's Kim Jong Un, 400-pound hackers, and Haitians eating dogs and cats.

And Dems have the messaging problem?

Every Democratic House and Senate member voted against the atrociously named "Big, Beautiful Bill." Six of Trump's Cabinet nominees received no support from Democratic senators: Pete Hegseth (Defense), Russel Vought (OMB), Tulsa Gabbard (DNI), Robert F. Kennedy, Jr. (HHS), Harold Lutnick (Commerce), and Linda McMahon (Education).

It's not the messaging, it's not the messenger — it's a country that's getting darker, dumber, and losing its mind ... and proud of it.

In Germany in 1932, 13,418,517 Germans voted, VOTED, for Adolf Hitler — and they didn't do so because Hitler's main opponents, Paul von Hindenburg and Ernst Thälmann, had lousy talking points.

But of course you can't blame voters if you're a Democrat, because it's bad politics and feeds into the belief the party only caters to tabby-loving vegetarian transgender volleyball players.

Further, let O'Rourke and Obama tell Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez; Sens. Bernie Sanders, Chris Murphy and Adam Schiff; California Gov. Gavin Newsom; and Illinois Gov. JB Pritzker they haven't been tough enough on Trump.

Think of Republicans you know — not the crazy ones, the ones who think Trump belongs on Rushmore or helped Jesus carry the cross to Golgotha — but the sane ones in your life who insist Trump has the best plan for the economy, regulation, immigration. What message could the Democrats have given them?

Republicans couldn't give them a message ... or messenger.

In 2016 and 2024, Trump faced 14 GOP contenders — Ted Cruz, Marco Rubio, John Kasich, Jeb Bush, Rick Santorum, Carly Fiorina, Chris Christie, Mike Huckabee, Rand Paul, Ben Carson, Vivek Ramaswamy, Asa Hutchinson, Ron DeSantis, and Nikki Haley, all saner than Trump — and GOP voters chose him anyway, even after he was proved

to be genitalia-grabbing mendacious blowhard. And your friends would have voted for Kamala Harris if she was tougher on transgenders in prison or if Chuck Schumer's glasses stayed on his head when reading his opposition to Trump's policies?

Please.

Democrats aren't any more responsible for Donald Trump in America than Turkey's opposition Republican People's Party (CHP) is in Turkey for Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, than the opposition Hungary's opposition Tisza party is for Viktor Orbán, than the opposition National Unity Party in Israel is for Benjamin Netanyahu ... than those opposition parties in 1932 Germany were responsible for Adolf Hitler.

In 2009, Obama went on *The Tonight Show* and told Jay Leno the story of bowling a 129 and how it was "like Special Olympics or something." The next day, Obama called Special Olympics then-Chairman Tim Shriver and apologized for not choosing his words more carefully.

In 2016, then-presidential candidate Donald Trump was speaking to a crowd at a campaign event, and, referring to *New York Times* reporter Serge F. Kovaleski, who suffers from arthrogryposis, which limits joint movements, said, "You ought to see this guy," while jerking his arms around and bending his right wrist at a grotesque angle.

The next day, Trump denied mocking Kovaleski.

So, what would have changed in America had he apologized for mocking the disabled?

What would have changed in America if Obama hadn't?

Nothing.

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The New York Times Does Not Fear Trump ... But Bret Stephens Is Another Matter

After the long-time skittish *New York Times* published a lengthy essay by the renowned genocide scholar, Prof. Omer Bartov of Brown University titled “I’m a Genocide Scholar, I Know It When I see It,” the Palestinian-hater, *Times* columnist Bret Stephens immediately jumped into the Netanyahu style rebuttal mode. His column was titled “No, Israel is Not Committing Genocide in Gaza.” His cruel and specious assertion, contradicted by many genocide scholars, was that if the Israeli regime was truly genocidal, they would have committed “hundreds of thousands of deaths” in Gaza instead of the mere 60,000 deaths reported by the Hamas run Health Ministry.

Get real, Mr. Stephens, the Israeli military has destroyed the lives of at least one out of four Palestinians there, or about half a million at least, from the daily bombing since Oct. 7, 2023, of civilians and their infrastructure. Saturation aerial and artillery bombardments of 2.3 million defenseless Palestinians, also under constant sniper fire, crammed into an area the geographic size of Philadelphia. (See *The Lancet*, “Counting the dead in Gaza: Difficult but essential,” my column “The Vast Gaza Death Undercount—Undermines Civic, Diplomatic and Political Pressures” and my article in the August/September 2024 *Capitol Hill Citizen*.) American doctors back from Gaza have repeatedly observed that almost all the survivors are sick, injured or dying.

Seizing on the Hamas regime’s self-interest in a low death count, to not arouse further the ire of the residents of Gaza against their lack of bomb shelters and other protections, Stephens constructs the usual fictions, reflecting AIPAC and Netanyahu’s regime, that Israel does not “deliberately target and kill Gazan civilians.” [Former UN

Ambassador and Foreign Minister Abba Eban wrote of Israel under then Prime Minister Menachem Begin that Israel “is wantonly inflicting every possible measure of death and anguish on civilian populations in a mood reminiscent of regimes which neither Mr. Begin nor I would dare to mention by name.”] Look at the reports by *Times* journalists from the area, see the pictures of the mass murder, the slaughter of babies, children, mothers, and fathers that comprise Netanyahu’s Palestinian Holocaust.

Listen to the Israeli Minister of Defense Yoav Gallant’s Oct. 9, 2023, enforced declaration that Israeli demolition of Gaza would include “...no electricity, no food, no fuel, everything is closed.” “We are fighting human animals and we are acting accordingly.”

And so indeed has the Israeli military targeted innocent families, journalists, and UNRWA relief staff. To quote Professor Bartov, “the systematic destruction in Gaza not only of housing but also of other infrastructure—government buildings, hospitals, universities, schools, mosques, cultural heritage sites, water treatment plants, agriculture areas, and parks...” Bartov grew up in Israel, served four years in the Israeli army, and knows the situation there in great detail.

Bret Stephens brings an unprecedented power over the editorial Board at the *Times* because he is seen as the voice of the Israeli government-can-do-no-wrong domestic lobby, inside the *Times* who is always ready to frivolously accuse anybody at the paper of antisemitism to shut them up or water down their content.

As Will Solomon reported July 25 in *Counterpunch*, Stephens is the “minder” of what is unacceptable criticism of the Israeli regime and has succeeded significantly in

legacy outlets looked for people and topics to cut, humor was one of the first targets. Editorial cartoonists, who had numbered in the hundreds, have been eviscerated.

Until half a century ago, big-city newspapers devoted a lot of space to comics. Sunday comics sections often ran 8-to-16 pages. Strips like *Blondie* and *Doonesbury* were widely syndicated, with *Peanuts* appearing in over 2,600 newspapers at its peak. Today, a Sunday section might include 10-to-15 strips.

The alternative newsweeklies, where my career began—papers like *SF Weekly*, *Boston Weekly Dig* and *The Village Voice*—added more humor writers and cartoonists as they expanded in the 1980s. At their peak, in the late 1990s, a paper like the *New York Press* might run as many as a dozen edgy Gen X strips, like my *Search and Destroy* and Ruben Bolling’s *Tom the Dancing Bug*. You could tell how well a paper was doing by how many comics it published. When the Internet—specifically, *Craigslist*—decimated the weeklies’ ad model, satire disappeared first. Alt weeklies have all but vanished.

Editorial decision-making being roughly as transparent as the White House, it’s impossible to say with certainty why satire got a harder swing of the budget-cutter’s ax when times turned hard. Comic strips and humor columns are popular with readers. But many editors have told me that they see these features as non-essential compared to hard news and opinion. Others said that humor generated too many complaints. Newspapers are trying to brand themselves as “serious journalism” to differentiate themselves from entertainment-focused digital media.

Perhaps because the websites of legacy newspapers are as funny-free as their print predecessors, newspaper profits have continued to decline as they’ve moved online.

The book publishing industry, still dominated by print editions, is profitable but threatened by rising operational expenses,

his censorship. If you wonder for example why it took the *Times* editorial board so long to condemn the Israeli regime’s starvation of Gazans, especially the most vulnerable infants and children (see the July 31 *Times* editorial and the July 27 opinion piece “The World Must See Gaza’s Starvation” by Mohammed Mansour), it is likely the climate of fear or weariness generated by Stephens.

Stephens is given remarkable latitude by the *Times* editors. His falsifications and antisemitic rage against Palestinian semites (see “The Other Anti-Semitism” by Jim Zogby) escape his editors’ pen. He is given unusual space, including a recently concluded weekly column with Gail Collins, which replaced valuable editorial space, with repartees that had become shop-worn over the years. He also is given special writing projects.

Consider his background. A former hard-line editor of the *Jerusalem Post*, then for years a war-mongering columnist for the *Wall Street Journal*. Especially vicious against Palestinians and their supporters, Stephens came to the *Times* for a singular reason. The *Times* wanted a right-winger who did not like the new president, Donald Trump. What the *Times* got was a cunning censor of their journalistic integrity and editorial respect for the regular devastating reports the *Times* was getting from their own journalists operating out of Jerusalem. They were not allowed into Gaza to report independently on what was being done with U.S. tax dollars and the unconditional support from President Joe Biden and now Trump.

Imagine, for example, the *Times* not writing an editorial following the Israeli booby-trapping of thousands of pagers in Lebanon. This was called a clear war crime by former Secretary of Defense Leon Panetta.

While the *Times* has published op-eds critical of Israeli aggressions, it has maintained a list of words and phrases that could not be used in its reporting, such as “genocide.” It has avoided doing features on the many Israeli human rights groups sharply taking Netanyahu to task, or groups in the U.S., such as the very active Veterans for Peace with 100 chapters around the U.S. By contrast the *Times* devoted extensive space to repeated false propaganda by the Israeli

including printing and distribution challenges. Returns of unsold books, a long-standing industry issue, make for razor-thin margins. And book publishers aren’t hot on humor. Only a few percent of trade books fall in the niche humor category. And forget edgy topical humor. When I tried to sell my prose Trump parody book “Dinner at Mar-a-Lago,” publishers liked the writing. But they were as afraid of angry MAGA readers as the president of Harvard.

Just when we need satire more than ever, we get hardly any.

Where there’s expansion and increasing profits—whether it’s cause or effect—you will find humor.

Comedy shows are a cornerstone of the exploding medium of video streaming, where platforms are investing heavily in original material like Netflix’s *Squid Game*, HBO Max’s *Abbott Elementary*, Amazon Prime’s *The Studio* and Hulu’s *Common Side Effects*. Leading the industry, Netflix released nearly 40 stand-up specials in 2024. *The Daily Show*, *Last Week Tonight* and *South Park* are still going strong. Comedy animations like *Bluey* and *Family Guy* top the Nielsen ratings.

A useful test for a correlation between satirical content and financial health is legacy broadcast television. They’re still making billions—but fewer billions. Continuing a years-long trend, total TV station revenue is anticipated to drop more than 9% this year.

The shrinking of legacy network TV profits has created a complicated picture. Networks like ABC, CBS, NBC and Fox run more weekly hours of satire than they did in their heyday of the 1970s and 1980s. But they’re far less prominent. Though *Saturday Night Live* ran and still runs in the late night, comedies like *All in the Family*, *The Jeffersons*, *Maude*, *The Mary Tyler Moore Show*, *The Smothers Brothers Comedy Hour* and *The Carol Burnett Show* ran in prime time. Satire reached massive audiences in an era with only three major networks. Seth Meyers and

regime.

Even coverage of the omnipresent Jewish Voice for Peace and If Not Now requires dramatic non-violent civil disobedience, as with the Oct. 24, 2023, sit-in at Grand Central Station, to get into the *Times* pages.

Throughout the months since Oct. 7, and the mysterious total collapse of the multi-tiered Israeli border security apparatus on the Gaza border, still denied an official investigation by its perpetrators, the defiant presence of Stephens persists, though it is being countered by the sickening pictures of skeletal, starving Palestinian infants. (A survey last year by a British civic association had 46% of Palestinian children wanting to die and 97% expecting to be killed.)

Credit Stephens with covering his self-designated, intimidating role of policing what should not be appearing by staff in the *Times*’ editorial pages. In his column with Collins, he used humor and praise of *Times* reports and book reviews not connected with the Israeli domination of the Middle East. Recognizing a no-win situation for herself, Gail Collins agreed not to raise the Israeli/Palestine issue in any of the hundreds of columns she wrote with Stephens, who is disliked by many at the *Times*.

Stephens is immovable. Over a year ago, he shockingly wrote that the Israeli military is not using enough force on the Palestinians. He refuses to disavow the most racist, vicious descriptions of Palestinians over the years by high Israeli government officials. He refuses to support opening Gaza to foreign journalists, including Israeli journalists. He even declines to support the airlifting of amputated and horribly burned Palestinian children to ready and able hospitals in the U.S.

The *New York Times* does not fear Donald Trump. But it does fear or is very wary of the smiling, internal censorious presence of this AIPAC clone and the attention he demands because of the forces he represents. The editorial board and *Times* management need to reject this affront to the freedom of its journalists and the paper’s integrity.

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Jimmy Kimmel can’t come close in their time slots. And if you believe CBS, *The Late Show with Stephen Colbert* is no longer financially viable—it reportedly generated \$60 million in revenue but lost \$40 million annually due to high costs, including large writing teams, celebrity guests and elaborate sets.

Optimism abounds in the rapidly-expanding \$30 billion-a-year podcast industry, and comedy is the cornerstone of the sector. Shows like *The Joe Rogan Experience*, *SmartLess*, and *My Favorite Murder* (which blends true crime with humor) consistently rank among the most popular programs.

Do more profitable media companies run more satire because they can afford it? Or is comedy profitable?

Yes and yes.

Satire is risky because it often pisses off advertisers and viewers. Editors and producers fear that more than cancer. Things seemed to be going well at my interview for the cartoonist job at the *Asbury Park Press* when the executive editor turned to me with that here’s-the-clutch-question expression. “Will I ever look out there,” he said, gesturing out his office window to the parking lot below, “and see people protesting one of your cartoons?” I replied something about not being able to guarantee that such a thing would never happen. That, they decided, was a risk they couldn’t afford to take.

Profitable organizations can weather a post-backlash downturn. But satirical content is cost-effective compared to content like drama, sports and hard news. And it attracts the younger, engaged audiences sought by advertisers. Had the *Press* taken a chance with me and other hell-raising types, it might have a brighter future today.

Ted Rall, political cartoonist, columnist and graphic novelist, is the author of “Never Mind the Democrats. Here’s WHAT’S LEFT.” See TedRall.Substack.com and his website, rall.com. He is co-host of the podcast “DeProgram with Ted Rall and John Kiriakou.”

TED RALL

Make Funny, Make Money

In media, does satire generate profits? Or do profits permit satire? Causation is elusive. But there is a correlation between how much money a media organization generates and how much funny it publishes or puts on air.

When print newspapers were dominant and highly profitable, satire was a significant part of their content. Based at *The Washington Post* through the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s, Art Buchwald’s syndicated column appeared in more than 500 newspapers worldwide. His droll takes on Beltway politics and everyday absurdities reached millions of Americans and was extremely influential. Mike Royko of the *Chicago Daily News* and *Sun-Times* blended populist snark about institutional corruption and sarcastic ethnic humor in hundreds of newspapers, inspiring a generation of journalists. Other influential widely-syndicated columnists included those who blended gossip, news and jokes like Herb “Baghdad by the Bay” Caen of the *San Francisco Chronicle*, satirist of suburban life Erma Bombeck of the *Dayton Journal Herald* (which I delivered to my neighbors) and, in the 1990s, Dave “I am not making this up” Barry of the *Miami Herald*.

By the late 2000s, when I worked as Editor of Acquisitions at the United Press Syndicate, editors’ appetite for humor had vanished. Barry, I said ruefully, would never have had a career had he been younger. Indeed, he never returned to the *Herald* after he took a sabbatical in 2005.

At this point, print media circulation had been declining steadily for years. As

Coal Gets a Boost As Renewables Are Gutted

By JONATHAN THOMPSON

A few years back, my friend Norm told me that when he was growing up in northern New Mexico in the 1950s and early '60s, his family often drove up to the La Plata Mountains in southwestern Colorado. From there he could see all the way to the Sandia Mountains outside Albuquerque, some 200 miles away.

His statement saddened me, since in all the time I spent on Four Corners high points, a persistent haze always limited my visibility to maybe 50 or 60 miles, blurring Shiprock's sharp spires into a fuzzy silhouette. That's because a fleet of massive coal-fired power plants in the region churned out haze-producing pollutants, harming humans and the ecology and blotting out vistas from the San Juans to the Sandias. It seemed as if I'd never get a view as clear as Norm's.

But over the last decade, the failing economics of coal shuttered those power plants. That means the air on the Colorado Plateau—when not sullied by the ever-lengthening wildfire season—has become cleaner as the coal industry faded away.

The shuttered plants include Mojave, Navajo, Nucla, Escalante, San Juan and, most recently, Cholla. The closures certainly sharpened the view of folks all over the region. But more importantly, they kept tens of millions of tons of greenhouse gases out of the atmosphere and oodles

of harmful pollutants (arsenic, mercury, sulfur dioxide and soot) out of the lungs of nearby residents, many of them on the Navajo Nation.

Yet in defiance of the free market that has boosted renewables, the Trump administration is acting to undo those positive changes and make the air dirty again by throwing multiple lifelines to the flagging coal industry.

It has eviscerated environmental protections limiting mercury and other toxic air emissions, ended Obama- and Biden-era freezes on new federal coal leases, and rescinded limits on carbon dioxide emissions. The administration has also blocked utilities from shutting down plants that are old, dirty and more costly than other power sources.

Donald Trump purports to do this in the name of “unleashing” coal from regulatory constraints so it can be mined and burned to achieve American “energy dominance.” Yet it's unlikely that unleashing the industry will reverse its decline.

It's true that delaying implementation of the mercury rule will enable the Colstrip coal plant in Montana—one of the nation's dirtiest facilities—to continue operating without expensive new pollution control equipment. Generally, though, utilities such as Xcel Energy, Intermountain Power Agency and Tri-State Generation & Transmission are moving forward with plans to retire their coal plants, namely because the aging facilities are dirty, inefficient, inflexible and, most of all, no longer profitable. They just can't compete with natural gas, solar, wind, and other, cleaner energy sources.

When signing one of his fossil-fuel-friendly orders, Trump said he would “save” the Cholla coal plant near Holbrook, Arizona, from destruction, adding, “We're going to have that plant opening and burning the clean coal, beau-

tiful clean coal, in a very short period of time.”

But its operator, Arizona Public Service, said it had already procured cleaner, cheaper generation for the plant, and had no desire to keep burning coal at Cholla. There was no save needed.

If Trump were truly interested in energy dominance and abundance, he would have supported the fastest-growing energy sources—wind and solar power. Instead, his administration is doing all it can to stifle them, from eliminating production tax credits for renewable energy in his “big, beautiful” budget bill, to slowing down permits for clean energy developments on public lands. Both utility-scale and rooftop solar will be affected, boosting the prospects of oil and gas, coal and nuclear.

U.S. Energy Secretary Chris Wright, in an Economist column, revealed the philosophy behind the administration's fossil-fuel fetishization. He wrote that climate change is “not an existential crisis,” merely a “byproduct of progress.” He said he was willing to take the “modest negative trade-off” of climate change—along, presumably, with ever more devastating heat waves, wildfires and floods—“for this legacy of human advancement.”

He is probably correct in saying that climate change and the sullied air over the Colorado Plateau are byproducts of so-called progress. But they are also nasty, deadly and avoidable. Ultimately, going backward toward coal will not only wreck progress, but perhaps life on earth as we know it.

Jonathan Thompson is a contributor to Writers on the Range, writersontherange.org, an independent nonprofit dedicated to spurring lively conversation about the West. He has long covered the West's natural resources.

'Fake News' in the Eye of the Beholder

By ROB PATTERSON

The term “fake news” screams irony today in too many ways. Those who sling the term out the most, like the whiny diaper baby in what's become the Offal Office and the MAGA morons who enable and support him, are also those whose lies are more fake news than any lapses in media reporting. (Hey kids, can we say projection? And deflection?)

Then there's the further irony of when I first heard that term not all that long ago applied to TV comedic news shows like *The Daily Show* and *The Colbert Report*. These days the former show (especially since the return of John Stewart) and the opening monologues of late-night talk show hosts like the recently-canceled Stephen Colbert on *The Late Show* offer more truths than too much of the major mainstream media. As well as laughs that provide a much-needed balm within such dyspeptic times.

I've a fondness for all of the aforementioned cheeky commentators on the news.

But there's one who has really won my admiration for how his show delivers both humor and serious news: John Oliver, who rose from the correspondent ranks of *The Daily Show* to host his own show, *Last Week Tonight*, which airs on Sundays on Max/HBO.

One likely reason that Oliver appeals to me is that he is English, first, given that I am an Anglophile. And my seminal exposure to news delivered with cheeky comedic elan originated with the English and the BBC TV show *That Was the Week That Was*, which was hosted by David Frost and ran from 1962 to 1963. A U.S. version ran from 1963 to 1965, and also featured Frost alongside such Americans as Buck Henry and Alan Alda.

Even though I was just a kid at the time, I was already a news buff. And somehow knew that such a serious business at first blush was also ripe for keen ripostes. These days the mind-boggling lunacy of current events offers gruesome hilarity that makes comedic news coverage almost a need. After all, if I were to watch actual TV news — I don't, especially because the less I have to see and hear Trump and his gaggle of fellow liars and butt-licking enablers the better — I might be tempted to pour a warm bath

and get out the razor blades.

Rather than wallow in despair, I quite prefer delight. Even when things are bleak.

One of Oliver's numerous charms to me is his fervent merriment, which is central to the opening of *This Week Tonight*. He smiles and slams his hands on his desk to let us know that insights, delights and hearty laughter are about to unfold. Which sets a mood I am grateful for as current news and politics are, let's face it, a huge depressive bummer.

Sarcasm and sardonicism just somehow seem to me to be more effectively delivered in an English accent. Maybe it's the Oxbridge intellectual superiority that the British elocution implies. Yet at the same time, Oliver seems to revel in an impish glee at skewering the latest monstrosities, absurdities, gaffes and humorous horrors. That gives me a positive boost.

He and his writing staff are as adept as any comedic crew at evoking titters and guffaws. Yet there's also the one factor that sets “*Last Week Tonight*” apart from the rest. At the middle of each show is one big story every week, in depth and well-researched ... like serious news should be. It is *real* news even if its partly played for laughs. And often a matter that needs but has yet to get the ex-

posure it merits. The segment imbues the show with gravitas that also underscores the humor.

And the laughter from Oliver and his ilk isn't just the best medicine. It's a vaccine to protect us from the horrors here in America as well as the rest of the world.

Populist Picks

TV SERIES: *The Morning Show* — Yeah, I'm late to the game on this masterful and acclaimed Apple TV show about a morning TV news and entertainment show, and what transpires behind the scenes with three seasons under its belt. Such star names as Jennifer Aniston and Reese Witherspoon as its co-hosts as well as Steve Carell as the co-host fired for sexual misdeeds and Billy Crudup as the network CEO deliver superb performances. The writing is sharp as a freshly-honed knife and the integration of real life events and issues into the plots make this not-to-be-missed topical TV.

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BOOK REVIEW/Si Dunn

Coming Up Short Can Win in the Long Run

When future U.S. Labor Secretary Robert B. Reich faced being drafted into the Vietnam War in 1968, an Army recruiter tried desperately to add one inch to his height. The recruiter wanted Reich to become a “tunnel rat,” one of the small-statured, specialized infantrymen who could sneak into Viet Cong underground hideouts and kill their inhabitants.

Five feet was the mandated minimum height for American soldiers, and no matter how many times Reich was told to “stand up straight,” he measured four feet eleven inches. He was declared 4-F and later found to have inherited a rare mutation called Fairbank's disease, or multiple epiphyseal dysplasia, which slows bone growth.

“*Coming Up Short*,” Reich's enlightening and politically rousing new memoir, shows that failing to qualify for the draft was about the only time in his life that stature—the shortage of it—gave him any advantage.

Long before he served in the Ford and Carter administrations, became Bill Clinton's labor secretary, and joined Barack Obama's economic transition advisory board, “Bobby” Reich endured frequent bullying as a child. He was noticeably small for his age and needed larger children to protect him until he finally learned how to fight back.

Ironically, his first walk-to-school protector was a young teen, Michael “Mickey” Schwerner, whose “calm good nature” kept bullies at bay. Reich eventually lost touch with

Schwerner. But in 1964, he was stunned to learn Schwerner had gone to Mississippi to help register Black voters and had been shot and killed in a Ku Klux Klan ambush. Two other “Freedom Summer” volunteers, James Chaney and Andrew Goodman, also died. Fighting bullyism became one of Reich's personal causes.

Reich describes “*Coming Up Short*,” his 19th book, as “part autobiography, part history focused on why America elected Donald Trump in 2016 and then again in 2024, and part a story of the failure of my generation” to curb racial, political, and income inequality. He also offers sharp criticisms of the current Supreme Court's conservative jurists and Trump's blatantly bullying tactics in national and international affairs.

“Today's Supreme Court majority doesn't have a clue about the court's moral authority and apparently couldn't care less,” he charges. “The Republican appointees to the court are mostly political hacks, rigid ideologues, and small minds intent on entrenching the power of the already powerful, comforting the already comfortable, and inflicting pain on the already afflicted.”

As for the current president: “When Trump first ran as a candidate for president in 2015, I viewed him as an anomaly, a cartoon caricature of a con man trying to gain power. He spent most of his life bullying others—employees, contractors, vendors, women, tenants, lawyers, bankers, politicians, producers. He was and is a bully's bully—vulgar, chaotic, angry, uninformed, impulsive, vindictive.”

Other matters get interesting focus as well, including (1) his energetic teaching style as a long-time (and now retired) college professor and (2) America's tendency to elect tall leaders. “My dear friend and mentor, the late economist John Kenneth Galbraith, was six foot eight,” Reich notes. “He once said that favoring the tall was ‘one of the most blatant and forgiven prejudices in our society.’ When we walked around together, chatting away, people stared at us

as if we were a carnival act. We laughed it off.”

Reich, however, does not laugh off how shortness affected his effort to win the 2002 Democratic nomination for Massachusetts governor. “[I]t seemed that the only attribute reporters wanted to cover was my height. Regardless of what I said in my speeches, the *Boston Globe* ran photos of me standing on boxes so I could see over the podium. The right-wing *Boston Herald* ran a headline on its front page, charging ‘Short People Are Furious with Reich,’ because I had joked about my height on the campaign trail. None of it helped me with that election. But I didn't lose because of my height. I lost because I was a lousy campaigner.”

Now nearing 80, Reich naturally has lost a little more height. Yet he isn't letting himself be overlooked. In print and video, on Substack, YouTube, TikTok, and Instagram, he has become one of the leading voices, along with Bernie Sanders, Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, and others, rallying voters and speaking out against Trump. Also, “*The Last Class*,” a movie featuring Reich lecturing on wealth and poverty to a thousand college students, is now showing in movie theaters.

While the Democratic Party keeps waiting for charismatic candidates who can take charge in 2026 and 2028, Reich insists individual voters must begin taking actions now. As he said in a recent YouTube “Coffee Klatch” episode: “We are the leaders we've been waiting for.”

“*Coming Up Short: A Memoir of My America*” by Robert B. Reich, Knopf, 416 pages, hardcover, ebook, and audiobook formats.

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FILM REVIEW/Ed Rampell

An Odd Odyssey

Those unfamiliar with Jack Kerouac may enjoy the biographical details shed by “Kerouac’s Road: The Beat of a Nation.”

In 2021 I closed my review of Ebs Burnough’s debut documentary, the 98-minute “The Capote Tapes,” stating: “I anxiously anticipate this gifted filmmaker’s next film”. Now, the wait is over, as the new doc by this former White House Deputy Social Secretary and Senior Advisor to Michelle Obama is being released. Like the excellent “The Capote Tapes” portrait of Truman, Burnough’s latest, “Kerouac’s Road: The Beat of a Nation,” is about a troubled, iconic novelist who was corrupted by capitalist society’s celebrityhood and had same sex relationships.

From Homer’s “Odyssey” to “Oz” to “On the Road,” from Telemachus to television and beyond, the epic trek has been at the heart of much mythic storytelling. Jack Kerouac created one of the enduring works of fiction about journeys, and Burnough’s nonfiction film is in part a biopic about the Beat Generation author of 1957’s “On the Road.” The documentary includes vintage footage of Kerouac and his Beatnik comrades, like Allen Ginsberg. There are also original interviews with artists such as: Matt Dillon, Josh Brolin, novelist Jay McInerney, 10,000 Maniacs’ Natalie Merchant, who sang “Hey Jack Kerouac”; comedian and commentator Kamau Bell; a biographer; an academic; former friend and composer David Amran; and ex-girlfriend Joyce Johnson.

However, for some reason, Burnough takes a detour on the road less traveled. Throughout the film he interjects by inserting three sets of rather dull, ordinary people who arguably have absolutely nothing whatsoever to do with Kerouac. Burnough is compelled to incessantly disrupt the

flow of this otherwise compelling (BTW, a word the director said nobody uses any more in a post-screening Q&A) biopic with the uninteresting, out-of-place stories of these very boring individuals. Their unwelcome interruptions are completely distracting and gratuitous, as these run-of-the-mill characters only tangentially relate to Kerouac, in the sense that they are on their own personal journeys; two of the three interlopers are frequent flyers on the highways.

In the post-screening discussion and Q&A moderated by *L.A. Times* film critic Mark Olsen Burnough defended his decision to include these figures who don’t know Jack (so to speak), saying that there had already been biopics about Kerouac. It’s true that there indeed have been documentaries about the author, including 1984’s “Kerouac, The Movie” and 1986’s “Whatever Happened to Kerouac?” But that was 40 years ago and I’ve never seen them or others I may not be aware of. (I did see 2011’s “Magic Trip: Ken Kesey’s Search for a Kool Place” co-directed by Alex Gibney, but Kerouac is not the focus of that documentary about the Merry Pranksters.) There have also been feature films about Kerouac and adaptations of his novels, including 1980’s “Heart Beat,” which, copacetically, was also on Turner Classic Movies the night I saw “Kerouac’s Road.” Call it Kerouac kismet!

As far as I know, none of these fiction films, including the long-awaited big screen version of “On the Road” in 2012, were hits, so I don’t think that the market is exactly overflowing with easily accessible films about the life story of the so-called “King of the Beats.” I grew up about three miles from where Kerouac wrote “On the Road,” and in addition to having read that, I also read “The Subterraneans.” I for one would have liked to learn more about this enigmatic scribe, instead of having the film frequently taking its eye off the ball. Burnough touches upon some of the fascinating aspects of Kerouac’s personality and life, including his veiled bisexuality, the fact that the man renowned for restlessly wandering around the continent was a mama’s boy (his journeys may have been attempts to break free of her?), his alcoholism, which led to an early death, etc. But rather than pursue these fascinating strands in depth, Burnough wastes his time on the peregrinations of the aforesaid nondescript figures, who have little if anything to add to the main story.

You may disagree and think these characters are relevant and interesting; that’s your prerogative. But I’ll add one thing, which is that in the post-screening Q&A, Burnough revealed that one of those individuals was a MAGA conspiracy theorist, although you’d never know this from the film, as the director, a former Barack Obama apparatchik, edited all that out. Documentaries are a form of reporting, and from a journalistic point of view, some may find Burnough’s cutting the Trumpian dialogue out to be eyebrow-raising. Especially given that at the end of his 47 years, Jack was reportedly spewing Archie Bunker-type opinions in 1969.

A fan of Kerouac, Michael Imperioli of “Sopranos” fame voices readings of the author’s writings in “Kerouac’s Road.” The documentary also has one of the best jump cuts ever in movie history: To illustrate the subversive role Kerouac played as an oppositional voice to mainstream materialistic, corporate culture, “Kerouac’s Road” cuts from 1956’s “The Man in the Gray Flannel Suit”’s Gregory Peck as a PR hack and discontented businessman to the countercultural Dennis Hopper and Peter Fonda on the road in their motorcycles in 1969’s “Easy Rider.” Very clever cut!

Those unfamiliar with Jack Kerouac may enjoy the biographical details shed by this film, in between the meanderings of those fellow travelers, who either distract from the main story or make it more relevant, depending on your perspective about this odd odyssey. “Kerouac’s Road: The Beat of a Nation” started its theatrical release Aug. 1. And so, the Beat goes on.

NOT SO FUN FACT OF THE REVIEW: “The Subterraneans” appears to be the first screen adaptation of a book by Kerouac, who is depicted in it by George Peppard, while Jack’s lover Mardou Fox, who is Black in his novella, is portrayed in the movie by White Frenchwoman Leslie Caron. Seems like the silver screen wasn’t quite ready for an interracial romance in 1960 – but our man Jack was.

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. His new novel is “The Disinherited: Blood Blalahs.”

EDGE OF SPORTS/Dave Zirin

Hulk Hogan Was a Racist, Liar, and Scab

In the 1980s, the professional wrestler portrayed himself as an all-American hero—but he was really a “jabroni” the entire time.

My 9-year-old self, uniformed in a Mets hat and Coke-bottle glasses, was a Hulkamaniac. It’s embarrassing now for countless reasons. I first saw the man born Terry Bollea as Thunderlips in the 1983 classic Rocky III. He was improbably muscled, blond, and tan: pure kid catnip. I became a World Wrestling Federation fanatic and was glued to the Zenith as Hogan rapidly climbed the WWF ladder. In January 1984, Hogan completed a meteoric rise to defeat the Iron Sheik and avenge the Iran hostage crisis (seriously). That title match wasn’t fake to me. It was as real as game 7 of the World Series, and when Hulk broke free from the Sheik’s dreaded “camel clutch” and secured the pin, I jumped up and down so much that the people downstairs called up to complain.

What I did not know was that there was a real world at odds with this ecstatic experience. I did not know that the Iron Sheik, a former Olympic wrestler who was once a

bodyguard for the shah of Iran, could have cracked Hogan in two. He even almost went off script to do so because he found Hogan to be, as the Sheik put it, “a jabroni.” It was all 1980s fake, as fake as Ronald Reagan’s jet-black hair.

Now that Hulk Hogan has died at 71, the media, top wrestling honchos, and particularly the Trump administration are verbosely mourning this leather-skinned mass of steroids and bile stuffed in spandex. The media is treating Hogan’s death like they are in on a bit. They praise “Hulk Hogan” for being an American hero while ignoring that Terry Bollea led an ugly, amoral life; that he was accused of abuse by both one of his wives and a daughter; that he was broadly loathed by generations of wrestlers; and that his final act involved shilling full-time for Donald Trump. Hulk Hogan was a racist scab and a liar, which made him a natural fit for a prime-time appearance at Trump’s Republican National Convention.

It is gratifying, however, that July 24 is, in addition to the day of Hogan’s death, the 10th anniversary of the *National Enquirer’s* publishing audio of Hogan going on an N-word-laden tirade. The coincidence is serendipitous, allowing the legions he harmed to remind people that many mourning this man are mourning a myth. His racism also matters because it dovetails with years of complaints made by Black wrestlers about both his treatment of them and his role as WWF co-owner Vince McMahon’s right-hand man, making sure they never got a shot at his top spot. (In fairness, many White and Brown wrestlers have made the same claim.)

Then, as Hogan has himself admitted following years of accusations, he informed on his coworkers, telling Vince McMahon about a secret unionization push led by Jesse “The Body” Ventura. When one considers the shocking number of wrestlers who prematurely died in the 1980s

and ’90s because of depression and addiction, both results of being hellaciously overworked, a union could have saved lives.

But Hogan’s harm can be counted in more ways than just what took place behind the curtain. He sold what was left of his soul to Palantir founder and sweaty, ham-faced fascist Peter Thiel, who bankrolled Hogan’s lawsuit that bankrupted Gawker. With Thiel’s help, Hogan crushed an audacious Internet journalism outlet that I guarantee would have published the Epstein lists by now. That we lost Deadspin because of Peter Thiel and Hulk Hogan will never not make me apoplectic.

Speaking of Jeffrey Epstein, Hogan’s death, as well as adoration for alleged rapist and alleged sex trafficker Vince McMahon, now also provides an opportunity for the secretary of education, Linda McMahon, to change the subject from Trump’s depredations. Fresh off freezing billions in desperately needed public education funds, Linda McMahon, the billionaire wife of Vince, will use Hogan’s death to try not to look like a repulsive representative of a scandal-soaked administration. It will be Hogan’s last act of fealty to the McMahaons.

The Hulk Hogan of 2025 embodied all that is wrong with this country. He should be remembered as a living expression of our national decay: a hero exposed as a fraud, a fraud exposed as a coward, and a coward who cried with joy upon finding an authoritarian who told him that his sins were, in fact, virtues.

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



AMY GOODMAN



The Global Plastics Treaty was supposed to be finalized last year, but talks broke down, and Trump began his second term urging, 'Drill, baby drill.'

From Thinking to Action in the Fight Against Plastics

In Geneva, Switzerland's Place des Nations, the plaza outside the United Nations campus, a replica of Auguste Rodin's famous sculpture, The Thinker, has been installed. Like the original, the seated figure holds his chin in hand, but the hand in this version also clutches several empty plastic bottles. A baby lays across his other arm, resting its head in the Thinker's left hand. The Thinker gazes down, past the baby, onto a sea of plastic waste that surrounds the statue. The statue's placement coincides with a 10-day summit inside the UN, where negotiators hope to finalize the Global Plastics Treaty, an ambitious effort

to reverse the overwhelming amount of plastic waste polluting the environment and negatively impacting human health in countless ways. Canadian artist Benjamin Von Wong calls his piece "The Thinker's Burden."

"Over the course of the next 10 days, we're going to be slowly adding more and more plastic to this art installation to show the growing cost being passed on to future generations if we don't take urgent and immediate action," Von Wong told Agence France Press as he added plastic to the pile. "If you want to protect health, then we need to think about the toxic chemicals that are entering our environment. We need to think about limits on plastic production. We need to think about a strong, ambitious plastics treaty."

The Global Plastics Treaty was supposed to be finalized last year at a summit in Busan, South Korea. Negotiations broke down between two major blocs of nations, those seeking controls on plastics and harmful chemicals, and nations with economies largely reliant on fossil fuel production, like Saudi Arabia, Iran and Russia. Since then, of course, US President Donald Trump began his second term, with his MAGA mantra of "Drill, Baby, Drill." His appointees, like Energy Secretary Chris Wright, a former fracking company CEO, are shutting down climate programs, attacking climate science and promoting climate deniers to key policy positions.

It is in this context that *The Lancet*, the premier British medical journal, has launched the Lancet Countdown on health and plastics, "a health-focused, indicator-based, global monitoring system on plas-

tics," with a global team of scientists led by Dr. Philip Landrigan, director of the Boston College's Global Observatory on Planetary Health.

"The global plastic threat has been quietly worsening; global plastic production has increased 250 times since it began in the 1950s and as it's on track to double by 2040, and triple by 2060," Landrigan said on the *Democracy Now!* news hour.

"The reason plastic production is growing so rapidly, especially production of single use plastics, is the fossil fuel industry. Ninety-nine percent of plastic is made from oil, gas and coal. They see the market for fossil fuels declining...they see the long term trend for the fossil fuel market going down, so they're putting enormous resources into plastic."

Dr. Landrigan continued,

"Plastic harms human health at every stage of the plastic life cycle, starting with the fracking and through the manufacturer and the fabrication of plastic products, and finally, when plastic is discharged into the environment. Waste plastic contains 1000s of toxic chemicals that cause human exposure that result in disease, disability and premature death."

The Lancet group released a comprehensive report with their announcement, detailing the scale of the problem. Plastic pollution has been found from the deepest ocean depths to the slopes of Mount Everest. Plastic nanoparticles infiltrate the human body, from the brain to breast milk. The impacts on children are the most severe, Landrigan said:

"Infants in the womb and young children are very vulnerable to plastics...chem-

icals get out of plastics, get into pregnant women and then pass through to their children, and in children they can cause a whole range of diseases that encompass brain injury, resulting in decreased IQ, injury to the reproductive organs, resulting in decreased fertility when today's child becomes tomorrow's adult, and damage to the liver, which interferes with cholesterol metabolism and increases risk for obesity, for diabetes, for heart disease and stroke."

Auguste Rodin sculpted The Thinker between 1880-1881, less than 20 years after plastic was invented in England. Rodin intended the sculpture to be part of a larger, epic piece called "The Gates of Hell," inspired by Dante's *Inferno*. "The Gates of Hell" consumed much of Rodin's life, and was only cast after his death. His pensive Thinker, meanwhile, went on to achieve global renown on its own.

We are now at a moment where life truly is imitating art; the fossil fuel industry is driving us into an inferno, accelerating the climate catastrophe and blocking meaningful action on climate and on the Global Plastics Treaty. We are standing at a real-world version of Rodin's Gates of Hell, where thinking about the problem is no longer enough.

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."

Why Sometimes the Forest Needs a Little Fire

By BONNIE JEAN FELDKAMP

Unless you're roasting marshmallows, it's hard to think of fire in the woods as a good thing. We all watched wildfire devastation play out earlier this year in Southern California, and many dealt with poor air quality as smoke drifted into the United States from fires burning in Canada. The National Interagency Fire Center reports that since Jan. 1, nearly 40,000 wildfires have burned more than 3 million acres in the US.

But as I stood in a section of a local forest that had burned 18 months ago, I tried to understand how fire is integral to a healthy forest. To be clear, this section of woods was burned on purpose under the supervision of Allen Pursell, who is Sam Shine Foundation's Director of Forest Programs. Allen brought me to the woods to show me why it was important.

When Allen looks at a forest, he tries to envision what the composition and structure should look like in 100 years. From there he works backward. "Long ago I real-

ized that I had to adjust my time-scale to that of trees rather than humans," he said.

Stoler Creek Forest is about 788 acres in Hardinsburg, Indiana. "I'm looking at the biggest trees," Allen said, and "I'm trying to read what's the past of the forest here." He points out the white oak and hickory trees that he would expect to see in this high and dry terrain. But as the older oak trees are dying off, they're not being replaced by young oak trees. What's replacing them are beech and maple trees, and that's a problem.

Looking at what's popping up in the understory, "We'd probably be hard pressed to find an oak that was any bigger than a seedling," Allen said. A generation is missing.

Beech and maple trees are not bad to have, but oaks provide much more to the local ecosystem. According to the National Park Service, oak trees support more life-forms than any other North American tree, and not just because of their acorns. At least 934 caterpillar species are supported by oak trees, and a single large tree can host thousands of individual caterpillars. According to the American Bird Conservancy, caterpillars are a dietary mainstay for most bird species in North America.

This is where fire comes in. When a fire burns through an understory, it clears the forest floor and opens it up. I could see the

difference standing there at the fire break. One side was weedy with little tangles of green growth. On the burned side I saw the leaf litter from the previous fall with spots of native grasses and oak seedlings popping up. Oaks evolved to be fire dependent; they keep a set of buds protected just below the soil line and sprout anew after a fire.

Until the Europeans arrived, fire was a consistent part of the picture for American forests. Native Americans used fire to manage the forest understory as well as to aid in hunting. Europeans, on the other hand, wanted to suppress fire to protect property. It is in this suppression that the forest began to lose its beneficial burns. Allen hopes to advance the use of more widespread fire in Indiana, and bring the flame back to the forest.

In the absence of fire, the understory grows dense with competing vegetation, and oaks don't like shade. "Oak is kind of a persnickety thing," Allen said, because it doesn't like full light either. It thrives in more dappled sunlight.

A dark forest understory caters to beech and maple trees. Full light, however, helps tulip poplars thrive. None of these trees are considered invasive species, so I was surprised to understand that beech and maple trees are part of what's getting in the way of next-generation oaks in the forest.

"I want there to be maples and beeches

in here," Allen clarified. "I just want to bring it back to what I think is a more appropriate balance in the forest."

The fire helps. After the fire takes out the smaller unwanted saplings, Allen can go through strategically and cut midgrowth beech and maple. "I'm not so much focusing on the fact that I want to kill that tree as I'm thinking of, 'What do I want to benefit?'" he said. And it's the oak and hickory trees he has in mind. "I generally don't ever think about killing a tree unless I have in mind a tree I'm going to benefit," he said. It's about assessing the health of the whole forest.

Though Allen will not see his 100-year plan to completion, the satisfaction of knowing what the woods might become is enough for him. "No one will remember me in a century," he said, "but that's OK. We also don't know the names of all those who believed we should have national parks and national forests, but looking back we are thankful for their foresight."

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Dispatches ...

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most nations' rail infrastructure is owned and operated today—and where the railroad workers are included in all aspects of managing railroad operations," the document concludes.

RWU joins other prominent rail labor leaders and policy experts who have expressed deep concerns about the proposed takeover, which is part of a wave of mergers in the U.S. industrial sector this year under the Trump administration. The UP-NS merger still must receive federal approval.

"If the Union-Pacific-Norfolk Southern merger is approved, BNSF, the other western railroad—owned by Warren Buffett's Berkshire Hathaway—will almost certainly pursue CSX, the other eastern railroad, to avoid being boxed out," Amav Rao, a transportation policy analyst at the Open Markets Institute, warned in a piece for *Washington Monthly*.

"If the United States is serious about reshoring manufacturing, it cannot afford to let its rail system become a duopoly," Rao

added. "Allowing Union Pacific to absorb Norfolk Southern would leave just two national carriers, each with incalculable leverage over customers, workers, and regulators."

MOST OF TRUMP'S NET WORTH COMES FROM 'CRYPTO,' WHICH TRUMP'S TEAM IS WORKING TO DEREGULATE. Over his nearly seven months as president, the administration of U.S. President Donald Trump has been taking a sledgehammer to regulations on cryptocurrency. A new report sheds further light on the reasons why, Stephen Prager noted for *Common Dreams* (8/11).

The president may be profiting far more from his "rapidly-growing crypto empire" than was previously known and has used it to dramatically increase his net worth, according to an investigation released by the anti-corruption group Accountable.US.

While a report from Bloomberg on July 2 estimated the billionaire president's crypto holdings to total about \$620 million of his nearly \$7 billion net worth, Accountable examined other investments that had not previously been reported, but indicated Trump's

net worth could roughly be \$15.9 billion, with about \$11.6 billion in uncounted crypto assets, or 73% of his net worth.

As part of what they called "Crypto Week," House Republicans passed multiple industry-friendly pieces of crypto legislation in July, the GENIUS Act and the CLARITY Act, which Accountable says would allow Trump to directly profit.

The GENIUS Act purported to create a regulatory framework for so-called "stablecoins," which are pegged to existing financial assets like the U.S. dollar and are poised to become part of the portfolios of increasing numbers of companies. However, as Nikki McCann Ramirez wrote for *Rolling Stone* in June:

"One of Trump's priorities has been the normalization of these so-called stablecoins — a type of asset that his family is now hawking.

"Despite the moniker, stablecoins can be extremely unstable. A 2023 study published by the Bank for International Settlements found that of 60 stablecoins analyzed in their review, all of them had become de-pegged from their underlying asset at least once.

"The 2022 crypto crash was triggered

by the failure of Terraform Lab's Terra/Luna "algorithmic" stablecoin—the collapse of which saw \$45 billion erased in the span of a week."

The bill places only very light regulations on stablecoins, and Sen. Elizabeth Warren (D-Mass.) has warned that since he controls such a large percentage of the stablecoin market, their uptake into the broader economy could "create a superhighway for Donald Trump's corruption."

"As soon as the players understand that Trump's intervention is a real possibility, then the stablecoin market is no longer about a careful review of whether there are adequate dollars to back up a particular stablecoin, or whether the stablecoin issuer has an AAA rating," Warren said.

"Instead, the whole game becomes one of trying to engage the president to weigh the end and make one set of coins more valuable, and therefore another set of coins less valuable," she added. "It's corruption, but it's also a market manipulation that ultimately drains away any development... It undermines all the markets at that point."

But the CLARITY Act, which has been passed by the House and now awaits consideration

Continued on next page

We Are Losing Our Humanity. I Am Searching for an Antidote.

By DANA MILBANK

Nearly three years ago, my wife and I bought a dilapidated farmhouse on a piece of land in Rappahannock County, Virginia, that had been overtaken by weeds and vines. My then-editor, David Shipley, proposed what I thought at the time to be a wacky assignment: I would write about my attempts to restore the land. I went along with it, mostly to humor the boss.

What happened next transformed my life. I took up hunting (yes, from my bathroom window). I bought a tractor (and promptly got it stuck in the mud). I shared my personal space with bugs and snakes. I injured myself with power tools. (As I write this, a splitting maul was just delivered to my front door. What could possibly go wrong?) I got certified as a master naturalist. I planted hundreds of trees and meadows full of wildflowers and native grasses. I wrote about my rural community's struggles to develop housing, to secure broadband access and to keep the local newspaper going.

To my amazement, these columns have resonated with readers personally in a way my political columns generally don't. Each one produces intense engagement, and often scores of notes from readers sharing their personal experiences - even readers who have no use for my political com-

mentary. A guy high up in MAGA world wrote to say he shared my love of oaks. Another man, from rural Idaho, wrote to say that, "politically, we would not agree much over a beer," but, after reading my "musings on life and nature last Sunday ... I will now read your articles in a different light. Not saying I will agree, but we all have to stand on this same Earth."

I believe my stories from the farm have tapped into something we are all feeling to some extent. We are living in a moment of existential dread and alienation caused by the savagery of social media, the ugliness of our politics, the AI takeover, our melting planet, a winner-take-all economy and a sense of social isolation that still hasn't recovered from the dark times of the pandemic. We're losing the connection to nature that has defined our species for 2 million years. At the same time, we are losing our connection to each other and to our communities - what Alexis de Tocqueville called "the art of associating." In short, we are losing our sense of what it means to be human - and the challenge of our time will be to recover what we have lost.

Now, I've decided to follow this passion. I've signed a contract to write a book about life on the farm and in my rural community. And this fall, my column will move from *Washington Post* Opinions to *The Post's* new Futures section, an ambitious venture that aims to help our audience understand and act on the major forces and ideas transforming life in the 21st century.

I hope you will join me on this new journey. I'm betting that a lot of readers are searching for the same thing I am.

The core of the new column will be about "the tonic of wildness," as Henry David Thoreau put it, and the fight

to save what we can from the destruction of climate change and mass extinction. In the most basic sense, nature provides an escape from the misery of our current national discourse. In a deeper sense, science is finding that we are genetically programmed to seek a connection to nature, which boosts our emotional and cognitive functioning, as I described in a recent piece about hiking the Appalachian Trail. I'll continue writing about the critters and plants I'm getting to know, and the outdoor pursuits in field and stream that have kept me sane (or slightly less insane).

But the column won't be all flowers and fireflies. I'll be asking questions about other ways in which we can restore our imagination and creativity and nurture our sense of awe and wonder. It will also be about how we rebuild our frayed social structures, in our communities and in our country. I will continue to engage in the political debate, by focusing on how we get out of the mess we're in.

This will be an elaborate exercise in crowdsourcing. Please write to me, at dana.milbank@washpost.com, and tell me how you "rehumanize." How have you found what my favorite pol, John McCain, used to call "a cause greater than self-interest"? How do you experience the sublime and the transcendental? Through nature or art? Music or the spiritual? Volunteer service? Watching TV and eating ice cream? How can we overcome the isolation so many of us feel from each other and from our communities? I know I don't have the answers, but, with your help, I'll devote myself to finding them.

Dana Milbank writes for the *Washington Post*, where this appeared. Follow him on Twitter @Milbank. Email dana.milbank@washpost.com

Our Worst Chief Justice

By GENE NICHOL

With each passing week, Chief Justice John Roberts and his Republican colleagues bestow never-before-enjoyed authorities upon the Trump Administration. The plan seems to be - if we grant the usurper everything he dreams of, maybe he'll leave the high court unmolested. The republic may fall but we'll still have the cool robes and life tenure. John Roberts is becoming the Neville Chamberlain of post-democratic government in America.

Recent steps have allowed the executive branch to decimate the Department of Education, summarily fire tens of thousands of other civil servants, permit "third country removals" to notoriously dangerous nations despite demonstrated likelihood of torture, let the Department of Defense brutally dismiss even highly decorated transgender members based on orders of overt bigotry, terminated legally-assured protections for massive numbers of migrants from war-torn countries, and limited the essential reach of

federal court decrees against the executive branch - frequently under summary and temporary orders with scant or non-existent justification. Each would have likely been illegal before Trump. Now they're seemingly fine.

And the Court seems to have invalidated, after nearly a century of ready and repeated judicial embrace, the notion of independent federal agencies as well. In a brief, unsigned order, the justices just blocked a federal district court ruling preventing Trump from firing, contrary to statutory mandate, three of the five members of the Consumer Product Safety Commission. The landmark 1935 decision in *Humphrey's Executor v. United States* was apparently cast aside. No limitations on presidential discretion are now to be tolerated - no matter how much sense it may make to remove certain types of administrative decision-making from the sway of politics. All power to Trump, regardless of the claims of text and history. You demand it, Mr. President, we deliver. Just spare us your wrath. We don't even mind if you violate our decrees. Just lie when you do it. That seems easy enough.

All this begins, existentially, with *Trump v. United States*, where Roberts determined

- despite the clear text of the Constitution, the bold declarations of the framers, over two centuries of judicial precedent, and the obvious contemporaneous understandings of every American president - that Donald Trump is beyond the reach of the criminal law. That we are no longer a government of laws, not men. The axiom had a great run, but 235 years is enough. As Trump puts it: "I have an Art. II, where I have the right to do whatever I want as president." Ungrammatical perhaps, but he got the gist of it.

What amazes me most about Roberts' judicial leadership is that, even after having had it proven to him, undeniably, that his judicial positions are disastrously untenable, he embraces them in a limp cling to power. Don't believe your lying eyes, they seem to say. Trump summoned and instigated a violent attempt to overthrow the government of the United States. The bloody tirade occurred just down the street from the Court itself. It was on TV. But Roberts concluded the constitution had to bend to Trump instead of the other way around. That since we have a criminal seditionist as president, the legal system must be altered to accommodate the criminality. What worked for centuries will no longer do.

Then Trump and Elon Musk demon-

strated to the world the horrors of an unconstrained presidency - of a truly uncabined "unitary executive". As if those words could meaningfully define the permissible ins and outs of a massive modern administrative state not ever contemplated by the framers. Trump and Musk delivered a chain-saw laden regime of cruelty and stupidity that stunned, still stuns, the American people. Between those outrages and ICE's constant thuggism, we are treated to a government that literally sickens our stomachs. So Roberts steps in, overruling Humphrey's Executor, to make sure Trump's discretion is additionally liberated. Really? Why, just because you're scared of him?

It's reasonable to wonder whether the rule of law can survive this. As John Roberts works to become our worst chief justice, will he also effectively become our last?

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Dispatches ...

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eration in the Senate, is "the real prize" for the industry. It would dramatically narrow the Securities and Exchange Commission's (SEC) ability to regulate cryptocurrencies - most notably by recategorizing many assets as commodities instead of securities, which places them under the much smaller and less-resourced Commodity Futures Trading Commission (CFTC).

Trump would be one of the foremost beneficiaries of this bill, which would exclude digital assets like his \$TRUMP and \$MELANIA "meme coins" from SEC regulation.

It would also likely affect the classification of Bitcoin, which Trump Media has explicitly acknowledged would benefit the president. "If Bitcoin is determined to constitute a security," the company said in a June SEC filing, it could "adversely affect" the price of Bitcoin and the price of Trump Media's holdings.

Not only does this benefit Trump, said Accountable.US executive director Tony Carrk, but the legitimization and entrenchment of these unstable assets has the potential to make the whole economy less stable.

"Eerily reminiscent of the risky behavior that gave us the 2008 financial collapse, Donald Trump is ushering in a new era of casino-like speculation on Wall Street with highly volatile crypto trading in retirement accounts," Carrk said.

"While the Trump family stands to win either way with crypto investment product fees," Carrk added, "throwing such a wild card

into the financial system with little to no guardrails could lead to history repeating itself - with everyday Americans footing the bill when things inevitably go south."

VETS FACE DIRE NEW HEALTH CARE CRISIS.

President Donald Trump's policies are causing doctors to turn down job offers in Veterans Affairs hospitals, a new report has revealed. Simultaneously, the administration is engaging in anti-union actions in the veterans health care system and Democratic lawmakers say veterans will ultimately suffer, Oliver Willis noted at Daily Kos (8/8).

ProPublica reported that a new analysis of hiring at VA hospitals since Trump took office shows that doctors are rejecting job offers. Of the roughly 2,000 doctors who were offered jobs between January and March, nearly 40% turned down the offer. That turnaround rate is a 400% increase from a year ago when former President Joe Biden was in office.

ProPublica also revealed that doctors and nurses already in the system are leaving. Every month that Trump has been in office has seen a decline in doctors employed by the VA. Between January and June, twice as many nurses left the VA system as have been hired.

The brain drain is occurring at the same time that the administration is focused on slashing the agency's workforce.

Under Veterans Affairs Secretary Doug Collins, a longtime Trump cheerleader and apologist when he served in Congress, the administration has pursued significant cuts. The agency announced Aug. 7 that it is on pace to cut 30,000 jobs by the end of the 2025 fiscal year.

"This announcement makes clear VA is bleeding employees across the board at an unsustainable rate because of the toxic work environment created by this Administration and DOGE's slash and trash policies," Sen. Richard Blumenthal, (D-CT) ranking member of the Senate Committee on Veterans Affairs, said.

ProPublica noted in its report that wait times have increased for patients seeking primary and specialty care, along with wait times for outpatient surgery and appointments.

Collins also announced that the agency is terminating collective bargaining agreements for more than 350,000 unionized employees. Democrats slammed the action as another attack on veteran care.

FBI PURGE INCLUDES OFFICIAL WHO TRIED TO PROTECT JAN. 6 INVESTIGATORS.

Amid accusations that President Trump is turning the Department of Justice into his "personal weapon," multiple media outlets reported Aug. 7 that his administration is ousting at least three top officials at the Federal Bureau of Investigation, Jessica Corbett noted at Common Dreams (8/7).

The FBI purge includes Brian Driscoll, who served as acting director earlier this year; Walter Giardino, a special agent involved in the investigation of Trump's ex-trade adviser, Peter Navarro; and Steven Jensen, acting director in charge of the Washington Field Office, unnamed sources told outlets including The Associated Press, *The New York Times*, and Fox News.

Jensen was involved in investigating the Trump supporters who stormed the U.S. Capitol on Jan. 6, 2021, and Driscoll - as head of the FBI

before Trump's appointee, Kash Patel, was confirmed - resisted the administration's demand that he turn over a list of agents who worked on probes of the insurrectionists, who were promptly pardoned when Trump returned to power.

Highlighting that battle over the list of agents, the AP detailed:

Emil Bove, the then-senior Justice Department official who made the request and was [in July] confirmed for a seat on a federal appeals court, wrote a memo accusing the FBI's top leaders of "insubordination."

Responding to Bove's request, the FBI ultimately provided personnel details about several thousand employees, identifying them by unique employee numbers rather than by names.

The three men were reportedly told to leave the FBI by Aug. 8. According to Fox, one source described the removals as "retribution," and multiple people told the outlet that "more ousters are expected at the bureau by the end of the week, though the exact number of personnel included, or their roles at the bureau, are unclear."

The Times noted that "the fresh ousters reflect, in part, a long-running effort by senior Trump administration officials to dismiss agents and prosecutors who worked on cases related to the president. Those have included the investigation into his 2016 campaign's ties to Russia during his first term, the investigation into his handling of classified documents after he left office, the investigation into his efforts to overturn the results of the 2020 election, and the investigations of rioters at the Capitol."

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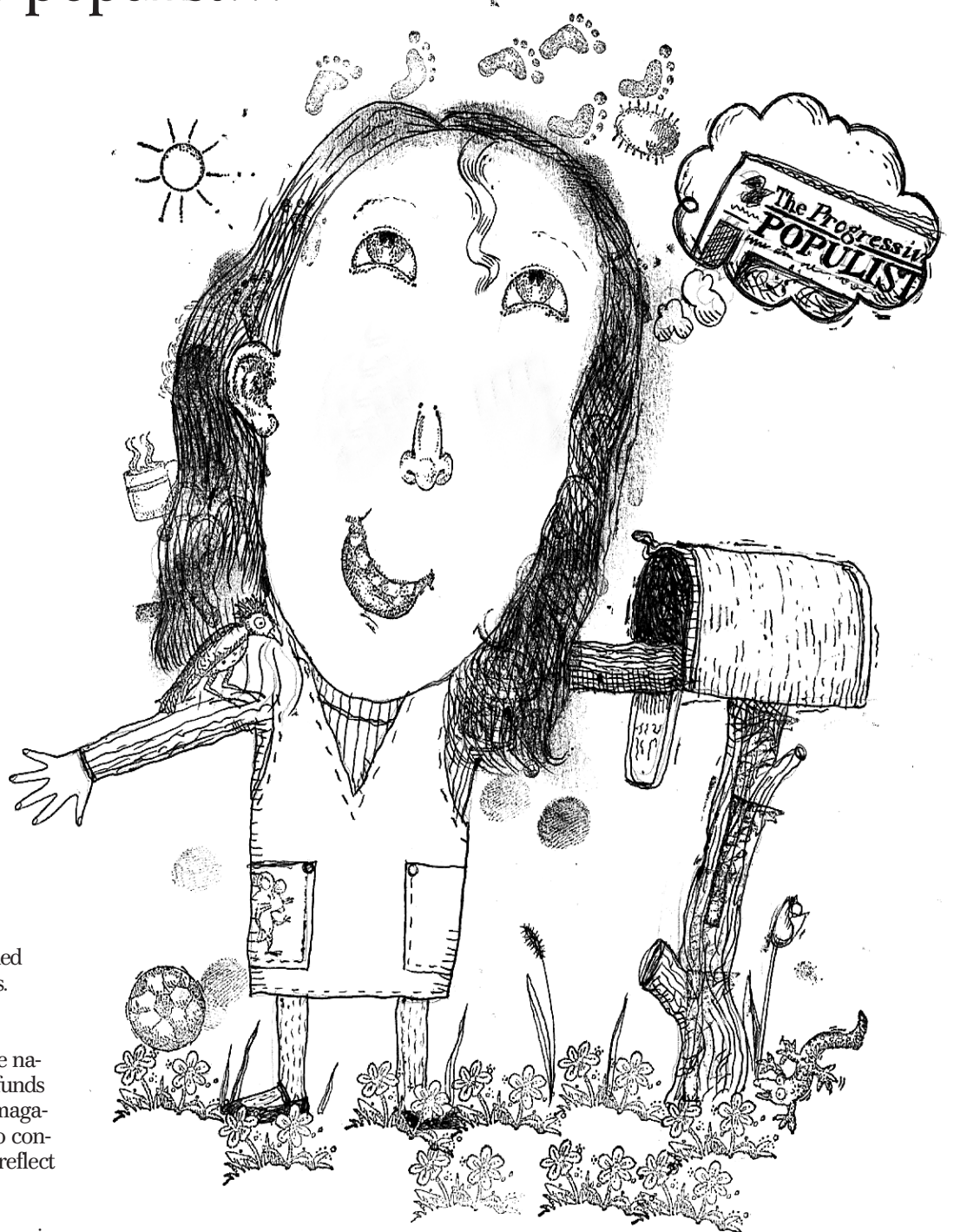
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