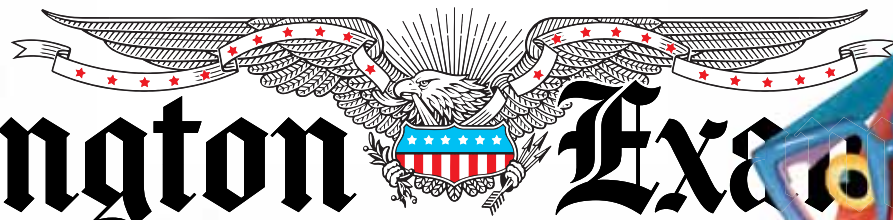


Washington Examiner



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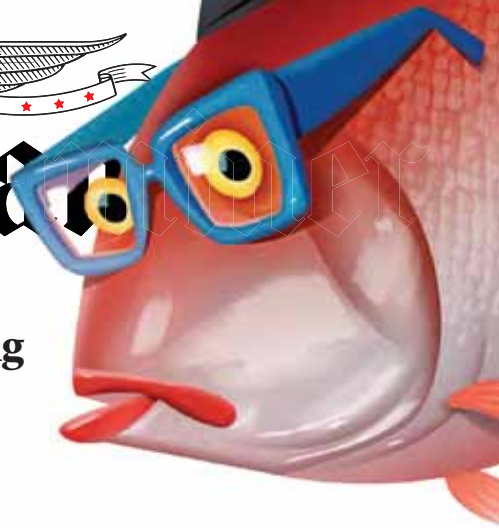
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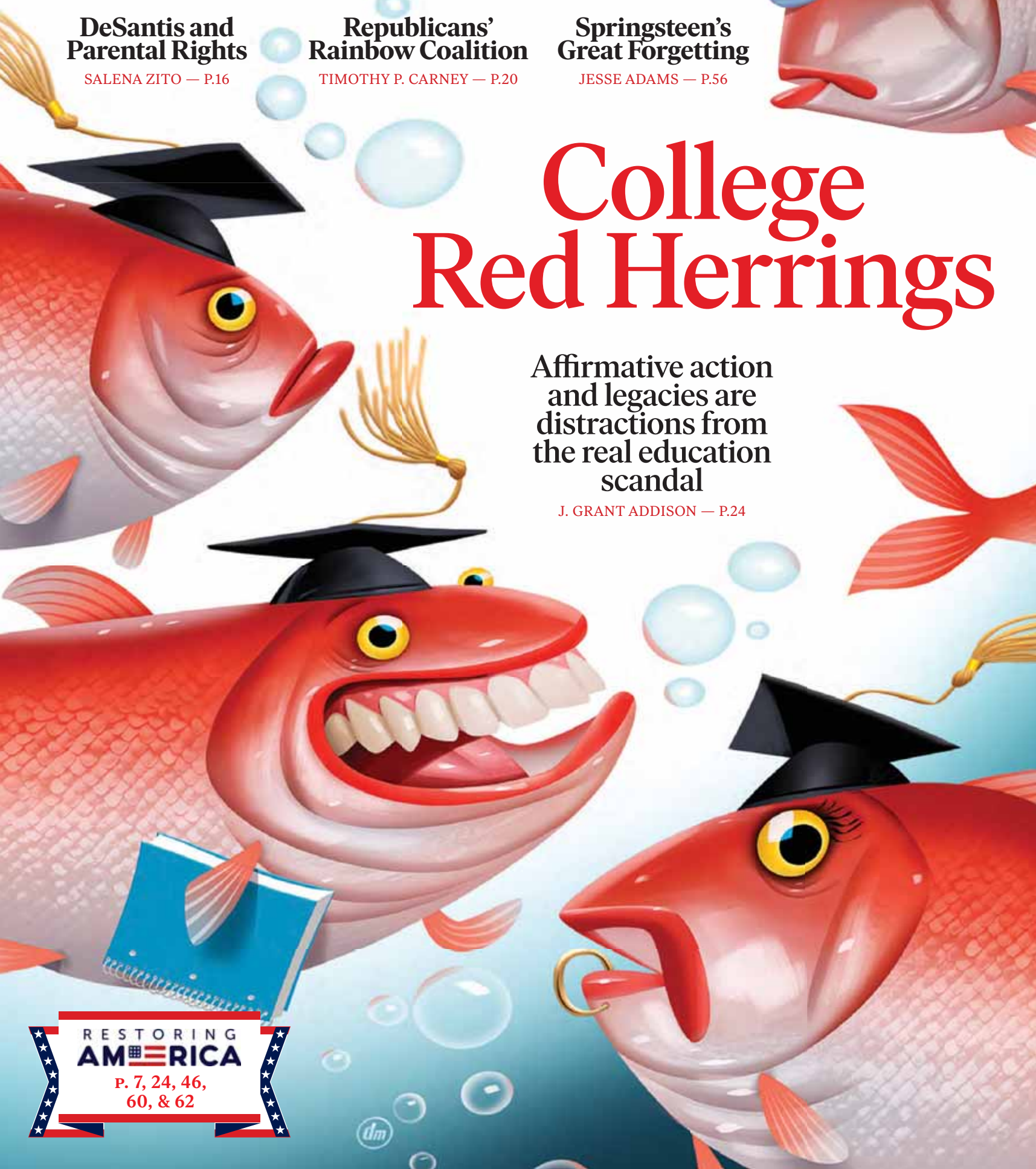
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Supreme Court must save West Coast from 9th Circuit's homeless insanity

The United States Court of Appeals for the 9th Circuit is not the only reason why cities across the West Coast have been overrun with plague-infected homeless camps, but the court is a big part of the problem.

The denial by the circuit for a full court review of the efforts of Grants Pass, Oregon, to address that city's homelessness crisis creates an opportunity for the Supreme Court to step in and undo the 9th Circuit's mistake. There is no Eighth Amendment right to camp in a public park — the 9th Circuit's invention of such a right is spreading disease and chaos across the West, and the Supreme Court should fix the problem as soon as possible.

Anti-vagrancy laws are older than the Constitution itself, first originating in England and crossing the Atlantic with the first colonists. Most colonies had anti-vagrancy laws before the revolution, and they kept them through the foundation and growth of the republic.

When the founders adopted the Bill of Rights, not one person suggested there should be a right to camp on city property. Patrick Henry did worry that Congress "may introduce the practice of France, Spain, and Germany — of torturing, to extort a confession of the crime." So he suggested adding an amendment to prevent such punishment by adding the Eighth Amendment, which says, "Excessive bail shall not be required, nor excessive fines imposed, nor cruel and unusual punishments inflicted."

The Eighth Amendment has since been used to overturn sentences for crimes that were considered disproportionate, including life sentences for juvenile offenders. Never has the Eighth Amendment been used to invalidate a criminal statute entirely. Never, that is,

until the 9th Circuit did exactly that in 2018.

In *Martin v. Boise*, the 9th Circuit held that cities were prohibited from enforcing their anti-camping statutes unless they could prove that the city had enough shelter beds available to house every homeless person in the city. Never mind that most homeless don't want shelter — usually because they don't want to com-

“**Anti-vagrancy laws are older than the Constitution itself, first originating in England and crossing the Atlantic with the first colonists.**”

ply with shelter rules. If there were one more homeless person in the city than beds available, not a single anti-camping citation could be given out.

The homeless population was already rising before *Martin*, but it has exploded since then. More than half of all unsheltered homeless people now live in California alone, and Los Angeles has over 70,000 homeless people in encampments today.

These encampments take up entire parks, denying their use by otherwise law-abiding citizens. They have become vectors for diseases, including literally the plague, as well as for robbery, rape, and open drug use.

Homelessness is a complex problem caused by a number of factors, including environmental regulations that prevent affordable housing, drug legalization that creates more addicts, and inadequate systems for dealing with mental health concerns. But denying cities the ability to clear out public spaces and disincentivize public camping is also making this problem harder to deal with.

The Supreme Court wisely took abortion regulation out of federal courts and returned it to democratically elected leaders a year ago. It is time they did the same thing for homelessness policy now. ★



Courts need to ensure Election Day doesn't become Election Month

When Election Day actually lasts for weeks, logic says something is wrong with the system. Now, there's a lawsuit that compellingly argues that extending deadlines past Election Day violates federal law as well.

Plaintiff Mark Splonskowski, the county auditor of Burleigh County, North Dakota, deserves to win the suit. His victory should, in a just world, set a precedent for states across the nation to end their practices of allowing vote deadline leniency. It shouldn't take weeks after Election Day just to start counting some votes, not to mention actually seeing final results.

North Dakota's system is particularly egregious. There, ballots can still be counted even if they arrive up to 13 days after Election Day. Utah and Illinois are among other states that, like North Dakota, merely require that mail-in ballots be postmarked, but not necessarily delivered, by the end of Election Day itself. Illinois had six congressional races close enough for the results to remain in doubt while officials waited for late-arriving ballots.

Such systems obviously delay the announcement of winners. In close races, it causes public confusion, at the very least. Worse, the longer the delays are, the more chance there is for people to suspect skulduggery. Public confidence in election systems, the bedrock of our republic, erodes when results, or the system of delivering results, are so uncertain.

Splonskowski would not have a lawsuit, however, if his only point were to argue that North Dakota's system is unwise. It's a good point, but the efficacy of systems is something for legislatures, not courts, to decide. What's new, and what makes it a court's responsibility, is that Splonskowski and his counsel, the Public

Interest Legal Foundation, make a strong argument that the state's system violates existing law.

The Constitution explicitly gives Congress the authority to set the time for conducting federal elections. In three separate provisions of federal law, Congress has done so by establishing a nationwide election date of the first Tuesday after the first Monday in November of each even-numbered year. For presidential elections, that date was reinforced earlier this year when President Joe Biden signed the Electoral Count Reform Act.

In all those provisions, the lawsuit noted, "every mention of the day is singular, not plural."

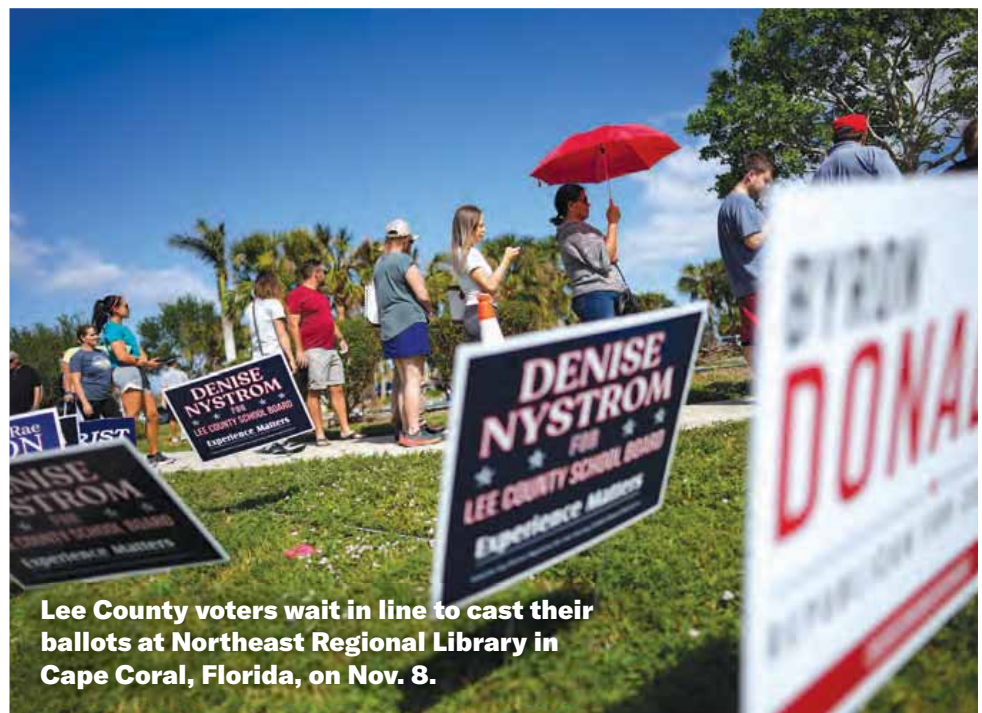
When Congress originally passed the legislation establishing a nationally uniform Election Day, the bill's sponsor specifically explained the intent "that on the day when one votes, all should vote, and that the whole question should be decid-

ed then."

Legally, this should not be complicated. All federal courts presented with the question should rule that, no matter what other mail-in provisions exist, all states should require that votes cannot be counted unless they are received by the end of Election Day.

Requiring that ballots be received on Election Day should in no way be a deterrent to ballot access or fairness. Modern technology and lenient early-voting regimes make it abundantly possible for every eligible citizen to vote on time and for votes to be counted quickly. Florida, the third-most populous state, now regularly conducts elections with notably high voter turnout in which it promulgates definitive results within mere hours after its polls close.

Systems of delayed vote acceptance are unnecessary in practice and harmful in effect, and most importantly, they violate the clear intent of federal law. The North Dakota federal district court should throw out that state's late-acceptance provision, and all similar practices across the country should be challenged and likewise ruled unlawful. In law, as it is in nature, a "day" is something that doesn't extend beyond a single rotation of the Earth's axis. ★



Lee County voters wait in line to cast their ballots at Northeast Regional Library in Cape Coral, Florida, on Nov. 8.

REBECCA BLACKWELL/AP



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TOO HOT

FOR SPOT AND TOT

**When the weather's hot, don't leave
kids or dogs in cars.**

PETA



Tyranny of the majority, or the minority of one

Concern is mounting that hot war with China may not be many years away. We're already in a cold war despite occasional efforts to effect a thaw, such as with Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen's recent bowing and scraping in Beijing.

Republicans and conservatives worry more than Democrats do that the Pentagon is distracted by race and gender ideology from a proper focus on winning or deterring wars. But one of Capitol Hill's most conservative Republicans is making matters worse just when the military needs to be as sharp as possible.

Sen. Tommy Tuberville (R-AL) is blocking appointments to hundreds of military vacancies. Senior promotions are stalled. The Marine Corps doesn't have a commandant!

Tuberville won't budge until the Defense Department stops paying expenses for military personnel traveling to get abortions. He's also fighting to prevent Colorado from being chosen as headquarters for U.S. Space Command, as the Air Force and Space Force recommended, instead of Alabama.

Few are happy with Tuberville's intransigence, which President Joe Biden and Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-KY) alike condemn.

Senate rules allow any senator to demand a full debate on legislation rather than waving it through. It would take every work hour until the end of the year to clear all outstanding promotions. There'd be no time for anything else, such as appropriations.

Such nonsense, with a single elected official stymieing agencies on unrelated matters, prompts trans-Atlantic transplants like me to yearn occasionally for the brutal efficiency of a parliamentary system. It gets things done.

The executive is not separated from the legislature but emerges within it. They reinforce each other. When a party commands a majority in parliament, it forms the government. A single member can block legislation only if he or she thus tips the government into a minority in the legislature. Single malcontents cannot thwart the will of 99 others.

This is why Margaret Thatcher, for example, was able to get so much done in the 1980s. Having won landslide majorities, she could, blessed relief, demolish the sclerotic labor laws that put businesses over a union barrel and turned Britain into the poor man of Europe. A parliamentary system means the government voters choose can take decisive action.

But there is a big problem with this, too. It means one government's reforms can be swiftly reversed when the pendulum of popularity swings back to the other party. The country tacks and veers, sometimes wildly. The tyranny of the majority means minority concerns can be swept aside. Indeed, they are set aside as a matter of routine. If you're in the minority, you get to speak, but you don't get a say.

The U.S. Constitution, with its checks and balances, was written in part to prevent such a thing, although it was also written as it was to prevent a minority of one, a king, from going to war. Now, one senator, not a king, is making decisions that affect the nation's ability to win and deter war. At least, that is what his critics contend. This wasn't quite, to put it mildly, what the founders had in mind. ★

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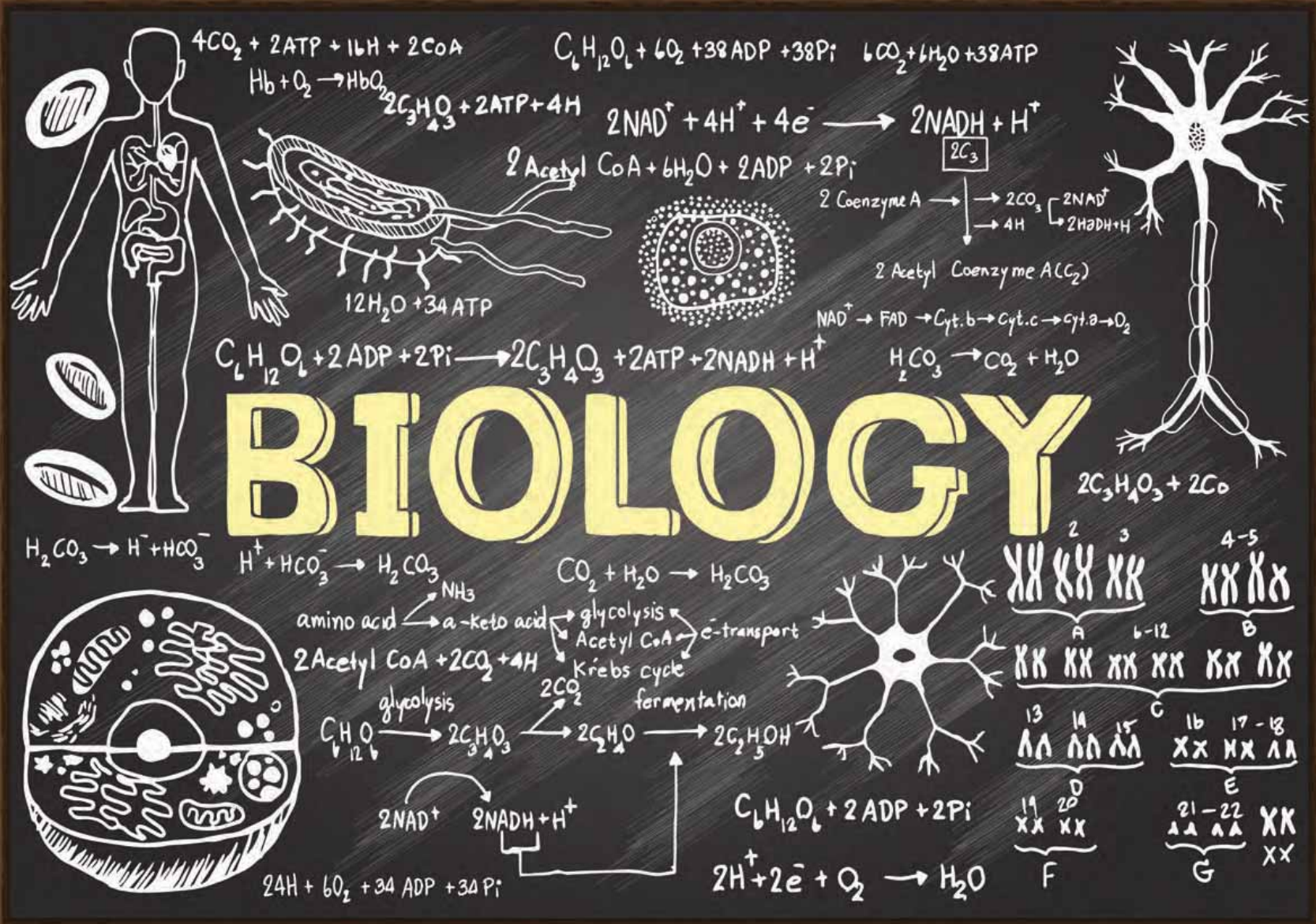
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Your Land



Teaching Biology Could Get You Fired

To understand just how thoroughly gender ideology has warped the minds of its adherents, look to St. Philip's College, a community college in San Antonio, Texas, that fired one of its biology

professors for teaching ... biology.

Johnson Varkey, who taught at the school for more than 20 years, said this month that he was fired after giving a lecture on the human reproductive system in November of last year. Var-

key specializes in human anatomy and physiology and simply pointed out to his students that two chromosomes, X and Y, determine a human being's sex. This is a simple fact that no one, not even those who have bought



into the idea of "gender fluidity," is debating or denying. Yet four students reportedly stormed out of Varkey's lecture hall in response, taking their complaints to the college's administration.

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In January, Varkey received a notice from the school stating that it had “received numerous complaints” about his “religious preaching, discriminatory comments about homosexuals and transgender individuals, anti-abortion rhetoric, and misogynistic banter,” according to First Liberty Institute, which is representing Varkey in his lawsuit against the school.

The college’s letter also allegedly claimed that Varkey’s teaching on sex “pushed beyond the bounds of academic freedom with [his] personal opinions that were offensive to many individuals in the classroom.”

It is true that Varkey is religious and that he believes there are only two genders. In that, he’s joined by millions of people around the world and leading experts and institutions that believed the exact same thing up until two minutes ago.

But Varkey’s teaching on sex chromosomes was not a religious argument. Again, stating that men have X and Y chromosomes and that women have X and X chromosomes is just a scientific fact. To suggest that he should stop teaching as much to accommodate the ideological whims of young adults is absurd.

Varkey is suing St. Philips, accusing the school of illegally terminating him. Let’s hope for the sake of sanity and science that he prevails.

—By Kaylee McGhee White

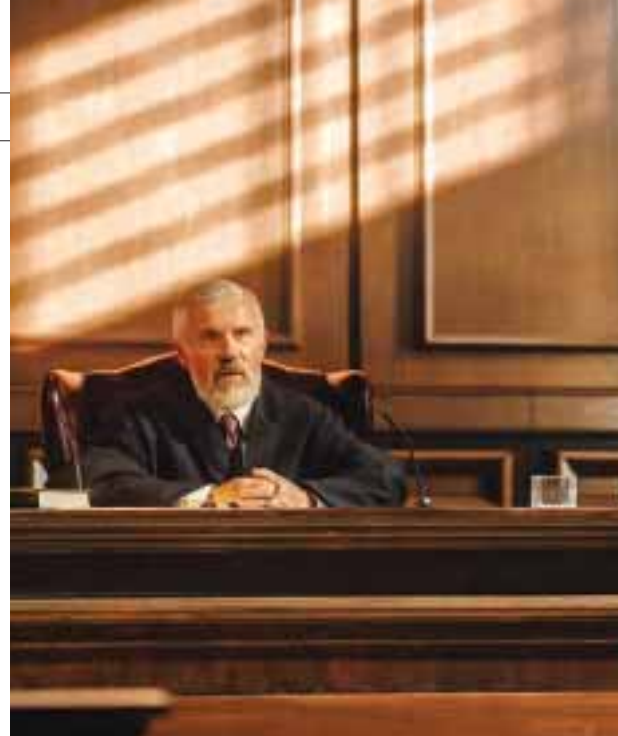
California Bill Would Require Racial Bias in Prison Sentencing

A little-known bill that passed the California State Assembly in May would make liberal victimhood ideology the law of the land in the state.

The state Senate is now considering Assembly Bill 852, which would require judges to “consider the disparate impact on historically disenfranchised and system-impacted populations” when deciding prison sentences. Consistent with the view that statistical disparities are automatic evidence of a racist system, judges would be giving black convicts lighter punishments than white convicts for the same crimes.

The two-paragraph bill does not specify how a judge may arrive at the conclusion that a black convict is oppressed. It only tells judges to “rectify the racial bias that has historically permeated our criminal justice system.” It’s unclear what, if anything, would limit this wide discretion.

Partiality in the justice system is certainly a bad thing. That’s why the United States Sentencing Commission convened decades ago to address it at the federal level. Congress tried to strike a balance



between blanket standards and the role of judges to assess the nuances of every case. Federal judges may adjust the prescribed sentence for a crime based on appropriate factors, such as how likely the criminal is to re-offend or how much suffering the crime caused. Irrelevant characteristics such as skin color are out of the picture.

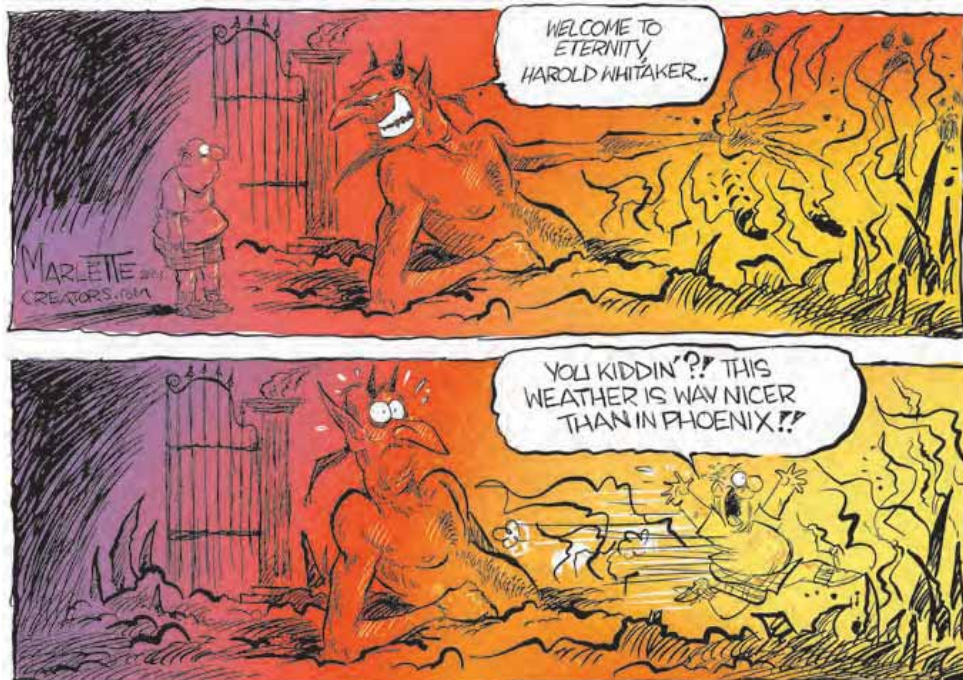
To many Democrats, however, color is not irrelevant and systemic racial bias is good. The leniency they wish to afford some criminals stems from the immoral, irrational idea that suffering excuses people of wrongdoing and that dark skin alone is evidence of that suffering.

When leaders treat the justice system as a victimizer, it creates real suffering for real victims. Just consider the two women killed in a hit-and-run on New Year’s Eve 2020 by Troy McAlister, a repeat offender who was out on probation. McAlister’s three prior theft convictions should have earned him life in prison under California’s three-strikes law and kept him off of the streets. But the black criminal became a beneficiary of former San Francisco District Attorney Chesa Boudin’s “reforms,” one of which barred prosecutors from pursuing three-strikes cases due to racial disparities.

California voters repaid Boudin for his destructive leadership last year by recalling him. If their state senators and governor have any sense, they will reject Assembly Bill 582, which would bring more widespread and lasting damage. Criminals are not victims. The people they hurt are. This doesn’t have to be partisan.

—By Hudson Crozier

GETTY IMAGES





The Weakest Generation? Shocking Number of American Adults are Sleeping With Stuffed Animals

Has America become too soft? It's a question to ask after recent data showed that more adults in the country are (seemingly) sleeping with stuffed animals than ever before.

Surveys revealed that a considerable number of U.S. adults (Generation Z and millennials) sleep with stuffed animals. Moreover, according to the *Philadelphia*



Inquirer, a 2017 poll conducted by Build-A-Bear Workshop, the teddy bear retail company, claimed that “40% of adults” said they slept with stuffed animals.

Adults use stuffed animals as coping mechanisms to soothe anxieties and other health-related problems, the *Philadelphia Inquirer* reported. Respondents claimed that they used the presence of stuffed animals to (essentially) make their lives easier.

“It adds a little emotional texture to life,” Max Genecov, a Ph.D. candidate in clinical psychology at the University of Pennsylvania, told the *Philadelphia Inquirer*. “And these days, young people are much more open about talking about having animals, and about taking a transitional object — something from childhood to adulthood — comfortably.”

But is this a good thing? Previous generations endured the threat of nuclear extinction, world wars, the Great Depression, extreme poverty, racism, segregation, sexism, a lack of electricity and other luxuries, and many other challenging societal obstacles, but today's generation suffers from crippling anxiety?

We live in an era of unprecedented wealth, with food and entertainment easily accessible, limitless knowledge, and various methods of communication available at one's fingertips, but many people need stuffed animals to sleep. How did previous generations ever survive?

I empathize entirely with anyone who suffers from anxiety or has difficulties sleeping. I would be lying if I said I could not relate. And striving to remedy such issues is undoubtedly a positive. However, it seems American society has reached a point where we now discourage any idea of overcoming adversity or perseverance. Instead, we now prioritize the coddling of people.

About 80 years ago, Americans were parachuting on European beaches, scaling up 35-meter cliffs under heavy gunfire from Nazis to save Western civilization. They are rightfully known as the “Greatest Generation.” Today, Americans need “emotional texture” to cope with everyday life.

An old saying advises, “when the going gets tough, the tough get going.” Now, when the going gets tough, we need to give the weakest generation teddy bears.

—By Christopher Tremoglie

Making San Francisco Great Again

Times are tough for San Franciscans these days. While the city was able to coast on the wealth of nearby Silicon Valley for decades, the consequences of giving complete control over the city to the Democratic Party have begun to take their toll.

The homeless have taken over most parks and public spaces. The sidewalks are littered with feces and needles. You can't park without the windows being broken and the car burglarized.

No wonder 77% of San Francisco residents think the city is on the wrong track and more than half say they want to leave.

Many businesses have already started to do just that. San Francisco's downtown has become a ghost town as more firms allow employees to work from home, more retail and restaurants leave the downtown area, and more firms just pick up and leave the city entirely. Just this year, San Francisco has lost its most prestigious shopping mall, two giant hotels, and its largest movie theater.

But not everyone is leaving the city entirely. Some firms have found an island of sanity amid the wreckage that is Dem-

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YOUR LAND

ocratic-controlled San Francisco.

“It feels safer than downtown,” Rex Salisbury of Cambrian Ventures told Reuters. “There’s no open drug use in the Presidio. There are no homeless encampments ... and that is because it’s the federal land and the federal police is a big part of it.”

A military base seized from Mexico during the Mexican-American War in 1846, the Presidio was an active Army base up through the 1990s when it sent units to serve in Operation Desert Storm. In 1994, the base was turned over to the National Park Service which has ably managed the bucolic grounds without interference from the city. The national park balances commercial and preservation interests, including a thriving office building.

“It’s a very calm and quiet space, something that I think instills creativity and stimulates people,” business owner Mathias Schilling said. “We take meetings outside and we walk around the big lawn here.”

That the Presidio is able to maintain California’s natural beauty without homeless encampments, human waste, and open-air drug markets exposes the lie that San Franciscans have no choice in their city’s decline. The surrounding housing prices are just as bad for the Presidio as they are for the rest of the city.

What San Francisco lacks is the political will to let police do the job neces-



sary to keep their city clean and livable. Former President Donald Trump once threatened to send 60,000 federal agents to Portland, Oregon, to end the unrest and clean the city up. The Presidio’s success shows maybe Trump wasn’t that crazy after all.

—By Conn Carroll

Nothing Says ‘Harm Reduction’ Like Helping Addicts Overdose

When you hear the phrase “harm reduction,” you assume that it means some sort of public safety program, perhaps one designed to protect people from themselves.

When you’re in Portland, it means

helping drug addicts do crack, meth, and fentanyl.

Multnomah County, home to Portland, is altering its “harm reduction” program since drug addicts aren’t using syringes as often as they did back in 2019. The county will now be giving out tin foil, straws, glass pipes, and snorting kits that come with spoons to ensure that drug addicts can continue to kill themselves with crack and methamphetamine. The state of Oregon saw more than 1,000 overdose deaths in 2021, and around 9,000 emergency room visits.

The problem has become drastically worse since the “harm reduction” began in 2019. Fentanyl deaths in Multnomah County jumped from 26 in 2019 to 209 in 2022. Portland is littered with homeless encampments, and the deaths of homeless people jumped 53% from 2020 to 2021. Unsurprisingly, the majority of those deaths were drug overdoses. “Harm reduction” never looked so harmful.

The logic goes that offering free drug kits to drug addicts won’t create new drug addicts, but it will help active drug addicts seek treatment, assuming they don’t overdose before then. Even many of the liberals in charge have begun souring on this idea, as Portland’s mayor and city commissioner both denounced the move, and even Multnomah County’s commissioner isn’t sold on the county’s plan.

You can dress up a plan in academic jargon and “compassion” all you like, but when the plan is to help drug addicts do the drugs that are killing them, “harm reduction” is probably the least appropriate name for it. Perhaps everyone involved here should be putting down the crack pipes, figuratively and literally.

—By Zachary Faria



The Week That Was

STAT OF THE WEEK

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The number of years it has been since the last time the **Writers Guild of America** and the **Screen Actors Guild** were on strike at the same time, which the Hollywood unions have just voted to do.



Ryan Gosling and Margot Robbie at the *Barbie* premiere in London.

QUOTE OF THE WEEK



Having conducted two review sessions, thorough deliberations, and consultations with relevant government agencies, including a legal expert on the West Philippine Sea, the Movie and Television Review and Classification Board (MTRCB) has given the film 'Barbie' a Parental Guidance ('PG') rating.

— A statement from the **Philippine government** on why it will not censor the new Barbie movie over pro-China concerns.

PHOTO OF THE WEEK // MUHAMMAD SAJJAD/AP



Youths jump into a commercial swimming pool to cool themselves off in **Peshawar, Pakistan** on July 13. Last week saw the hottest global temperature ever recorded, according to data from the **European Union's Copernicus Climate Change Service** that covers multiple decades.

Drugs in the White House

Cocaine is far from the first drug found in the People's House

By Tevi Troy



When I was preparing to leave the George W. Bush administration after Barack Obama's 2008 election, I had a conversation with a career security officer at the Department of Health and Human Services. He had his own thoughts on what the transition of administrations would mean, telling me that "with the Democrats coming in, we have to turn a blind eye to sex and drugs on our background checks."

I laughed. Then he added, "But when you [Republican] guys come in, we have to overlook shady business practices." I thought about this conversation in light of the recent Secret Service disclosures about finding cocaine in the Biden White House. Looking back at the people and policies of the past 75 years of White House history, it's pretty clear that my security office friend was right and Democrats have generally been more lenient on drug issues than Republicans.

The Republican antipathy to drugs dates back to the 1950s. Dwight Eisenhower disliked illegal drugs so much that he refused to watch movies with known drug users in them. According to White House projectionist Paul Fischer, "When [Eisenhower] found out that [actor Robert] Mitchum was involved with marijuana, he wouldn't have nothin' to do with any films Mitchum was in." Mitchum had served two months in prison for marijuana possession in 1948, five years before Ike's presidency began, but Eisenhower was adamant on the point. Fischer even tried to sneak some Mitchum films past Ike, but Eisenhower, despite his movie-loving proclivities, would get up and leave the theater if he ever saw Mitchum's name or face on the screen.



From top, Nixon with Elvis Presley, Dec. 21, 1970; Chip Carter in 1977, inset; Jody Powell (at left) with Hamilton Jordan, May 1977.

Ike's vice president was Richard Nixon, who won the presidency in 1968. At the time, marijuana was the rage among the anti-war protesters that Nixon abhorred. In 1970, Elvis Presley visited the White House and asked Nixon to grant him the title of "federal agent-at-large" in the Bureau of Narcotics and Dangerous Drugs. Nixon told the King that he believed there was a link between anti-American attitudes and drug use, noting "that those who use drugs are also those in the vanguard of anti-American protest." Nixon, however, did not notice what many viewers of the now-famous photo between Presley and Nixon observed: that frequent prescription drug abuser Presley appeared stoned at the time. Regardless, Nixon granted the King's wish, and presidential aide Egil "Bud" Krogh, who later went to prison as a result of Watergate, gave Presley the requested badge while they lunched in the White House Mess.

Appearances aside, it has never been



proven that Presley was under the influence during his presidential meeting. Moreover, his visit to the White House was meant to draw attention to the cause of combating drugs and their influence. A more serious attempt to bring drug culture into the White House was undertaken that same year by Jefferson Airplane's Grace Slick. Slick was, along with Nixon's daughter Patricia, an alumna of Finch College. When Nixon hosted a White House event for Finch alumnae, Slick planned to attend, under her given



After the 2008 election, a career security officer at the Department of Health and Human Services said that 'with the Democrats coming in, we have to turn a blind eye to sex and drugs on our background checks.'

name of Grace Wing — with the radical Abbie Hoffman in tow. Slick claims to have plotted to spike the president's tea with LSD while inside, but we will never know if she would have been able to succeed. The Secret Service pulled the subversive couple from the line, explaining, "We checked, and you're a security risk."

In 1975, Republican President Gerald Ford's 23-year-old son Jack caused a stir by admitting to the *Portland Oregonian* that he had smoked marijuana. The young Ford said, "I've smoked marijuana before, and I don't think that's so exceptional for people growing up in the 1960s." Gerald Ford wasn't alone. His successor Jimmy Carter's sons Jack and Chip both used drugs. Jack used marijuana and LSD as a ploy to get discharged from the Navy. And Chip developed a more serious drug problem, which led to a long estrangement from his father. Chip and his father reconciled before Carter became president, and Chip later shared a "big fat Austin torpedo" with country star Willie Nelson on the roof of the White House.

Nelson was not the only musician who indulged at the Carter White House. According to David Crosby of Crosby, Stills, & Nash fame, one member of the band lit a joint in the Oval Office while the band was on a visit with Jimmy Carter in 1977. As Crosby described it, "It was funny, man. One of us, and I will not say who, lit a joint in the Oval Office just to be able to say he'd done it, you know?" On another occasion, when Carter hosted a 2 1/2 hour South Lawn concert to celebrate the 25th anniversary of the Newport Jazz Festival,

attendees could hear musicians such as Dizzy Gillespie, Mary Lou Williams, Herbie Hancock, Lionel Hampton, and Cecil Taylor, but they also smelled powerful clouds of marijuana smoke.

Drugs were a problem with the Carter staff as well. Carter press secretary Jody Powell mocked aide David Kaplan during a briefing on staff drug usage when Kaplan admitted that he had never smoked marijuana. Powell got a big laugh from his team by saying, "You've never smoked pot? You should be fired for that reason!" In 1979, Powell and Carter strategist Hamilton Jordan were accused of doing cocaine at the legendary disco Studio 54. The owners, Steve Rubell and Ian Schrager, were under federal investigation at the time, so their accusations may have been an attempt by Rubell's lawyer, Roy Cohn, to give them plea bargaining leverage. But Jordan did have a reputation for partying. Carter pollster Pat Caddell defended Jordan with faint praise, saying, "Everybody knows Hamilton has a weakness for women and booze, but he doesn't do drugs."

Jordan told Powell that he thought the accusation would "be a three-day story and blow over." The press-savvy Powell knew better, telling Jordan, "Are you kidding? The president's top aides, a president who is a born-again Christian, Studio 54, drugs. ... Batten down the hatches because we are going to have a bumpy few days here." No legal action was taken against the pair, but the story got a lot of press attention and cost Jordan \$175,000 in legal fees.

The Reagan administration was famously anti-drug. First lady Nancy Reagan used the "Just Say No" slogan as part of her campaign against youth drug use. She even appeared on the sitcom *Diff'rent Strokes* to promote the cause. She should have tried the slogan at home, though, as her daughter Patti Davis later admitted to having smoked marijuana at age 15. Family was one thing, appointees another: In 1987, Ronald Reagan withdrew the Supreme Court nomination of Judge Douglas Ginsburg because of reports that Ginsburg had smoked marijuana during his time as a Harvard faculty member.

As for George H.W. Bush, he selected former Education Secretary Bill Bennett as the nation's first drug czar, or head of the Office of National Drug Control Policy. Bennett was a staunch opponent of illegal drugs, but he had also once gone on a date with rock star and drug overdose victim Janis Joplin.



Obama adviser Ben Rhodes, Dec. 16, 2014.



Multiple members of the Obama staff also had drug histories. This included Ben Rhodes, who had trouble getting a security clearance because of past marijuana smoking.

Bill Clinton was the first baby boomer to be president. Clinton, and many in his administration, shared many of that generation's lax attitude toward substance abuse. Clinton famously admitted having a joint in his mouth, although he softened it by claiming he did not inhale. Even so, the revelation was a big deal at the time. Clinton's brother Roger indulged as well, serving over a year in jail on cocaine charges. He received a pardon from his brother as the administration was ending. Clinton Vice President Al Gore was also found to have smoked marijuana intermittently in the early 1970s.

Clinton's administration was also more casual with staff drug usage than its predecessors had been. Nevertheless, it still had to make accommodations around security clearance questions. According to FBI agent Gary Aldrich, up to a quarter of the Clinton White House staffers had sufficient "serious experience with significant illegal drugs" that

they could not easily get security clearances. According to Aldrich, the Clinton approach was to delay or not seek clearances so as to allow those people to maintain their administration positions.

Like Clinton, George W. Bush was vague about his drug use, refusing to discuss the subject. When pressed, Bush used the formulation that "when I was young and irresponsible, I was young and irresponsible." Interestingly, Bush's rationale for not admitting drug use was not political expediency but the desire to set an example for America's youth. According to Doug Wead, the author of a book on the Bush family, Bush said, "Do you want your little kid to say, 'Hey daddy, President Bush tried marijuana. I think I will?'" Obama had no such compunctions. In a 2004 *Rolling Stone* interview, Obama said he was "a wild man" in high school and college: "I did drugs and drank at parties. But I got all my ya-yas out." He even admitted in his memoir to using "maybe a little blow," which makes Obama the only modern president to have admitted cocaine use. (Ulysses S. Grant used a hydrochlorate cocaine solution to ease the pain as he was dying of oral cancer.) Multiple members of the Obama staff also had drug histories. This included Ben Rhodes, who had trouble getting a security clearance because of past marijuana smoking, and Alyssa Mastromonaco, who filled out the White House security clearance form and then got rid of her marijuana.

President Joe Biden is, of course, of an older generation and has taken tough anti-drug stances in the past. His staffers and family members, however, are another matter. At least five staffers lost their jobs early in the administration because of past drug use, and Hunter Biden's substance abuse problems are well known. In today's world, with widespread marijuana legalization, marijuana usage is less of a problem. Cocaine, however, especially when found in the White House, still raises eyebrows. We don't yet know whose cocaine it was nor how it got there, but based on history, and my security official friend's observation, it is perhaps unsurprising that this incident took place in a Democratic rather than a Republican White House.★

Tevi Troy is director of the Presidential Leadership Initiative at the Bipartisan Policy Center, the author of four books on the presidency, and a contributing writer to the Washington Examiner.

1920s Style for a 1920s Price

It was a warm summer afternoon and my wife and I were mingling with the best of them. The occasion was a 1920s-themed party, and everyone was dressed to the nines. Parked on the manse's circular driveway was a beautiful classic convertible. It was here that I got the idea for our new 1920s Retrograde Watch.

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Washington Examiner

DeSantis and the Fight for Parental Rights

How the governor plans to bridge the gap between the government and the governed

By Salena Zito

When the parental rights group Moms for Liberty held the Joyful Warriors summit in Philadelphia in early July, they were met with left-wing protesters who vandalized a museum hosting one of the group's events

and mobbed attendees shouting threats at women and children. One of the speakers at the conference was Gov. Ron DeSantis (R-FL), a 2024 presidential contender who has embraced the flashpoint causes of parental rights in education and medicine. In a wide-ranging interview after his speech, DeSantis explained why he has done so. The following has been edited for clarity and space.

Washington Examiner: In your speech, you said, “Moms are going to be a key force in this election.” I want you to talk a little bit about that because I think they had a significant impact in your re-election in Florida, this underestimated force, even with Glenn Youngkin in his governor’s race.

Gov. Ron DeSantis: Well, if you look at how Moms for Liberty has been treated by the media, they’ve been treated very hostile. So, one of the points I made was: That tells you you’re making an impact because they would not be doing that if you weren’t making an impact. Because I think they recognize that the majority of moms agree with what this group, and our policies in Florida, that you know what? Parents do have a right to direct the education and upbringing of their kids.

Yes, schools are [an] important part of the community. They don’t supersede the rights of parents. Parents have a right to know what curriculum is being used in their kids’ schools. They don’t have to sit there and have an agenda imposed on kids, particularly these very young kids.

Schools can’t be doing things behind parents’ back like “changing the gender” of a student without informing the parents. And so, I think a lot of parents have seen, we need a seat at the table again, and they’ve seen the Left — and the Left’s actually honest about this. They will say: “Parents should really just butt out of this. They don’t really know enough about education. We are going to handle it, and the parents should just be thankful about it.”

It’s a very arrogant position, but it is a position rooted in the recognition that the more parents are involved, the harder it is for the Left to use the school system to advance an agenda.

Washington Examiner: What was interesting to me, in doing interviews with women here, dozens of them told me that they were really not involved in politics beforehand. And they voted. They sort of had a smorgasbord of votes: They voted for Democrats, they voted for Republicans, sometimes they just didn’t even vote at all. But this galvanized them, and they have not only started voting and paying attention but also have started running for school boards, getting involved. And like the Tea Party, which was underestimated in 2009 when it first started, do you see this movement having that kind of force for the conservative movement?



Republican presidential candidate Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis speaks at the Moms for Liberty meeting in Philadelphia on June 30.

DeSantis: I think it’d even be more potent electorally. Ultimately, that 2010 cycle, a lot of that was — these were traditional conservatives who were rebelling against the Obama administration. There was a lot of energy, and it was a big, big win. But I think because of what you say, you’re actually bringing people to the table who may not have been involved at all politically prior to this. And I think it’s just a huge swath of people when you’re talking about parents with children, and it cuts across party lines.

When we did parents’ rights and education in Florida that said we’re not going to do the gender ideology in the schools, the media had ... pitched a fit, the Left pitched a fit, but the parents were with us. And it wasn’t just Republican par-

ents because these parents are looking at it saying, wait a minute, why aren’t we worrying about reading? Why aren’t we worried about math and science?

Why are we getting into all these social and political things that most parents are not going to want for their kid anyways? And so I think in that sense, we probably can reach a broader coalition of voters because of this parents’ rights movement. And I really believe — like, in my election in Florida, I mean, we were fortunate to win by almost 20 points. But you know, we won 50% of single women. Republicans never do that. And I think the reason is the single moms were for us because they saw that we cared about their role in education. We made sure the schools were open



Schools can’t be doing things behind parents’ back like ‘changing the gender’ of a student without informing the parents. And so, I think a lot of parents have seen, we need a seat at the table again, and they’ve seen the Left — and the Left’s actually honest about this. They will say: ‘Parents should really just butt out of this. They don’t really know enough about education. We are going to handle it, and the parents should just be thankful about it.’



People march along highway U.S. Highway 1 for a 'Freedom For All' rally in Homestead, Florida, on July 1 as they protest the bills passed by the Florida legislature and signed into law by Gov. Ron DeSantis.

when many people were telling us we couldn't do that and they had difficulty putting food on the table if they had to also be the teacher at home.

So, we did a lot, I think, that connected with those folks, and I think we'll do the same nationally. And I think there's a lot of parents around there that haven't been as fortunate to have policies like Florida. And I think they want to have somebody that's going to be a champion for their rights.

Washington Examiner: Let's talk a little bit about the recent Supreme Court decisions.

DeSantis: Well, I think the idea that we should treat students based on race, rather than merit, violates the law and the Constitution. In Florida, we don't have that. We have colorblind admissions. And that works very well, and it's fair. And we also say, because we understand some schools may be better than others, [if] you finish in the top 10% of your class in high school, you can get into a Florida university, and we'll make sure you have a spot for that. But we're not giving up [spots] on the basis of race, and I think that that's important. So I think it was a good ruling.

Now in Florida, we've gone even further with our universities because, yes, we don't have race-based admissions, but we actually eliminated this whole idea of DEI. They say it's diversity, equi-

ty, and inclusion. In reality, it's ideology being imposed on the institution. And it's really division, exclusion, and indoctrination the way it's done. We don't think that has a part in our public institution, so we nixed it.

I think this decision may open the door for more equal treatment in corporate America because I think corporate America divvies up based on race. Look, we've got to focus on merit, focus on achievement. There's so many things that can unite us. When you elevate things that divide, that's not healthy for society. So, I think this whole project of trying to socially engineer a superficial diversity has not worked. Here's the thing, what I've found in some of these

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You want somebody that understands the proper role of the court, that's going to apply the law and Constitution as it's written and originally understood, not as they would like it to mean, and no legislating from the bench.

elite institutions: Yeah, they may generate diversity in skin color, but they tend to promote uniformity of thought.

What about diversity of life experience? Diversity of viewpoints on things? I think a lot of these organizations that go whole hog with DEI, they end up creating a conformity, which I don't think is something that's very appetizing.

Washington Examiner: Let's pretend you're president. What's some of the criteria you want for a good Supreme Court justice?

DeSantis: You want somebody that understands the proper role of the court, that's going to apply the law and Constitution as it's written and originally understood, not as they would like it to mean, and no legislating from the bench. That's kind of the intellectual framework. I think what separates the great justice from justices who may not reach that level is: Do you have the fortitude and the backbone to rule the way the Constitution demands, regardless of how that's going to be received by elite media, by the law professoriate? So, if you look at somebody like Justice Clarence Thomas, if you look at Justice Samuel Alito, they would really be the models because I think what they've shown over the years is an ability to issue principled rulings regardless of what way the wind blows. I think Justice [Antonin] Scalia, the late Justice Scalia, was another one of those.

But Clarence Thomas, you cannot rattle him. They've been smearing him for decades. And he is just strong as a bull. He believes in the Constitution, and he's just fearless in what he does. And nobody's perfect. But man, anytime there's a decision, 99.9%, he's probably in the right spot. But I do think it's just because, again, elite society is going to pull these justices to the Left. You've got to have somebody that really has that firm foundation.

And I've heard from justices, from people that have worked the Supreme Court, this building, they say it does things to people. I mean, you come in, and then it can kind of change you. You don't want someone that's going to change based on that. You want them to be the same person, and you want them to be able to rule the way the Constitution demands. It's not an institution that was designed by the founders to follow public opinion. Because the time when you're upholding constitutional rights, when it really matters, is when that's not necessarily popular.

Washington Examiner: How do you as president bring the country back together?

DeSantis: I think the vast majority of Americans are interested in the country going in a better direction. But it's got to be rooted in truth and common sense and reality. And we can't be going on these ideological joyrides like we've seen in these liberal jurisdictions and, of course, like we see with the current administration. And I think there's a big, big market for that. It's not going to be easy to do. But I also think that we're probably in a position right now, more so than any time since 1980 when President Reagan was elected, where the country recognizes, hey, we're off course here, let's try something different.

Washington Examiner: You were just at the border. What was that experience like to you to actually see it on the ground?

DeSantis: So I've been fortunate [to go] down there a bunch of times. I've sent people for years now to help Texas. The No. 1 thing I feel is just humiliation that our country has ceded control of its borders to Mexican drug cartels. Because that's exactly what has happened.

So we need to stop the invasion. We do need to build the border wall. We need to reestablish the sovereignty of this country. So, that's what we'll do on day one. We'll do a state of national

emergency. I'll move resources, including military, there. But one of the things I saw when I was in Arizona a couple weeks ago — there, obviously, there's not a border wall that protects the whole wall. There are pieces of wall, and there was one place where there was a piece of wall, and it's big concrete beams. And the cartels would actually cut through the border wall. They got backpacks on, and they're bringing drugs. And they're just allowed to do that with impunity. What kind of a country are we?

So, what I said at the border is, if

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I think the vast majority of Americans are interested in the country going in a better direction. But it's got to be rooted in truth and common sense and reality.

the cartels break through our walls and they're running poison into this country, we're going to have rules of engagement that that's the last thing they will ever do. Because those cartel operators are going to end up stone-cold dead. We're going to defend this border like we would defend our homes or like we would defend our businesses. And yet that is not what happens. It's basically just a free for all. And what's the cost of that?

In the drugs alone, we have tens of thousands of Americans who are dying because of fentanyl overdose. And this is impacting communities all across the country. It's impacting people in Florida. It's impacting people in New Hampshire. I was at the southern — when I was at the border, we did a town hall with people from South Texas. We had 10 angel moms who had lost kids to fentanyl overdose. That would not have happened ... but for us allowing this to come in. So, we're going to have the most assertive policy in American history on interdicting that and holding the cartels accountable. ★

Salena Zito is a national political reporter for the Washington Examiner.



DeSantis waits to speak at a news conference along the Rio Grande near Eagle Pass, Texas, on June 26.

An Emerging Rainbow Coalition—on the Right

The Left's gender and sexuality agenda is sparking pushback from religious minority communities

By Timothy P. Carney

Montgomery County, Maryland, is a wealthy suburb of Washington, D.C., and some still hold an image of it as a white enclave. Local Democratic politicians, however, will tell you how diverse Montgomery County actually is and how it's becoming more diverse every year.

It's true: MoCo, as the locals sometimes call it, is less and less white, more and more immigrant, and even more Muslim every year. Here's the twist: This diversity is causing a major headache for the county's liberal establishment.

As the 160,000-student Montgomery County Public School system rapidly adopts radical new sex-ed curricula, the chief resistance is coming from Ethiopian Orthodox immigrants, Muslim parents, and South American Catholics.

This rainbow coalition of religious conservatives is already causing short-circuits in the minds of race-baiting, identity politics-peddling Democrats and liberal commentators. It is also exposing the extent to which the Left in parts of Ameri-



Diversity is causing a major headache for the liberal establishment in suburban Washington, D.C. As the 160,000-student Montgomery County Public School system rapidly adopts radical new sex-ed curricula, the chief resistance is coming from Ethiopian Orthodox immigrants, Muslim parents, and South American Catholics.



A multiethnic and interfaith protest of sex-education policies enacted by Maryland's Montgomery County, June 27, 2023.

ca has turned supposedly secular institutions, such as local governments and public schools, into dogmatic enforcers of a new quasi-religion.

Finally, if some Muslims and non-white Christian immigrants continue to align with the more stereotypical “Religious Right,” it could help build up a new conservative coalition.

COALITION OF VIRTUE

Montgomery County Public Schools have been changing the sex-ed curriculum and adding books about homosexuality and gender identity to other parts of the curriculum. One required book is titled *Born Ready: The True Story of a Boy Named Penelope*. The central message of this book is that a girl can become a boy by identifying as a boy. The premise here is that each person has a gender, which is interior and known only to that person, and that this gender is undetermined by, and more important than, biological sex.

Again, this isn't merely a book left on a bookshelf in a public library. Opponents of this curriculum aren't book banners. This is a book peddling a brand-new an-

thropology and sexual morality that is not based in science. The teachings can only be accepted on faith, and it is a faith that directly contradicts not only Catholic teaching and evangelical preaching but the tenets of all Abrahamic faiths.

The pre-K material for the current sex-ed curriculum comes from the Human Rights Campaign, a far-left gay and transgender group. Pre-K teachers read *Pride Puppy!* to the class. The “Search and Find Word List” in the back of the book includes “intersex,” “drag queen,” “underwear,” and “leather.”

The school system had originally indicated that some parents would be able to opt out of some of these lessons but then backtracked. Thus, the Coalition of Virtue entered the scene. The nonprofit group describes itself as an “organization of American Muslims, strategically partnered with members of other faith communities, working together with the intention of reviving the universally held virtues and morals of our country's great faith traditions.”

The coalition wrote that MCPS “recently introduced a new curriculum to

indoctrinate students from pre k-eighth grade on a specific and highly opinionated view of sexual morality and gender ideology.” MCPS isn't preaching “acceptance” of various lifestyles or beliefs but is instead preaching one specific set of beliefs as dogma, the coalition explained.

“It is a curriculum that teaches a specific sexual morality/values and gender ideology that is completely unnatural and unacceptable,” it added. “The goal isn't inclusion or education of another view, its indoctrination into that view.”

Tamer Mahmoud, along with a few other county parents, responded in May by filing suit, demanding a right for parents to opt their children out of such programming. The county didn't take kindly to this suit or to the flood of angry parents who came to testify against such proselytizing in the name of “inclusivity.”

'RELIGIOUS FREEDOM, RAISE YOUR VOICE'

The tension built until many hundreds, maybe a thousand, people showed up at the June 28 board meeting, which the county closed to the public, and protested

outside. The crowd was mostly Muslims, Ethiopian Christians, and other immigrant or nonwhite parents or activists.

An Ethiopian Orthodox cleric named Like Seyouman Getahun spoke at length to reporter Asra Nomani of the *Federalist*. He painted the new curriculum as undermining parents' right to raise children according to their culture. "Our culture is knowing God, respecting God, and fulfilling God's instruction," the cleric said.

One Peruvian American mother carried a sign reading, "Respetemos el derecho de las familias a compartir su cultura y religión con sus hijos e hijas!" which translates roughly as "Respect the right of families to share their culture and religion with their sons and daughters!"

This whole situation fries the circuit boards of the Left. "Progressive" school boards across the country advance their gender and sexual ideology in the name of diversity and inclusion, but the Muslim and Ethiopian Orthodox protesters have at least as good a claim to "diversity and inclusion" in their demand for an opt-out.

This tension causes embarrassing and revealing reactions from the Left. The June 28 meeting gained so much attention and became a protest because of the demeaning and belittling reaction liberal school board members had to Muslim parents and students who spoke up at earlier meetings. In the spring, one liberal school board member insulted the "Muslim families on the same side of an issue as white supremacists and outright bigots." Another liberal board member belittled a Muslim student who objected to the sexual content, dismissing her arguments as "parroting dogma." The premise here is that Muslim "dogma" deserves no respect, but anyone who questions the dogma behind *Pride Puppy!* and *Born Ready* is a bigot.

Jen Psaki, the Democratic spokeswoman-turned-cable news host, treated the Muslim- and Ethiopian Orthodox-led protests as "a right-wing strategy." "The GOP is trying to recruit Muslim Americans, a community that makes up less than 2% of the U.S. population, against another tiny, marginalized group of Americans: transgender people," Psaki said. Her clear implication is that Mus-

lims and Ethiopian Christians do not have agency and that they protest left-wing indoctrination only because they are manipulated by wily right-wingers.

Psaki and school board members cast about for conspiracy theories and novel explanations because it offends their

er have known: Before 9/11, Muslims voted overwhelmingly Republican. The best estimates of the 2000 election show George W. Bush carrying about 70% to 90% of the Muslim vote. That suggests that the era of Muslims as Democrats is the aberration, not the norm.

Most important, though, is the hard-left tack of Democratic culture warriors and the recent takeover of public schools by gender ideologues. When former President Barack Obama dominated the Muslim vote in 2012, the Democratic Party wasn't yet insisting that men who identify as women are, therefore, women. Certainly, it was rare to find this preached as dogma in public schools.

In recent years, public schools in cities and large left-leaning counties have gone from liberal secular institutions to dogmatic religious left-wing institutions. A place such as Montgomery County, while very secular and liberal, has plenty of conservative Catholics, evangelicals, and Jews. Those families are likely to have their own private schools that reinforce the values and beliefs of the parents.

Muslim and Ethiopian Orthodox families, on the other hand, are smaller minorities and poorer. They, along with immigrants from South America who are likely to be Catholic or evangelical, are more likely to rely on public schools.

These public schools are no longer secular schools, though. Transgender ideology is effectively a religion. Its precepts clash with those of Islam and Orthodox Christianity, along with those of Catholicism, Christianity, and Judaism. The Montgomery County School Board is not the only liberal-dominated entity in the country that is trying to convert children to this new religion, away from their parents' religious beliefs.

Throw in the condescending talk from Psaki and crew — *you only hold on to your own faith because you've been duped by white conservatives* — and Democrats are the ones building a new political coalition on the Right. ★

Timothy P. Carney is the senior political columnist at the Washington Examiner.



Tweeted coverage of the June 27 Montgomery County protest, which included a wide variety of faiths.

self-image, and undermines their political tactics, when minority groups oppose them. In most fights over policy, liberals are simply able to shout "racists!" instead of rebutting a conservative's point. But it takes no secret strategy by the Right to win over Muslims or nonwhite Christians. The Left's behavior is driving this shift.

WHAT'S NEW?

You may ask, *why now?* Immigrants and nonwhites have long been more religious and more conservative than the Democratic Party as a whole, and yet they have generally remained on the Left side of the aisle. What would cause them to take to the streets and tack away from their party now?

The answer starts with a not-too-distant history that Psaki might nev-

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The Real College Scandal



Affirmative action and legacies are red herrings

By J. Grant Addison

The Supreme Court's decision to end affirmative action in college admissions has not so much settled a debate as it has begun a whole host of new ones. While *Students for Fair Admissions v. Harvard* maintains that colleges and universities are not permitted to recreate their affirmative action regimes in the aggregate through other admissions methods, such as the personal essay, schools may still consider "an applicant's discussion of how race affected his or her life, be it through discrimination, inspiration or otherwise," in the words of Chief Justice John Roberts's majority opinion. Similarly, nonacademic factors such as geographic location and socioeconomic status remain accepted grounds on which to consider applicants.

This obviously leaves ample room for subjectivity on behalf of colleges in orienting their admissions processes, including in directions that still prioritize racial status, leaving the future of the college admissions landscape rather unsettled.

And no sooner had the Supreme Court struck down Harvard's affirmative action policies than public debate immediately turned to yet narrower questions of matriculation, most notably the use of legacy admissions by Ivy League and other prestigious institutions. "If SCOTUS was serious about their ludicrous 'color-blindness' claims, they would have abolished legacy admissions, aka affirmative action for the privileged," Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez (D-NY) tweeted following the decision.

A lawsuit has already been filed against Harvard's use of legacy admissions, or the preferential consideration given to children of alumni. Similar calls for the abolition of legacy policies have continued over the past few weeks, including from President Joe Biden and other politicians, university presidents and professors, and high-profile voices across the political spectrum.

At the heart of this debate is the idea of what *should not* be determining admissions: We *do not* want race, by itself, determining who is able to attend highly selective colleges and universities; we *do not* want the inherited privilege of alumni status, typically concentrated among those who are wealthy and often white, carrying the day for certain applicants, and so on.

While diversity of experience, socioeconomic class, geographical residency, and background are all desirable factors to consider when seeking to compose a well-rounded freshman class or cohort of undergraduates, one would hope the primary criteria of consideration for applicants would be that of academic merit. College is, after all, an academic endeavor. Students graduating high school with a record of scholastic

achievement are, on average, better suited to the demands and expectations of undergraduate coursework — and, in an academic sense, somewhat more deserving of the still-limited opportunity to study at an institution putatively dedicated to higher learning than those with no such record of achievement.

Yet academic merit has been remarkably absent from the recent debates over college admissions. Indeed, it is as if the entire pretext that college-going is itself about



A protester outside of the Supreme Court in Washington on June 29, 2023.



Graduating Harvard University students celebrate their degrees during commencement ceremonies on May 25, 2023, on the school's campus in Cambridge, Massachusetts.



educational attainment is being abandoned in real time. More than 80% of four-year colleges and universities did not require SAT or ACT standardized test scores for fall 2023 admissions, according to a nationwide list compiled by the National Center for Fair & Open Testing, or FairTest. What began largely as a COVID-era convenience has quickly been enshrined as a new measure of equity and fairness in admissions at schools across the land, including highly selective, academically prestigious institutions such as Harvard, Stanford University, and Columbia University. In the wake of the *SSFA v. Harvard* decision, a number of schools, such as those in the University of California system, announced they will find new ways to prioritize “adversity” and other such experiential metrics as a way to arrive at a racial and ethnicity emphasis within their admittance standards. At the University of California, Davis, School of Medicine, this has resulted in the ranking of applicants based on an “adversity score,” determined by the self-reported disadvantages prospective students have faced.

Meanwhile, public trust in higher education continues to sink with each passing year. Even as arguments were swiftly shifting from affirmative action to legacy admissions, Gallup released its latest survey findings, reporting that the public’s overall confidence in higher ed-

ucation has fallen “to 36%, sharply lower than in two prior readings in 2015 (57%) and 2018 (48%).” While trust declined most sharply for Republicans, dropping a massive 37 points from 2015 to 19%, confidence in higher education fell among both independents and Democrats alike, resting at 32% and 59%, respectively.

“**If you view colleges and universities as places of deep learning, dedicated to academic rigor and aptitude, that goal is ill-served by our get-them-all-in-and-graduate-as-many-as-possible mindset.**”

The public, it seems, is waking up to the fact that higher education has become vastly untethered from its original purposes. At the same time, it remains as central to socioeconomic advancement as it has ever been. It is a near-mandatory barrier to middle-class employment, one that is increasingly more expensive. Employers overwhelmingly prioritize college degrees in hiring. Thus, it is in-

credibly important who gets into and graduates from college. Fairness and representation have become the paramount concerns, above merit, academic ability, or even likelihood of graduation and coursework completion.

This is why debates over things such as legacy admissions are so sexy and attention-grabbing. There is a deep sense of unfairness when the progeny of the rich are reserved spots at the institutional system most associated with wealth creation and career remuneration, particularly when merit is removed from the equation. Yet when set against the broader reality of our K-12-to-college-to-workforce career pathway, such debates are little more than red herrings.

It feels much safer, much easier to argue about a privileged minority in legacy admissions, which, according to professor Evan Mandery’s *Poison Ivy*, represents roughly 14% of Harvard’s entering class, than it does to take and grapple with the fundamental failures of the higher education system as a whole. Consider what we know about both the inputs and the outputs of our current system.

College applicants, as we have seen, increasingly no longer have to prove academic achievement through standardized test scores. Such scores are an admittedly imperfect measure of intellectual aptitude, but the alternatives hinge almost entirely on subjectivity.

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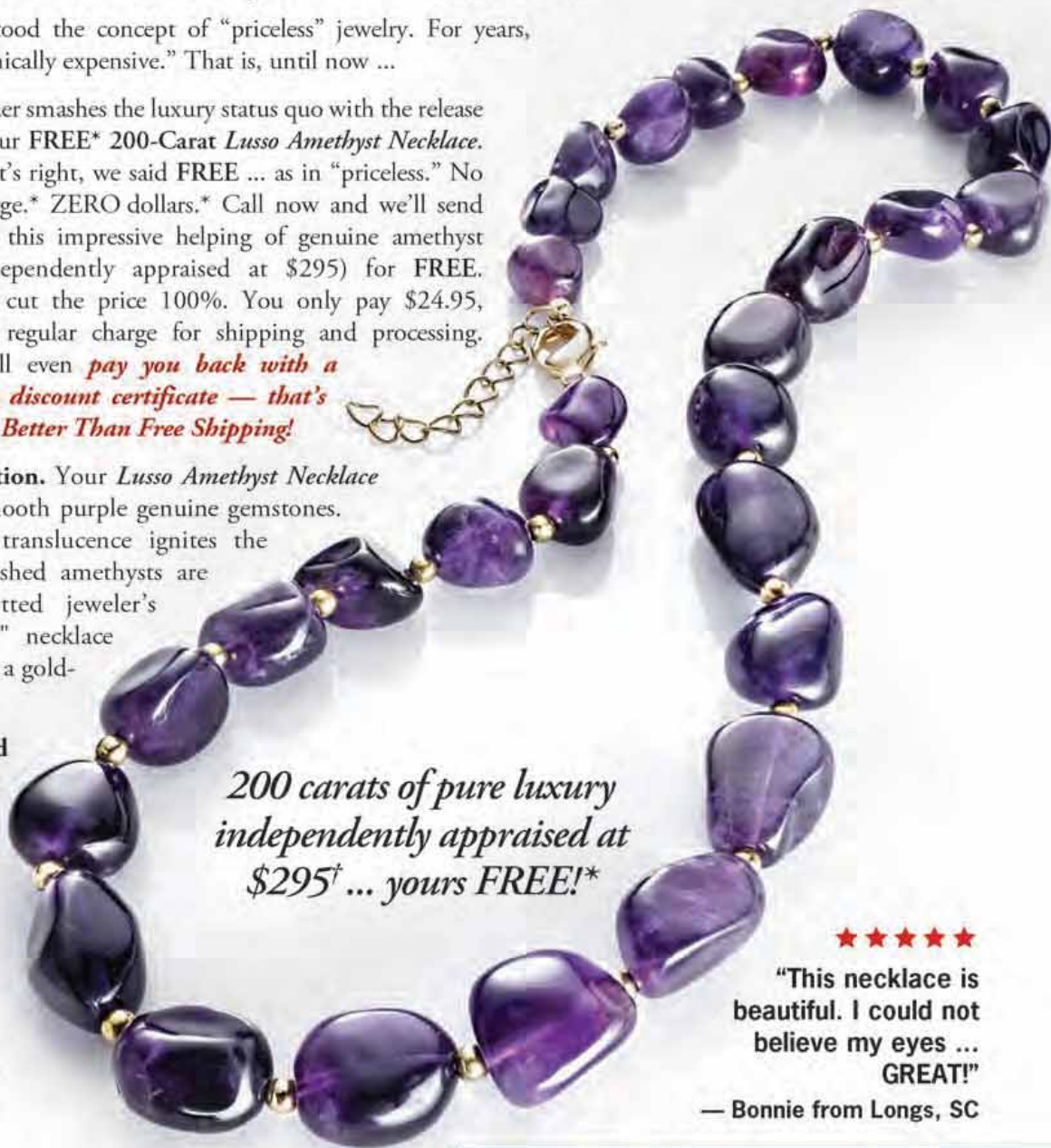
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While GPA remains somewhat involved in the admissions game, it is being watered down in favor of personal experience and demographic attachments. At the same time, the K-12 farm system, if you will, produces its own uneven measures of results. High school graduation rates around the country remain high even as individual metrics of reading, mathematics, and writing skill paint a bleak picture of student proficiency, with the latest results from the “Nation’s Report Card” National Assessment of Educational Progress scores suffering even worse under the effects of COVID-era remote schooling policies.

The outputs of the higher education system, the graduates themselves, are also suspect. The National Student Clearinghouse Research Center found that roughly 62% of full-time students at all four-year institutions graduate within six years — six years, mind you, that’s two years and four semesters longer than what should be the standard rate of completion. Meanwhile, grade inflation is a well-recognized phenomenon all across the undergraduate landscape. As remarked recently by Derek Thompson and David Perell, the average GPA at Harvard between 1890 and 1950 was 2.5. It was 3.0 in 1960, and it’s a whopping 3.8 today. A middling six-year graduation rate even as grades improve does not make for much confidence in the level of learning being acquired by undergraduates. What they are acquiring is loads of loan debt, of course, along with routinely liberal-coded social and ideological conditioning.

It strikes me we no longer understand what college should be for, beyond a six-year holding pattern before middle- and upper-class employment. Even while we focus on designs to make admissions fairer and broader, so that the opportunities to matriculate into this system are more evenly distributed, it seems we’ve begged the question of why the system should exist in its current state at all. Because, from whichever angle you wish to consider it, what we have now is failing in whatever goal you deem most important. If you view colleges and universities as places of deep learning, dedicated to academic rigor and aptitude, that goal is ill-served by our get-them-all-in-and-graduate-as-many-as-possible mindset. If your priority for the college system is increasing equity for socioeconomic mobility, itself a noble goal, surely a more streamlined credentialing process that



USC reported offering admission to eight students over the course of four years who were related to donors or alumni but didn’t meet admission requirements.

does not require the traditionally underprivileged and poorer to forgo years of earning would better suit such needs.

If we have lost the plot on our higher education system, the focus of future debates should not be on red herrings but on rethinking a different reality. This involves digging into barriers preventing system change, but it also involves asking deeper questions regarding what higher education should be for. The benefit of system innovation is that higher education operating with new modes and orders does not have to be all things for all people under one model, as it is now. Departing from a four-year institutionally controlled system that attempts to achieve equity, employment preparation, intellectual exploration, and scholarly patronage means you can uncouple such goals from one another, letting various sectors of a new system pursue each endeavor more thoroughly, rather than having them each clash against another.

While there are legal obstacles to revolutionizing our system — principal among them being the disparate impact discrimination doctrine around employer hiring that itself has elevated the college degree to its privileged place in our labor market — as well as self-interested agendas of colleges, bureaucracies, and current stakeholders, I submit that the

biggest obstacle is our fear of letting pluralism reign. Innovation might feel unfair, after all, and we just can’t have that. We have arrived at our present situation due in large part because of the fear that someone, somewhere might be excluded. Uniformness and bigness rule the day, the system growing and metastasizing into a bloated, self-perpetuating mass designed to be all things to all people. Not everyone should go to college, not everyone is equipped to, nor does everyone want to. To say as much is not a value judgment or negative reflection on those people despite how advocates and the zeitgeist writ large might disagree.

A move toward a more pluralistic system populated with various iterations of postsecondary pathways — streamlined credential programs, public-private workforce partnerships, smaller, more exclusive, and classically differentiated universities revived under the strict goals of scholarship, as opposed to employment training — does by necessity discriminate in purpose and design but that does not make it *discriminatory* in the way we typically understand it now. Distinction is good and valuable, regardless of how afraid of it we have become. ★

J. Grant Addison is deputy editor of the Washington Examiner magazine.

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Washington Briefing



NATIONAL SECURITY

Biden and Zelensky get what they needed from consequential NATO summit

President Joe Biden shakes hands with Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelensky at the NATO summit on July 12 in Vilnius, Lithuania.

PAVEL GOLOVKIN/AP

The debate over when to formally invite Ukraine to join NATO has been based on a flawed premise, that the mere invitation would spur World War III

By Jamie McIntyre

In the end, the big issue going into the NATO summit in Vilnius, Lithuania, turned out not to be such a big deal after all.

In the weeks and months leading up to the annual meeting of NATO leaders, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky had been adamant that in addition to the tens of billions of dollars in weapons and ammunition NATO and partner nations have supplied his army since Russia invaded almost 17 months ago, he needed a formal invitation for Ukraine to join NATO to send a message to Russian President Vladimir Putin.

Ahead of the summit, President Joe Biden had given an interview in which he said flat-out NATO was not ready to extend such an invitation, a move that would require approval from all 31 member nations.

And when Zelensky got wind that the communique NATO would issue on the first day of the summit would cite “additional democratic and security sector re-

forms” as conditions Ukraine would have to meet, he briefly exploded on Twitter.

It’s “absurd,” Zelensky tweeted. “It seems there is no readiness neither to invite Ukraine to NATO nor to make it a member of the alliance.”

But by the time Zelensky arrived in Kyiv later that day, it was obvious that the commitments NATO was making, while short of an invitation, would send the kind of message he wanted Putin to get.

“Allies agreed on a new multiyear assistance package for Ukraine to help transition Ukraine from Soviet-era to NATO equipment and standards, and make their forces fully interoperable with NATO,” said Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg in his closing press conference.

“Ukraine is now closer to NATO than ever before,” he added. “And as Ukraine continues to liberate territory, we will stand by them for as long as it takes.”

“Ukraine’s future lies with NATO,” said Biden sitting across from Zelensky just before their private one-on-one meeting. “Allies all agreed to lift the requirements for Membership Action Plan for Ukraine and to create a path to NATO membership while Ukraine continues to make progress on necessary reforms.”

It was more than enough for Zelensky to gush that the summit was a “very much-needed and meaningful success.”

“[The] Ukrainian delegation is bringing home significant security victory for the Ukraine, for our country, for our people, for our children,” Zelensky said.

The debate over when to formally invite Ukraine to join NATO has been based on a flawed premise, that the mere invitation would drag NATO into World War III.

“All 31 allies were not prepared to admit Ukraine at this summit into NATO,” explained White House national security adviser Jake Sullivan in an appearance on

“Ukraine’s future lies with NATO. Allies all agreed to lift the requirements for Membership Action Plan for Ukraine and to create a path to NATO membership while Ukraine continues to make progress on necessary reforms.”

—President Joe Biden



CNN. “If Ukraine were admitted to NATO today that would mean NATO would be at war with Russia today. It would mean that the United States would be at war with Russia today. And President Biden and the other NATO leaders were not prepared to do that.”

Except as Zelensky has argued, Ukraine is not asking to join now. Just for the invitation to join later.

“As for the invitation to NATO. ... It’s a signal,” he said at a press conference with Stoltenberg.

“Nobody is willing to have a world war, which is logical and understandable,” Zelensky said. “Ukraine is fighting, and it truly understands that Ukraine cannot be a member nation of NATO as long as the war continues in our territory. This is absolutely clear. But those signals are important.”

“Invitation now does not mean ac-

President Joe Biden addresses the public during an event on July 12 at Vilnius University on the sidelines of a NATO summit in Vilnius, Lithuania.



cession now,” tweeted retired Gen. Ben Hodges, a former commander of the U.S. Army Europe. “This is an incorrect assumption by Mr. Sullivan, but it’s used as the excuse for not yet inviting Ukraine into the alliance. Where is the strategic bravery and leadership that can best prevent war and ensure Europe’s security?”

At a public forum, Sullivan was confronted by Daria Kaleniuk, a Ukrainian anti-corruption activist who asked why Ukraine must wait for an invitation while her young son sleeps in the corridor to avoid Russian missiles.

“Jake, please advise me, what should I tell my son?” she asked. “That President Biden and NATO didn’t invite Ukraine to NATO because he’s afraid of Russia? Afraid of Russia losing? Afraid of Ukraine winning?”

“Every member of NATO has to meet certain democrat reform requirements

before coming into the alliance,” Sullivan said afterward on CNN. “That’s true also of Ukraine. It has made substantial progress along the reform path and there are more steps to take.”

Biden’s big win came before he arrived in Vilnius, thanks largely to the shuttle diplomacy skills of Jens Stoltenberg and a change of heart by Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan.

Erdogan agreed to drop his objection to Sweden becoming the 32nd member of NATO, in return for support in reviving Turkey’s effort to join the European Union, along with clearance to buy 40 new F-16s from the U.S.

Erdogan, who just won reelection for another five-year term, seems to have made a sharp course correction away from Moscow and back toward the West, perhaps in part as a result of Putin’s weakened stature and the poor performance of

Russian ground forces when confronted with NATO weapons and tactics.

“When Putin and his craven lust for land and power unleashed his brutal war on Ukraine, he was betting NATO would break apart. He was betting NATO would break. He thought our unity would shatter at the first testing. He thought democratic leaders would be weak. But he thought wrong,” Biden said in a speech.

“NATO is stronger, more energized, and yes, more united than ever in its history,” he said.

Meanwhile, back in Washington, Rep. Marjorie Taylor Greene (R-GA) was introducing six amendments to the 2024 National Defense Authorization Act that would cut off all aid to Ukraine, including F-16s and long-range missiles, and direct President Joe Biden to withdraw from NATO, calling the trans-Atlantic alliance “not a reliable partner.”

That was happening as President Joe Biden was tweeting he was in Lithuania “to reaffirm our ironclad commitment to NATO.” ★

Jamie McIntyre is the Washington Examiner’s senior writer on defense and national security. His morning newsletter, “Jamie McIntyre’s Daily on Defense,” is free and available by email subscription at dailyondefense.com.

“**When Putin and his craven lust for land and power unleashed his brutal war on Ukraine, he was betting NATO would break apart. He thought our unity would shatter at the first testing. He thought democratic leaders would be weak. But he thought wrong.**

—President Joe Biden

WHITE HOUSE

Carry on my wayward son

The Biden White House isn't shy about having Hunter Biden around, to the dismay of House Republicans probing the president's troubled kin

By Reese Gorman

As the congressional investigations into Hunter Biden continue to ramp up, so have public appearances with his father, President Joe Biden.

First was at a lavish December state dinner with French President Emmanuel Macron. Six months later, on June 22, Hunter Biden attended another state dinner for Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

Two days prior, on June 20, the Department of Justice had announced in a court filing that Hunter Biden planned to plead guilty to two federal tax crimes, both misdemeanors. Part of the plea deal would also see the president's son enter a diversion program for illegally possessing a firearm.

At the most recent state dinner, Hunter Biden joined a prestigious guest list, ranging from Ralph Lauren to House Speaker Kevin McCarthy (R-CA). But also alongside Hunter Biden was the man whose agency had been investigating him — Attorney General Merrick Garland.

All the while, various Republican-led House committees have been probing Hunter Biden's past activities, including alleged influence-peddling schemes going back to his father's vice presidential tenure from 2009-17. That's a bad look, at the very least, GOP lawmakers said.

"Damn. He went to a state dinner with Merrick Garland there," Rep. Nancy Mace (R-SC) told the *Washington Examiner*. "The president of the United States inviting his son, who's under investigation, you know, under indictment, plead guilty, whatever, and to go to a state dinner with Merrick Garland, it's just the optics are terrible. But that's just kind of true of the administration right now."

But President Joe Biden and his



Hunter Biden talks with guests during a State Dinner for India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi, June 22, 2023.

communications team don't seem flummoxed by it, with the commander in chief's actions harkening back to the title and lyrics to the band Kansas's epic 1976 progressive rock anthem, "Carry On My Wayward Son." The White House defended the president's decision to allow Hunter Biden to attend the dinner just days after it was revealed he would plead guilty.

Hunter Biden also recently was seen leaving with his father heading to Camp David for vacation and on a White House balcony alongside his father, watching the fireworks on July 4.

Joe Biden hasn't directly addressed his son's plans to plead guilty to the federal charges. The day the news dropped, Biden said he was "very proud of my son" and didn't elaborate.

A White House spokesperson also said at the time that "the president and first lady love their son and support him as he continues to rebuild his life. We will have no further comment."

The public appearances of Hunter Biden with his father and other members of his father's administration have led to Republicans in Congress believing the president

doesn't take his son's charges seriously.

"It sort of feels like they're rubbing our noses in it," Rep. Matt Gaetz (R-FL), told the *Washington Examiner*. "Not just to the investigators but to the country."

Republicans point to Hunter Biden's "sweetheart" plea deal as proof that Republicans and Democrats are held to different standards in the eyes of the law, often comparing it to former President Donald Trump's 37 federal charges in relation to his handling of classified documents when he was out of office.

Other members believe the public appearances, especially the ones alongside Garland, show the Bidens don't care.

"What matters to me is that, what is it now, like 60% of the country thinks there's a double standard in our justice system," House Judiciary Committee Chairman Jim Jordan (R-OH) told the *Washington Examiner*. "I tell people they think that because there is, and that's what we're trying to address with what we're working on."

In addition to legal troubles, Hunter Biden, 53, has spoken of a troubled personal life. The Yale Law School graduate has admitted to squandering money during his first marriage on drugs, alcohol, and prostitutes. In 2014, he was kicked out of the Navy Reserves after testing positive for cocaine.

THE INVESTIGATIONS

Three House committees are intensely scrutinizing Hunter Biden's criminal case and if the DOJ interfered in any way with the investigation.

The House Oversight, Judiciary, and Ways and Means committees have started working in tandem to probe the DOJ's actions in Hunter Biden's criminal case — that after two IRS whistleblowers alleged the DOJ blocked David Weiss,

the Trump-appointed U.S. attorney for Delaware, from bringing charges in the jurisdiction of his choice, and concealed information relating to an alleged foreign bribery scheme involving Hunter Biden and then-Vice President Joe Biden from IRS and FBI investigators on the case.

“These whistleblowers provided information about how the Justice Department refused to follow evidence that implicated Joe Biden, tipped off Hunter Biden’s attorneys, allowed the clock to run out with respect to certain charges, and put Hunter Biden on the path to a sweetheart plea deal,” House Oversight Chairman James Comer (R-KY) said in a statement. “Americans are rightfully angry about this two-tiered system of justice that seemingly allows the Biden family to operate above the law.”

In light of the whistleblower testimony, Hunter Biden’s legal team has started an aggressive effort to discredit the IRS whistleblowers.

That legal team includes high-profile

veteran Washington attorney Abbe Lowell. Former GOP Rep. Denver Riggleman, who was previously a senior technical adviser for the House select committee that investigated the Jan. 6 attack at the U.S. Capitol, is working with the legal team as well. Riggleman was a House member from 2019-21, representing a conservative southern Virginia district. He lost renomination in 2020 to Rep. Bob Good (R-VA) and has since left the GOP.

On June 30, Lowell sent a 10-page letter to Rep. Jason Smith (R-MO), the chairman of the House Ways and Means Committee, attempting to discredit the whistleblower testimony.

“Since taking the majority in 2023, various leaders of the House and its committees have discarded the established protocols of Congress, rules of conduct, and even the law in what can only be called an obsession with attacking the Biden family,” Lowell said in the letter. “Your recent actions and joint statement with Chairmen Comer and Jordan make

clear that you have joined this ignoble group, adopting their irresponsible tactics as your own.”

And since it was revealed Riggleman was working with Hunter Biden’s legal team, the former congressman has taken to social media to sway public opinion in favor of the president’s son.

“Truth matters. When I took this job, I wasn’t pro-Hunter or anti-Hunter. I am pro-data and facts,” Riggleman tweeted on July 5. “Forensics make clear that considerable information linked to Hunter Biden is questionable.”

The IRS critics, who House Republicans call “whistleblowers,” though it’s doubtful they meet that technical, legal definition, are set to testify before the House Oversight Committee on July 19. It is likely Hunter Biden’s legal team will heavily push back on any information that comes out of the hearing. ★

Reese Gorman is a congressional reporter for the Washington Examiner.

The advertisement features a light blue background with green palm fronds at the top. On the left is the United States Senate Federal Credit Union logo. The main headline reads "Summer of Saving" in a large, orange, cursive font. Below this, it says "Boost your balance with bonuses of up to" in blue, followed by a large blue "\$400" with a blue asterisk to the right. Underneath the "400" is the text "CHECKING + MONEY MARKET + CERTIFICATES" in blue. At the bottom, it says "Learn More: ussfcu.org/summer" in blue and orange. A small asterisk is to the right of the URL. At the very bottom, in small text, it reads: "*Limited time offer valid between 07/01/2023 and 09/30/2023. Make the qualifying deposit within 30 days of account application to earn your bonus. After an account is opened or service begins, it is subject to its features, conditions, and terms. Account terms, conditions and minimum balance requirements must be maintained for six consecutive months to qualify for bonus. Additional terms and conditions apply.** Membership eligibility required. Federally insured by NCUA."

CAMPAIGN TRACKER



Republican presidential candidate Vivek Ramaswamy arrives at a campaign rally in Urbandale, Iowa, on May 11.

Vivek Ramaswamy goes old school in 2024 GOP bid with Iowa and New Hampshire focus

Republicans now have less than six months to make the sale to Iowa voters

By David Mark

Businessman **Vivek Ramaswamy** is returning to New Hampshire, which has long held the first Republican primary. The Granite State is, not surprisingly, a popular destination among 2024 GOP candidates. Ramaswamy has been campaigning there for months and is set to return on July 20 for a town hall in Manchester.

The 6:30 p.m. event is hosted by the New Hampshire Institute of Politics at Saint Anselm College — 100 Saint Anselm Dr., Manchester, NH 03102.

Ramaswamy then heads west to Iowa, the first voting state in the GOP nomination process, with its midwinter caucuses.

On July 21 at 12:15 p.m., he'll headline a lunch event sponsored by Linn County Moms for Liberty and the Linn County GOP. The event is set for Kingston's Steakhouse, 568 Boyson Rd NE #100, Cedar Rapids, IA 52402.

Ramaswamy first made his name politically as a conservative cable television star, decrying "wokeness" in corporate culture. He's since become an outspoken critic of U.S. aid to Ukraine in its defensive war against Russia, even more so than former President **Donald Trump**, a 2024 GOP rival of Ramaswamy's, who polls show leads the Republican pack by a wide margin in his effort to return to the White House after four years out of office.

Congresswoman's BBQ bash bursts with GOP candidates

The first two 2024 GOP hopefuls who agreed to participate in an Aug. 6 event mixing politics and food, hosted by Rep. Ashley Hinson (R-IA), were Gov. **Ron DeSantis** (R-FL) and former South Carolina Gov. **Nikki Haley**. Now, they'll have plenty of company at the third annual "Ashley's BBQ Bash" at Hawkeye Downs Speedway and Expo Center in Cedar Rapids, Iowa.

Hinson, representing the northeastern Iowa 2nd Congressional District, recently announced that Ramaswamy will be there. So will North Dakota Gov. **Doug Burgum** and former Arkansas Gov. **Asa Hutchinson**. The 2024 Republican presidential candidates "will be joining us to share their vision to get our country back on track!" Hinson tweeted.

The top ranks of Iowa Republicans will also participate in the event hosted by Hinson, a former state lawmaker and local television anchor who beat a Democratic House member in 2020. Gov. Kim Reynolds and the Hawkeye State's two Republican senators, Chuck Grassley and Joni Ernst, will all be at the BBQ bash.

Iowa caucuses date set

Iowa has long been a key cog in the Republican presidential nominating process. The Iowa caucuses stand out even more for Republicans in the 2024 cycle since Democrats, set to renominate President **Joe Biden**, are banishing the state to the middle of its primary voting calendar.

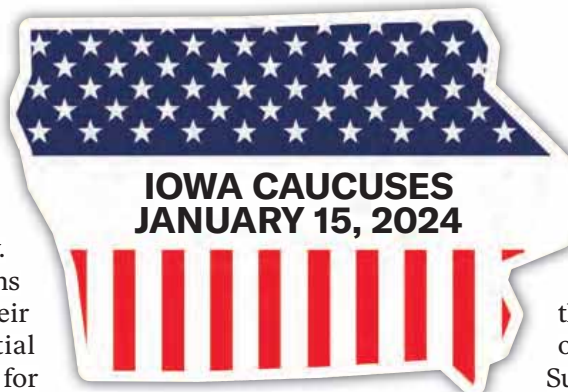
Republicans now have less than six months to make the sale to Iowa voters. Iowa Republicans voted on July 8 to hold their first-in-the-nation caucuses on Jan. 15, 2024, setting up the earliest start of the presidential nominating process since 2012, when caucusgoers gathered on Jan. 3. The State Central Committee of the Iowa GOP met and voted unanimously on the date.

The New Hampshire primary, which under state law must be held before any other primary, doesn't yet have a date but

is expected to be the second contest on the GOP calendar, before the end of January. Nevada Republicans plan to forgo their state's presidential primary (at least for the purposes of awarding delegates) and hold caucuses in early February.

South Carolina Republicans decided last month to hold their primary on Feb. 24. Trump is popular in South Carolina, but the Palmetto State has two local favorites challenging him for the GOP nomination in his White House comeback bid — Haley, his administration's first U.S. ambassador to the United Nations, and Sen. **Tim Scott** (R-S.C.), a senator for a decade after two years as a House member in a long career in local and state politics.

That all marks a slight change from recent Republican calendars. Previously, Ne-



vada was the last of the traditional “first four” early states to vote before the first major day of primaries on Super Tuesday.

South Carolina's continued prominence in the GOP nominating contest is keeping its favorite daughter at least somewhat close to home. Haley is set to campaign in Greenville, South Carolina, on July 20.

The unnamed event with Nikki Haley starts at 6:30 p.m. at the event space Zen. “From intimate gatherings to full-scale weddings and large corporate events, we help you make it unforgettable,” touts the website for Zen, which is at 924 S Main St., Greenville, SC 29601. ★

David Mark is managing editor of the Washington Examiner magazine.

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CONGRESS

Some House GOP lawmakers push Biden impeachment, but leadership is cautious

The president, along with Attorney General Garland and Homeland Security Secretary Mayorkas, would be top targets

By Max Thornberry

House Republicans have introduced multiple impeachment resolutions against President Joe Biden, focused largely on what they call lax enforcement of the U.S. border with Mexico.

Other House impeachment efforts target Attorney General Merrick Garland and Homeland Security Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas on the border issue and over investigations, or lack thereof, regarding bad boy presidential son Hunter Biden.

But just because a batch of high-profile House Republicans are pushing to oust Biden and members of his team from office doesn't mean it's going to happen. House Republican leaders have many considerations on the impeachment front. Starting, of course, with whether evidence exists to warrant a removal attempt. Then there's the potential political blowback should the narrow House majority move ahead, considering impeachment efforts are virtually guaranteed to fail in the Senate, where there's nowhere near a two-thirds majority willing to convict.

Impeachment rhetoric, if not House action, is likely to play a prominent role in the 2024 campaign season. GOP lawmakers and candidates will be looking to burnish their conservative bona fides, along with seeking revenge for the two impeachments of former President Donald Trump, the Republican 2024 front-runner aiming for a White House return.

Both Trump impeachments failed in

the Senate, part of an evolution of a one-time political nuclear weapon that has become more commonplace. President Bill Clinton was impeached by the House in 1998 and then acquitted in the Senate, mirroring the outcome 130 years earlier in Reconstruction-era efforts to remove President Andrew Johnson from office. In 1974 President Richard Nixon resigned over Watergate before the full House voted on impeachment, which would have likely ended in his conviction and removal.

The efforts to impeach and remove Trump animated House Republicans in the minority, and are driving the majority that clawed its way to dominance in the 2022 midterm elections. Despite cries that the impeachments of Trump were baseless, a breach of tradition, and political persecution against a disfavored personality because of personal grievances, Republican leaders will face increased intraparty pressure to investigate Biden.

House Speaker Kevin McCarthy (R-CA) has been noncommittal about impeachment proceedings. So have members of his House leadership team. But with impeachment still very much a live opportunity, here's what proceedings might look like and who they would target.

PRESIDENT JOE BIDEN

As the biggest logistical lift, putting Biden on trial in the Senate appears unlikely for House Republicans. But House GOP lawmakers have been toying with efforts to do

so since Biden took office in 2021 and they were still in the minority.

When Democrats successfully impeached Trump and twice sent him to the Senate, Republicans swore the rules of the game had changed. They promised to treat the next Democratic president with an equal level of scrutiny.

"Anything you do to us, we can do to you," Sen. Lindsey Graham (R-SC) said in 2019 after the first resolution to impeach Trump passed the House. "We have some people on our side just as crazy as people on their side."

As soon as Biden stepped into the Oval Office, Republicans trained their sights on him. They have introduced 10 impeachment resolutions for the president, none of which were taken up for a floor vote or agreed to in the House.

Since taking the House majority in January, Republicans have continued their efforts. They've shifted the focus away from a bungled withdrawal from Afghanistan and "undermining the energy security" of the country to zero in on the Biden administration's immigration policies.

The five House impeachment resolutions introduced this Congress charge Biden, in varying ways, with abusing his power, refusing to maintain control of the southern border, and not finishing building a wall along the border.

In recent weeks, Republicans considered dueling impeachment resolutions regarding the president and what he says he did and didn't know about questionable business deals his son Hunter Biden cut with Ukrainian and Chinese businessmen.

Rep. Andy Ogles (R-TN) introduced a resolution in June accusing the president of weaponizing his office to "shield the business and influence peddling schemes of his family from congressional oversight and public accountability."

One of the resolutions, introduced by Rep. Lauren Boebert (R-CO), survived its political infancy and has been referred to the House Judiciary Committee and the Homeland Security Committee. That's effectively a way for House Republican leaders to put the Boebert impeachment effort on ice for now while keeping open the option to take it up later.

HOMELAND SECURITY SECRETARY ALEJANDRO MAYORKAS

A recent shift away from targeting the president for his immigration and border security policies hasn't slaked Republicans' thirst for accountability on the issue.

The consensus among conservatives, and some Democrats representing districts along or near the southern border, is that a genuine problem plagues the country's immigration policies. But given the fact that Democrats control the Senate, an attempt to put a political head on a spike might be easier if members are aiming a little lower than the White House.

Homeland Security Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas has been in the caucus's crosshairs as long as Biden. Four Mayorkas impeachment resolutions this Congress could bear some fruit as the efforts have caught on in the Senate as well.

None of the resolutions introduced by Reps. Pat Fallon (R-TX), Andy Biggs (R-AZ), Marjorie Taylor Greene (R-GA), and Clay Higgins (R-LA) have been agreed to in the House. But the House has started hearings to grill Mayorkas about his leadership.

"This is not a case of negligence. If it were, the implications would be different. The remedy would be different," Rep. Dan Bishop (R-NC) said during the first hearing last month. "Intentional sabotage of the rule of law is something entirely different. It is an affront to the separation of powers to the institutional authority of the Congress, under the Constitution, and it invites another remedy — and that is impeachment."

The varying resolutions to impeach Mayorkas accuse him of presiding "over a reckless abandonment of border security and immigration enforcement" and failing to "maintain operational control" over the border.

Under the leadership of Biden and Mayorkas, illegal border crossings have skyrocketed.

"With over five million alien encounters and more than 1.5 million known gotaways at our Southwest border, Secretary Mayorkas's complete dereliction of duty has created a historic crisis and endangered every American by ceding operational control of our border to violent

cartels," House Committee on Homeland Security Chairman Mark Green (R-TN) told the *Washington Examiner*.

"Under Speaker McCarthy's leadership, Homeland Republicans are leaving no stone unturned in our oversight investigation, which will demand answers from the Biden administration and ensure we hold Secretary Mayorkas accountable for his refusal to enforce our nation's immigration laws, his cancellation of effective border security policies, and his misleading statements to Congress and America," Green said. "This Committee's mission is to secure our sovereign borders — and we will not stop until we succeed in that mission."

ATTORNEY GENERAL MERRICK GARLAND

The effort to target Attorney General Merrick Garland in this Congress received new life when two IRS whistleblowers alleged widespread interference by the Department of Justice in investigations into Hunter Biden.

Republican grievances with Garland stretch back to the beginning of his tenure as attorney general. Reps. Scott Perry (R-PA) and Marjorie Taylor Greene each filed a resolution to impeach him during the last Congress, arguing he had "politicized" the DOJ, citing a memo referencing concerned parents at school board meetings as "domestic terrorists" and "endangering, compromising, and undermining the justice system of the United States by facilitating the persecution of President Joseph R. Biden, Jr.'s, political rival, Donald J. Trump, the 45th President of the United States."

Greene introduced another impeachment resolution in May, reviving the accusations of the DOJ's politicization, the school board memo, and Garland's authorization of an investigation into Trump's retention of classified documents after he left the White House.

Following the revelation of the two IRS whistleblowers' testimony that U.S. Attorney David Weiss was prevented from bringing charges against Hunter Biden in Washington, D.C., and California, as well as being denied a request to

receive special counsel status, Kevin McCarthy voiced his own support for considering an attempt to remove Garland from office.

"We need to get to the facts, and that includes reconciling these clear disparities. U.S. Attorney David Weiss must provide answers to the House Judiciary Committee," McCarthy tweeted last month. "If the whistleblowers' allegations are true, this will be a significant part of a larger impeachment inquiry into Merrick Garland's weaponization of DOJ."

POTENTIAL POLITICAL BLOWBACK

Despite touting efforts to hold Biden and his top officials accountable as the meatiest part of election season approaches, Democrats are skeptical the approach is going to persuade voters to show up for Republicans.

"I think it kind of just speaks to where Republicans' priorities are and how just out of step they are with what the American people kind of care about," one Democratic aide told the *Washington Examiner*.

The aide noted while Biden is "focused on lowering healthcare costs and bringing jobs back to America," Republicans are pushing "political stunts" and trying to find a way to show up on TV.

Pushing political attacks onto the airwaves is risky business, as it offers Democrats a "very natural contrast" to talk about achievements they've secured and hold them up against Republicans' intransigence on popular legislation in favor of quixotic attempts to punish their political enemies.

"If their theory of the case next year is to be talking about whatever political stuff that they've done over the last two years, then I think the American people are going to look at them and be like, 'How does this make my life any better?'" the aide said. "And that, I think, is a huge risk for a party that is really, really struggling to connect with everyday Americans and prove to these everyday Americans that they care about their lives." ★

Max Thornberry is breaking news editor for the Washington Examiner.

CAMPAIGN

These seven Senate seats most likely to flip party control in the 2024 elections

Montana, Ohio, and West Virginia are ripe GOP targets, while Democrats are mostly playing defense

By David Mark

Senate Democrats face strong headwinds trying to hold the majority in the 2024 elections. With a slim 51-49 edge, the Senate campaign map puts Democrats largely on the defensive, with particularly tough political sledding in Montana, Ohio, and West Virginia. Each are states where, in 2020, former President Donald Trump beat President Joe Biden by margins ranging from comfortable to overwhelming.

Still, the Trump era of politics has demonstrated the unexpected can and will happen. More than 15 months out from the 2024 elections, Trump looks like the favorite in the 2024 field to nab the GOP nomination and again run against Biden. So, that would have all kinds of unanticipated effects on down-ballot races.

Ahead of the 2024 primary season, here are the seven Senate races most likely to change parties. It's a number chosen because at this point they're the most competitive, to varying degrees.

Senate Republicans need two seats to win the majority if Biden is reelected. Or, should Trump or another Republican win the presidency in 2024, the party only needs a single-seat pickup, with the GOP vice president breaking ties. As Biden's understudy, Vice President Kamala Harris has done so numerous times since taking office on Jan. 20, 2021.

Several Senate races could still develop into competitive contests, including swing states that will be top presidential candidates. But for now, in Michigan and Pennsylvania, Democrats have the upper hand. Rep. Elissa Slotkin (D-MI) is a favorite in the Wolverine State, where her party has had strong electoral success from 2018 on.

In Pennsylvania, Sen. Bob Casey (D-PA) will be a Republican target. But he's proven a reliable Keystone State vote-getter and is in good shape to win another six-year term for the Senate seat he first captured in 2006. Both race rankings could shift to the more competitive column.



Sen. Joe Manchin (D-WV)

1. WEST VIRGINIA

Senate Republicans, in 2024 candidate recruiting efforts, took to heart the biblical admonition in Deuteronomy 16:20, "Justice, justice you shall pursue." And they got their man. Gov. Jim Justice (R-WV) is running for Senate, seeking the Republican nomination for the right to challenge Sen. Joe Manchin (D-WV).

The 6-foot-7-inch Justice is running in a state where in 2020 Trump won all 55 counties, crushing Biden 69%-30%. Justice, among West Virginia's wealthiest residents through family businesses and his own investments, nonetheless cuts a populist profile in the Mountain State, with his famous English bulldog, Babydog, by his side.

Over his 13-year Senate career, Manchin has sought to distance himself from national Democrats and their liberal policies. Each week Congress is in session yields new headlines about Manchin

bucking his party on issues related to the environment, federal spending, and more.

But Manchin, West Virginia governor for six years before winning his Senate seat and a fixture of the state political scene since the early 1980s, is running in the now-deeply red state. Manchin's best political hope — and it's a long shot — is that Justice loses the Republican Senate primary to Rep. Alex Mooney (R-WV). That would set up a more competitive race between two longtime officeholders from West Virginia's northern tier, its most populous region.

Still, polls give Justice a commanding primary lead, making him the favorite to defeat Manchin in November 2024 — if the incumbent Democratic senator even seeks reelection. Without Manchin on the ballot, West Virginia is as sure a Republican pickup as exists in national politics.



Sen. Jon Tester (D-MT)

2. MONTANA

Sen. Jon Tester's (D-MT) political success has frustrated Montana Republicans and their national party to no end. In 2006, Tester beat an incumbent Republican senator, and he held his seat in high spending, often highly negative 2012 and 2018 reelection bids.

Tester's appeal in red Montana rests

NEVADA



WISCONSIN



ARIZONA



Senate Seats most likely to flip in 2024 elections



MONTANA



TEXAS



OHIO



WEST VIRGINIA



with his folksy demeanor, flat top haircut, and regular work on his farm in Big Sandy, in the state's remote north-central region. In other words, he comes off like a regular Montanan. Republicans contend that's all a ruse to trick Big Sky Country voters, pointing out his voting record largely mirrors that of Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer (D-NY) and most other liberal, Democratic senators.

Montana's population has grown rapidly over the last decade-plus, to the point that in January it gained a second House seat for the first time in 30 years. Some of that population growth has been in blue areas, such as the state capital of Helena and the college town of Bozeman. Still, Montana is a Republican state, where Trump in 2020 beat Biden 57%-41%.

Republicans think they have Tester's number in his 2024 reelection bid. The state's GOP establishment has rallied around retired Navy SEAL Tim Sheehy, a decorated Iraq and Afghanistan veteran who is now an aerospace company CEO. But Sheehy is likely to face a GOP primary challenge from Rep. Matt Rosendale (R-MT), a member of the House Freedom Caucus, made up of the chamber's most conservative lawmakers. Rosendale lost to Tester in a 2018 Senate bid, when he

was state treasurer, before winning his House seat in 2020.

Sen. Sherrod Brown (D-OH)



3. OHIO

Like Tester in Montana, Sen. Sherrod Brown (D-OH) is betting his personal political brand transcends Trump-era voting trends. Once a premier swing state, Ohio has moved decidedly to the right of late, with Trump beating Democratic presidential nominee Hillary Clinton in 2016 and Joe Biden in 2020 by about 8 points each time.

Brown is a prominent left-wing populist and among the Senate's strongest supporters of labor unions. He's held office most of the time since winning a state House seat in 1974 right out of college. Brown defeated an incumbent Republican senator in 2006 after 14 years as a House member, and he's twice staved off well-funded GOP challeng-

es to his Senate reelection efforts.

Several Republicans are now seeking the right to challenge Brown in November 2024. That includes state Sen. Matt Dolan, a part-owner of the Cleveland Guardians who can self-fund a campaign. So can Bernie Moreno, a wealthy auto dealer who has tied himself to Trump's brand of MAGA politics. Secretary of State Frank LaRose may still enter the GOP primary, as could other candidates.

Sen. Kyrsten Sinema (I-AZ)



4. ARIZONA

The Grand Canyon State Senate race varies from the Democrat versus Republican dichotomy in most other places. Sen. Kyrsten Sinema (I-AZ) hasn't said if she's seeking reelection to the Senate seat she won in 2018 after six years in the House. But there's a catch — Sinema was elected to the Senate as

a Democrat, only to become an independent in the latter part of her term.

Sinema's switch hasn't had a practical effect on the Senate's partisan control since she still caucuses with the Democrats. But, assuming Sinema does run again, it creates waves of uncertainty about how the 2024 campaign will play out.

Democrats have long been frustrated with Sinema, who they contend has sided with corporate interests and generally bucked the party. Her most vocal critic is Rep. Ruben Gallego (D-AZ), running for Senate as a traditional liberal, though he is heterodox on several issues. The Republican nomination is up for grabs. Kari Lake, a Trump acolyte who narrowly lost the 2022 governor's race and still falsely claims she won, could run for Senate. Pinal County Sheriff Mark Lamb is already in the race, and more Republicans are likely to join.

Traditionally a GOP bastion, Arizona is now highly competitive. Biden in 2020 was the first Democratic nominee to win Arizona since President Bill Clinton in 1996. And party registration is moving in favor of independents, leaving many moving parts in the 2024 Senate race.



Sen. Ted Cruz (R-TX)

5. TEXAS

It's no overstatement to say many Democrats loathe Sen. Ted Cruz (R-TX). The 2016 GOP presidential primary runner-up to Trump, Cruz has long chastised and belittled Democratic lawmakers in a sneering manner. Democrats are excited about their likely 2024 Senate nominee against Cruz, Rep. Colin Allred (D-TX).

Yet despite gains by Democrats in recent years, Texas remains a red state, if one likely to take on a purplish hue in the coming years due to demographic changes. It's unclear if Allred will have much more success against Cruz than the incumbent's

2018 opponent, then-Rep. Beto O'Rourke, who lost 50.9%-48.3% despite waves of glowing profiles in national media outlets.

Allred played Division I football at Baylor University and in the NFL as a linebacker. In four seasons for the Tennessee Titans between 2007 and 2010, Allred appeared in 32 games and recorded 46 tackles.

After his football career, Allred enrolled in law school, receiving his J.D. from the UC Berkeley School of Law in 2014. After practicing law for a few years, Allred in 2018 beat an incumbent Republican House member for a Dallas-area seat.

Cruz and allies insist Allred is far too liberal for Texas, which hasn't elected a Democrat to statewide office since 1994. Still, Texas is the Democrats' best hope for picking up a Senate seat and are likely to ensure Allred has enough money to run a competitive race. Allred will first have to get through a Democratic primary challenge from state Sen. Roland Gutierrez.



Sen. Jacky Rosen (D-NV)

6. NEVADA

Sen. Jacky Rosen (D-NV) is seeking reelection to the Senate seat she won in 2018, after a single, two-year House term. The former computer programmer and congregation president at Congregation Ner Tamid, a Reform synagogue in Henderson, Nevada, is likely to face Sam Brown, an Afghanistan war veteran.

Brown, a retired Army captain, ran in the 2022 GOP Senate primary but lost to former state Attorney General Adam Laxalt, who is sitting out this election cycle. Laxalt lost the general election to incumbent Sen. Catherine Cortez Masto (D-NV). For 2024, national Republicans are likely to back Brown in the GOP primary against Jim Marchant, a far-right candidate who has echoed Trump's false claims about the 2020 election and failed in a 2022 bid for

Nevada secretary of state.

On paper, Nevada looks competitive, with a fluid electorate due to the often transitory nature of the population in Nevada, a state heavily dependent on service industries that residents move in and out of frequently. And Gov. Joe Lombardo (R-NV) in 2022 beat a sitting Democratic chief executive. Senate races, though, have largely gone Democrats' way in recent years, making the low-profile Rosen an early, but hardly overwhelming, favorite.



Sen. Tammy Baldwin (D-WI)

7. WISCONSIN

The Badger State has the nation's most ideologically disparate Senate delegation. Sen. Ron Johnson (R-WI), who won reelection in 2022, is a strong Trump supporter with a consistently conservative voting record. His home state colleague is Sen. Tammy Baldwin (D-WI), first elected to the House in 1998, who moved up to the Senate in the 2012 elections. In the House, Baldwin represented Madison, the state capital, a far-left bastion that's home to the University of Wisconsin's flagship campus. And her politics reflect it, with one of the Senate's more left-wing voting records.

Baldwin has had an impressive political career, first winning election to the Dane County Board of Supervisors at age 24 before moving to the state Assembly and then Congress. In the Senate, she's from time to time been able to work with Republican colleagues on bipartisan legislation.

Moreover, Republicans lack an opponent to challenge Baldwin in Wisconsin, which promises to be a presidential battleground in the likely rematch between Biden and Trump. Possible GOP candidates include Rep. Tom Tiffany (R-WI) and wealthy businessman Scott Mayer. ★

David Mark is managing editor of the Washington Examiner magazine.

HEALTHCARE

Are short-term health insurance plans ‘skimpy’ as the Biden administration says?

Healthcare experts gave the president’s proposal a mixed review

By Jeremy Lott

The Biden administration recently proposed cutting back on short-term, limited-duration insurance plans for healthcare, which it derides as “skimpy” coverage.

The Trump administration had expanded that form of coverage, making it an effective workaround of the Affordable Care Act, former President Barack Obama’s signature domestic achievement. The 2018 Trump administration federal rule allowed insurance companies to offer healthcare coverage outside the ACA framework.

Now the Biden administration aims to scale these plans back. Cabinet agencies have dropped a rule in the regulatory pipeline to that effect. The departments of Health and Human Services, Labor, and the Treasury jointly issued a notice of proposed rulemaking on July 7.

If finalized, the new rule would “limit the length of the initial contract period to no more than three months and the maximum coverage period to no more than four months,” the departments said in a news release.

That would be down significantly from what is currently allowed. Short-term, limited-duration insurance health insurance contracts currently start at under one year and can be extended for up to three years total with one insurance provider.

Healthcare experts gave this proposal a mixed review.

“For equivalent premiums, [short-term, limited-duration insurance] plans have lower out-of-pocket costs, broader networks, and higher satisfaction rates than plans available on Obamacare’s



exchange,” Chris Pope, a senior fellow at the Manhattan Institute, told the *Washington Examiner*. “It’s not clear how forcing people off their insurance plans after a few months is going to achieve anything but leave them worse off.”

Nidhi Hegde, a director at the American Economic Liberties Project, cheered the Biden administration’s attack on “junk insurance” and “junk fees.”

“The president’s latest crackdown on junk fees and deceptive practices across healthcare sends a clear message: Working families come before corporate profits,” Hegde said in a statement. “From exposing hidden facility fees to leading an interagency effort to protect patients from unfair medical debt and risky medical credit cards, it’s clear this administration is working to make sure big corporations can’t abuse their market power to cheat consumers.”

Matthew Fiedler, senior fellow at the Brookings Institution’s Schaeffer Initiative for Health Policy, told the *Washington Examiner* that the rule change would be a mixed bag.

“The proposed change will reduce the extent to which the short-term, limited duration and fixed indemnity markets can serve as parallel individual markets subject to fewer rules,” Fiedler said. “There are trade-offs here, but I generally see this as the right direction

for policy to be moving.”

The shift to Obamacare will take some getting used to for some users, Fiedler admitted, but he thinks that it will ultimately have knock-on good effects.

“One effect will be to shift some people who currently buy these types of plans into the ACA-compliant market,” he said. “Some of the enrollees who shift over will find that they are better off, as many people who buy short-term, limited duration or fixed indemnity products are likely doing so without realizing how limited the benefits are.”

Fiedler added, “Others, generally higher-income and healthy enrollees, will be worse off in the ACA-compliant market, but their presence in the ACA-compliant market will reduce premiums and, in turn, federal subsidy costs and costs borne by unsubsidized enrollees.”

Fiedler noted, “That shift of cost burdens away from the federal government and unsubsidized enrollees and toward higher-income healthy enrollees is generally desirable, in my view.”

There are also risks that this rule change could mean more people go without health insurance.

“One potential concern with this policy is that some enrollees currently in these types of plans will become fully uninsured instead of obtaining ACA-compliant plans,” Fiedler said. “In practice, given the relatively generous subsidies that now exist for people who buy coverage on the marketplaces, I think these types of shifts will be relatively rare.” ★

Jeremy Lott is a Washington Examiner magazine contributor.

BEDARD

Washington Secrets



Kamala is a lock, worth more on ticket than booted off

She is seen even by some of her advocates as an empty suit given to awkward laughter and poorly worded comments. She polls horribly. So it's natural that there is renewed talk that President Joe Biden should consider replacing Vice President Kamala Harris on the 2024 ticket.

"How do you solve a problem like Kamala? The sense is she doesn't fit in. The sense is she's not an asset to the administration," said Democratic pollster John Zogby.

"So what do you do with Vice President Kamala Harris when you're running a tight reelection race?" he said in an online "riff" with his son and fellow pollster Jeremy Zogby.

Jeremy Zogby, the managing partner of John Zogby Strategies, was even harder on Harris.

"She's a major problem," he said. "She's not a good communicator. She can barely communicate a complicated idea. There's a lot of cackling, there's a lot of avoiding answering questions directly, there's a lot of theatrics," he added.

The duo suggested that Biden push her into another job, such as United Nations ambassador, to make way for another vice presidential pick that might help him in the reelection campaign — or make it easier for Biden to step aside and let a rising Democratic star such as Gov. Gavin Newsom (D-CA) get the nomination.

Well, according to Biden advisers, that will never happen and for several reasons, the biggest being that the former California senator and first-ever female and black vice president is worth



more on the ticket than off.

"This is a very well-balanced ticket," said Rodell Mollineau, a founding co-partner of the bipartisan Washington communications firm ROKK Solutions, citing the improving economy, Biden's early legislative wins, and Harris's connection to women and younger voters.

One adviser said that the talk about dumping Harris is idle Washington gossip. "Nobody who knows anything about politics or this campaign is raising that issue," said the adviser.

Another challenged Zogby's suggestion that Harris should be replaced with somebody more presidential to settle concerns that he might not live out his term. While that's

joked about in Washington circles, the adviser said it's not a big issue in the country since polling shows that no matter what Biden or Harris do, they remain within the margin of error in most head-to-head general election polls with GOP front-runners former President Donald Trump and Gov. Ron DeSantis (R-FL).

And despite the media portrayal of it as a national election, the Biden campaign believes a 2024 victory will rely on a few states such as Georgia. For those, they believe Harris is key. She can be deployed strategically and build up Biden's base, especially among women and black people who would likely abandon the president if he pushed his vice president out, they said.

Mollineau, also an adviser to the Biden super PAC Unite the Country, said that Harris has a unique role that can help even a president with strong ties to black voters, pro-choice women, and youth.

“Given how important African American voters are to Democratic success, especially African American women who vote at a higher clip and are more loyal to the party than African American men, having Kamala being the first black vice president is going to be helpful in this upcoming election,” he said.

“The vice president brings a certain amount of energy. I think she can talk about reproductive rights in a way the president can’t,” he said, adding, “You can see in the way that she talked about these issues after the *Roe* decision. So that’s extremely valuable, along with all the other things that she does. She brings a more youthful vibe to the campaign, and that’s a good thing.” ★

Ramaswamy ‘tsunami’

Republican presidential hopeful Vivek Ramaswamy has been on a roll in the polls over the past few weeks, and now he’s looking to take advantage of it in the fundraising department.

“Are you feeling the Ramaswamy TSUNAMI?” he said in a letter to donors this week.

He now ranks third in many GOP primary polls, just ahead of former Vice President Mike Pence, and starting to come at DeSantis, who is stuck in second behind Trump, the favorite.

“We cannot afford to let the recent polling momentum we’ve built peter out,” he told his supporters.

That seems unlikely, according to independent polling expert Ron Faucheux. He sees DeSantis in need



of a reboot and noted Ramaswamy’s improving approval ratings in a new memo.

He cited a Florida poll that showed Trump crushing DeSantis, “a disaster,” and Ramaswamy at 4%, a low third but climbing. Faucheux said, “It looks like it’s time for DeSantis to retool his national campaign. He needs to stop running for governor and start running for president. Also note: Ramaswamy is running third. Looks like the more Pence talks, the worse he does.” ★

ON DEEP BACKGROUND

★ It’s not hard to get the folks at People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals upset. But Hallmark? It turns out that the Hallmark Keepsake Ornaments turn 50 this month, and the anniversary has given PETA a chance to rap the all-American company for using images of grinning chimpanzees on bestselling cards. PETA Vice President **Colleen O’Brien** said endangered chimps aren’t smiling but instead are displaying a “fear grimace,” and continued use of the image boosts the black market

for them. To drive her point home, PETA is distributing its own ornament of a grimacing chimp holding a card that



reads, “I’m not smiling, Hallmark. I’m scared. Stop exploiting me in 2023.” ★ Generation Z, those up to age 23, like their money, want a house, and put “financial independence” at the top of their list. But our old friend and youth pollster **John Della Volpe** says that money only goes so far with “Zoomers.” They don’t, for example, want the kinds of jobs their parents have, demand employers play a strong social welfare role, and have a “work to live” approach. “As Generation Z breaks the twentieth-century

baby boomer traditions that defined success too often through the single lens of wealth, future success will be measured by the amount of social wealth and capital accrued,” said JDV. ... ★ MSNBC *Morning Joe* co-host **Mika Brzezinski** went on an epic rant against White House staff who continue to put **President Joe Biden** in situations that make him look bad, feeble, and confused. “Be there for him,” she demanded. “This makes me mad,” said Brzezinski, whose dad lived to 89. ... ★

Business



LABOR UNIONS

Despite Biden's boasts, union membership keeps falling

The data indicate that fewer workers are choosing a collective bargaining relationship, a trend that has continued for almost 70 years

By Haisten Willis

While union votes and union influence steal headlines this summer, the overall trend away from organized labor has not changed under President Joe Biden.

Biden dubs himself the most pro-union president in the nearly 250-year

history of the United States, plugging labor groups and often being introduced by union members at speaking engagements.

"When I say every job in America should be a good job, including a free and fair choice to join a union, I mean it," Biden said to applause at a South Carolina manufacturing firm on July 6. "Every venture to manufacture clean energy

technology would be made stronger by collective bargaining relationships. But that's up to you to decide."

The data indicate that fewer workers are choosing a collective bargaining relationship, a trend that has continued for almost 70 years.

This summer marks the five-year anniversary of the *Janus v. AFSCME* decision,

JESS RAPFOGEL/AP PHOTO



in which the Supreme Court ruled that government employees cannot be forced to pay union fees to cover the costs of collective bargaining.

Data from the Freedom Foundation, a conservative think tank, found that the nation's top unions in aggregate have lost 733,745 members, or 10% of their total membership, in the years since. Some unions, including AFSCME itself, are now at their lowest membership level on record.

It will be an uphill battle to reverse that trend, even with a vocal ally in the White House.

Overall union membership fell from 35% in the 1950s to 20.1% in 1983 and to 10.1% in 2022. Private sector union membership is down to just 6%, though roughly one-third of government employees remain unionized.

Union members do not always agree with Democrats on policy matters. Biden's

own green energy agenda is coming up against labor resistance, with organized auto workers prepared to strike over the hazards and lack of benefits in electric vehicle production. Biden must also work to keep blue-collar union members from slipping into the Republican column as candidates like former President Donald Trump play up American manufacturing and the virtues of import tariffs.

But more recent headlines showcase unions fighting their traditional battles over pay, benefits, and worker protections.

UPS is struggling to stave off its first worker strike since 1997 as the newly emboldened Teamsters union seeks higher pay for both full- and part-time workers. The Atlanta-based shipping giant is by far the U.S.'s largest private unionized employer, with some 340,000 Teamsters delivering 24 million packages a day.

The stakes are high all around.

Sean O'Brien became Teamsters president last year, ending the 23-year tenure of labor scion James Hoffa after campaigning on a promise to get tough in negotiations. The Teamsters voted by a 97% margin to authorize a strike, which would begin Aug. 1 if a deal isn't reached.

"It's strictly down to economics," O'Brien said in a recent *Bloomberg* interview. "They know what we want and they know what we need. They know what our members deserve."

But UPS business could quickly shift toward nonunion Amazon and FedEx trucks in a work stoppage, cutting business for UPS and membership for the union. UPS officials point to an average pay of \$93,000 for drivers and pensions for full and even part-time workers as evidence that it is more than a competitive employer.

"No one wins in a job action, including the employees, who lose wages, and our customers, who lose critical services,"

“**Labor unions bring in substantial dollars for Democratic candidates.**”

company spokesperson Natasha Amadi said. "We believe we will find common ground and reach a deal that is a win for our employees, the Teamsters, UPS, and our customers before Aug. 1."

Biden administration officials are not involved directly, though they are in touch with both sides and signaling support for the Teamsters. Acting Labor Secretary Julie Su told *Bloomberg* that "a fair contract is something that workers choose."

But Biden's labor boasting may be more show than substance, argues Duke University fellow Dan Bowling.

"He pays a lot of lip service to the unions but then does very little," Bowling, who teaches labor and employment courses, said.

Bowling argues there is now a disconnect between the unions' political actions and the views of most blue-collar workers, which is evidenced by the kinds of workplaces now unionizing, including Starbucks stores, Washington, D.C., think tanks, and even hospital physicians.

But that lip service is for a reason: Labor unions bring in substantial dollars for Democratic candidates. Biden launched his 2020 presidential campaign at a Teamsters hall in Pittsburgh, with labor organizations contributing \$27.5 million to his White House bid.

Organized labor's big money influence means unions still hold major sway over Democratic elected officials.

Gov. Josh Shapiro (D-PA) reversed course on a \$100 million school voucher program after facing heavy opposition from teachers unions, even though the program had been a campaign promise.

Other high-profile examples include a controversy over the American Federation of Teachers effectively lobbying the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention over school reopening guidance and the subsequent revelation that AFT President Randi Weingarten had the direct phone number of CDC head Rochelle Walensky.

"Democrats still jump when unions call," Bowling said. "That's where a lot of their funding is." ★

Haisten Willis is a White House reporter for the Washington Examiner

MOORE

Democrats are throwing kids off the school bus

Have you heard the outrageous story of what happened recently in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania's capital? Gov. Josh Shapiro (D-PA), elected in 2022, had campaigned on school choice for tens of thousands of children, mostly minorities, who are forced to attend failing public schools in places like Philadelphia.

"It's what I believe in," Shapiro, then state attorney general, assured voters as he ran for governor. Last month on a national Fox News broadcast, Shapiro was unequivocal in his support for school choice because "every child of God deserves a quality education."

But there's a force far more powerful in politics than Shapiro's convictions, such as they are. And that force is the teachers unions. They put on a full-court press to stop the roughly 10,000 vouchers for the poorest kids in Pennsylvania's worst school districts even though the state budget bill gave billions more for the public schools. It didn't matter that this voucher program comprised less than 0.5% of state spending. The union brass commanded Democrats to vote no on even a single penny going to schools that work.

In the end, Shapiro did a full flip-flop. He vetoed his own promise. He might as well have declared that black lives don't matter.

Shapiro has presidential ambitions — so he figures he needs the teachers unions behind him. But if he can't face down Randi Weingarten, how are you ever going to stand up to bullies like China's President Xi or Russia's Putin?

This story isn't just about Josh Shapiro in Pennsylvania. In North Carolina, Gov. Roy Cooper (D-NC) declared a state of emergency in the Tar Heel State because the legislature



wanted to fund vouchers for kids to go to the best schools possible. Egads!

In Arizona, Gov. Katie Hobbs (D-AZ) wants to defund a school choice program that is already serving tens of thousands of kids, most of whom are Hispanic, with proven results of better performance and higher test scores. Why would she kill a program that is working? The teachers unions want the money and the kids under their control.

In New York City's Harlem neighborhoods, charter schools are flourishing. They are alternatives to public schools but are still regulated by the state. They are oversubscribed because parents want to choose the best school for their kids. Now, the Democrats want to put a cap on the charter schools because the teachers unions want to warehouse the kids in public schools where a majority of the kids can't read or do math at grade-level proficiency. In other words, many of the public schools are worse than mediocre. And it's not for lack of money. New York spends more than \$20,000 per child in public schools.

Did I mention that in nearly every one of these cases across the country, the Democrats blocking private and Catholic school options went to private schools themselves? Or they send their kids to

private schools. But poor black kids aren't allowed that same opportunity? These are hypocrites with a capital H.

There's a cruel historic irony here. Sixty years ago this summer, Alabama Gov. George Wallace stood before the doors of the schools to prevent black children from attending the schools with white children. He was trying to preserve the stain of segregation.

Today, Democrats are employing the same tactic to keep minority kids from attending excellent schools. Why? They say that school choice will hurt public schools or cause more segregation.

Wrong on both counts. Monopolies are always bad for consumers and competition improves service. Education choice requires public schools to compete. Would you get good and friendly service if there was only one restaurant in town?

Instead of draining public schools of money, studies show that per-pupil funding rises when some kids take advantage of vouchers to attend alternative schools.

Charter and Catholic schools are, in most cases, more racially diverse than inner-city public schools.

I'm a parent of five boys, so I know that each of my kids has different skills, interests, behavior issues, and attention spans. To warehouse them all in the same schoolroom is madness. Schools should be tailored toward the kids and serve their interests — not those of the \$1 trillion a year public-school-industrial complex.

More importantly, as an economist, my biggest worry about America's future is what happens when kids are graduating without being able to read their diplomas and with no useful skills. There are hundreds of schools around the country where not a single child can pass a basic math or reading test.

That's an economic, civil rights, and national security tragedy. Shame on Democratic leaders, and some Republicans too, for putting their own political ambitions ahead of our nation's children. ★

Stephen Moore is the finance and economics columnist of the *Washington Examiner* and an economic consultant with FreedomWorks.



Life & Arts

Sports

Dana White, UFC's only real star, P. 52

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Jennifer Lawrence reminds the youth about sex, fun, and laughter, P. 53

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Our Planet II is great documentary and perverse philosophy, P. 54

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★ Poland's "plowed over cemetery"
★ Hometown statistician ★ Drink simple, like a WASP, for summer ★ America without a license



He had a nearly two-decade run of some of the greatest records and concerts ever, but the once working-class hero has turned plastic celeb sipping almond milk with Barack Obama."

Jesse Adams, P. 56

Bruce Springsteen at Los Angeles Memorial Coliseum in September 1985.



BOOKS

What the Russians Knew

By Micah Mattix

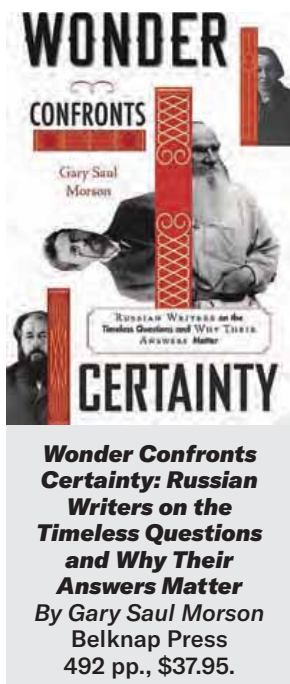
Gary Saul Morson is one of a handful of distinguished literary critics who was born around World War II and who resisted the siren call of postmodern literary theory that did so much damage to the study of English in the late 20th and early 21st century. (Paul A. Cantor, who died last year, is another.) He is currently the Lawrence B. Dumas Professor of the Arts and Humanities at Northwestern University, where he has taught since 1986. A prolific critic whose essays appear regularly in *The New Criterion*, *The New York Review of Books*, and *Commentary*, Morson has focused throughout his career on the function of narrative in Dostoevsky and Tolstoy and how these novelists offer an alternative account of history, of human choice, in their work.

His latest book, *Wonder Confronts Certainty: Russian Writers on the Timeless Questions and Why Their Answers Matter*, will likely be his magnum opus. Morson compares two groups of Russian writers and thinkers and their differing accounts of time and agency. On the one hand, we have the Russian intelligentsia whose handbook was Nikolai Chernyshevsky's novel *What Is to Be Done?* These were not people who approached the world with genuine curiosity but radical journalists who were utterly convinced that Russia's problems could be solved by a complete reordering of society. (The word "intelligentsia," Morson explains, originated

in Russia and was used to refer almost exclusively to ideologues who advocated "some form of socialism or anarchism" and "materialism and atheism.")

These radicals borrowed the ideas of Darwin and Marx and passed them through what Joseph Franks has called "the Russian prism," in which, Morson writes, "the borrowed idea would be extended from one domain to all; next, it would be rendered as abstract as possible; then it would be taken to the most extreme conclusion imaginable." At last, "it would underwrite radical action, like terrorism."

Morson traces how utilitarianism led to a full-throated recommendation of revolution and terror in the works of Mikhail Bakunin, Boris Savinkov, Alexander Blok, and others, not just as a necessary evil but almost as a way of life. In his posthumous *God and the State*, Bakunin argues that rebellion is "the essence of humanness" and that in persuading Adam and Eve to defy God, "Satan made them truly human."



Wonder Confronts Certainty: Russian Writers on the Timeless Questions and Why Their Answers Matter
By Gary Saul Morson
Belknap Press
492 pp., \$37.95.

Over time, Marx's theory of capital and historical materialism became accepted as the single truth by which all other accounts of reality were judged. In his *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism* (1909), Lenin argued that to determine if something were true or not, one simply had to look at it "through the eyes of 'party-mindedness' (*partiinost*)."

"One need not know physics or chemistry," Morson writes, "to recognize a false physical or chemical proposition. Instead, one could examine its consequences for the Party program. ... If the proposition in question ran counter to the Party program, it was wrong." Both Chernyshevsky and Lenin extracted "unchallengeable conclusions from a priori principles." If your experience of the world did not square with Marxist principles, your experience was wrong.

This unquestioning devotion to a single theory of the world made committing the most horrific acts a moral imperative. When peasants in Penza

objected to having their grain seized without payment, Lenin instructed the Bolsheviks to: "1) Hang (and I mean hang so that the people can see) not less than 100 known kulaks, rich men, bloodsuckers, 2) Publish their names, 3) Take all their grain away from them, 4) Identify hostages. ... Do this so that for hundreds of miles around the people can see, tremble, know, and cry. ... Cable that you have received this and carried [it] out."

To hesitate or doubt was a great evil. The terrorist Vera Figner wrote in her memoirs that she lost respect for her father "when he replied to a serious question, 'I do not know.' This answer filled her with 'burning shame.' Admirable people know. ... Reasonable people do not differ." What Figner herself knew with absolute confidence was that the "greatest good for the greatest number of men ... should be the aim of every person." To kill for a greater good became, for her, not only justifiable but "compulsory."

"Why did utilitarianism entail liberalism in England while in Russia it became synonymous with revolutionary terrorism?" Morson asks. There's no clear answer, though it may be because in England, it was just one of many competing truths, whereas it entered an intellectual vacuum in Russia. It is also a character of Russians, Morson argues, "to take ideas to extremes."

But this wasn't the case for all Russians. Against "certainists" like Chernyshevsky and, later, Lenin, we have novelists like Tolstoy, Dostoevsky, and Turgenev. While great works of art are often understood to develop out of great societies, the masterpieces of Russian literature were born out of the turmoil of the late 19th century.

These novelists ridiculed "utilitarian reasoning," testified to the inescapable subjectiveness and complexity of human experience, and the limits of progress. Uncompromising utilitarian ethics is shown to be absurd in characters like Bazarov in Turgenev's *Fathers and Sons* and Raskolnikov in Dostoevsky's *Crime and Punishment*. In Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina*, Levin learns that the meaning of life cannot be reduced to a formula. It is found in a mysterious encounter with the world around him. Wisdom is acquired through suffering, not an imposition of the will. "Faith — or not faith

— I don't know what it is — has come ... through suffering,” Levin remarks at the close of the novel. “Levin's reference to learning ‘through suffering,’” Morson notes, “expresses a key idea in Russian literature: the meaning of life can be revealed only to those who suffer. The happy can doze, the miserable must reflect. ‘Suffering lays bare the real nature of things,’ Evgeniya Ginzburg observed. ‘It is the price to be paid for a deeper ... understanding of life.’”

It is impossible to summarize Morson's many glosses on the great works of Russian literature during this period, but he is at the height of his powers in *Wonder Confronts Certainty*. What becomes clear in the volume is that the question that the Russian people faced during this time is the same one that the West now seems to be facing today: “Life or theory? For Chernyshevsky and the intelligentsia, theory provided the proper blueprint for life.”

For the great Russian novelists, and those who valued wonder over certainty, “life must take the place of theory.”

Micah Mattix is a professor of English at Regent University.

BOOKS

The Last of Aharon Appelfeld

By Malcolm Forbes

In 1988, Philip Roth flew to Israel to interview his friend and fellow writer Aharon Appelfeld at his home on the outskirts of Jerusalem. The interview, which was published in the *New York Times Book Review* and later collected in Roth's book *Shop Talk*, took the form of a detailed Q&A about Appelfeld's life and work. Those unfamiliar with either were brought up to speed at the outset with a thumbnail sketch of Appelfeld's history and his oeuvre. Roth declared that “Appelfeld is a dislocated writer, a deported writer, a dispossessed and uprooted writer.”

Appelfeld, who died in 2018, couldn't have been any other kind of writer. Born in Czernowitz (then part of Romania, now in Ukraine) in 1932, his childhood

ended and his world caved in when the Nazis invaded and began systematically killing Jews. His mother was murdered, but he and his father were sent to a forced labor camp. He managed to escape but then faced another ordeal hiding and foraging in forests for two years. At the end of the war, he wandered all over Europe, homeless and rudderless, picking up languages but being master of none. When he finally found asylum in Palestine in 1946, he started learning, and eventually writing in, Hebrew.

Appelfeld wrote over 40 books. Much of his fiction features displaced and disorientated individuals buffeted by the darkest tide of 20th-century history or else navigating a new life in Israel while wrestling with traumatic memories of his past.

In his writing, Appelfeld often dealt obliquely with Jewish persecution and the horror of the Holocaust. The Nazis hardly appear in his wartime memoir, *The Story of a Life* (2003), though they cast a large shadow. The eponymous protagonist of *The Immortal Bartfuss* (1988) is a survivor of one of “those notorious camps” who makes no mention of the hell he endured there. And Appelfeld's most famous work from 1978, *Badenheim 1939*, reads like an allegorical fable in which the Jewish residents of an Austrian spa town are relocated to Eastern Europe by inspectors from the “Sanitation Department.”

Appelfeld's last book to appear in English, *To the Edge of Sorrow*, about a band of Jewish partisans battling to stay alive in a Ukrainian forest, marked something of a departure by centering squarely and directly on the plight of Jews during the war. Three years on from that novel comes another one that confronts the Holocaust head-on. Originally published in 2005 and now skillfully translated by Stuart Schoffman, *Poland, a Green Land* is the story of a Jewish man's visit to his parents' birthplace. What starts out as a straightforward pilgrimage with the opportunity for fact finding and soul searching soon turns into a complex journey of self-discovery filled with dark

revelations and painful home truths.

Yaakov Fine has led a comfortable and prosperous life in Tel Aviv since turning his late parents' textile shop into a women's fashion boutique. But for all his success, he finds happiness hard to come by. His daughters have married and left home, leaving him feeling suffocated with just his wife, Rivka. Prone to bouts of gloom and loneliness, he is also plagued by bad dreams — dreams that “erupted within him and conquered his nights.”

For years, Yaakov has wanted to travel to Poland, his ancestral homeland, specifically the village of Szydowce, where his parents lived until war forced them to flee. His grandparents and the village's other Jewish inhabitants were not so fortunate, ending up victims of a Nazi massacre. Yaakov's parents lived to tell their tale but never related the whole story to him, only that the land they left was once a green and pleasant one. Now seems as good a time as any for Yaakov to see their village for himself. “Where's the logic?”

an incredulous Rivka asks him. “What will you find there?” “Everything,” replies Yaakov.

And so his trip begins. On a train from Warsaw to Krakow, Yaakov gets into conversation with a fellow Jewish man who doesn't share his optimism about Szydowce. “There are no Jews there,” he informs him. “There is nothing there.” Later, a taxi driver scoffs at his choice of destination: “It's not even a village; it's just fields without people.” But once Yaakov gets there, he quickly discerns signs

of life. Magda, a beautiful farmer, gives him shelter and shares recollections of his parents and grandparents, whom she knew when she was a young girl. Yaakov enjoys her company but also his own as he surveys the lay of the land. Taking in his verdant, pastoral, and peaceful surroundings, he comes to realize that his parents instilled in him “not only a repressed animosity for Poland but also a love for these landscapes.”

But it isn't long before the serenity is shattered and the idyll tarnished. Wanda, “the village memory bank,” tells Yaakov



Poland, a Green Land
By Aharon Appelfeld
Schoffman
240pp, \$27.00

more about his family, then urges him to be careful: “For some reason, Jews arouse the darkness in people.” Yaakov finds this out for himself as he extends his stay and finds antisemitism still present in Poland. He tries to visit the former house of his grandfather, only to be threatened by its angry occupant. Drunken farmers eye him with suspicion in the local tavern and peddle crude stereotypes: Jews are cunning and cowardly, stubborn and arrogant, greedy and slippery. Magda tries to reassure him by explaining that the villagers are afraid Jews will come back and demand the property that was stolen from them. When levels of animosity intensify, she speaks more bluntly: “Lovers of Jews you won’t find here.”

She proves to be an exception as romance blossoms between her and her lodger. But tainting Yaakov’s newfound joy is the formidable challenge of negotiating with the village’s corrupt mayor. Yaakov wants to move fragments of desecrated Jewish tombstones to Israel. The mayor decides the stones are in fact “priceless cultural and historical assets” — but then manages to come up with an exorbitant price of ten thousand dollars. Can Yaakov find a way to bring the stones home? And with Magda’s love for him offsetting the villagers’ hate, does he even want to go home?

Poland, a Green Land is an enthralling novel suffused with quiet brilliance and subtle power. However, it has its faults. Appelfeld occasionally repeats himself. Some of his lines strive for profundity but ring hollow (“The place reveals only what the person has brought with him”). Others are let down by bland imagery: “Their lives had seemed to him like an icy lake filled with dark secrets.” More irksome are the book’s many dream sequences. “Tell a dream, lose a reader,” warned Henry James. Readers should stick around to see how Yaakov’s nightmares or warped visions play out and affect his waking moments. But patience is required, for while those dreams have undeniable color and vitality, they also impede the book’s narrative momentum.

These flaws are overshadowed by the novel’s many strengths. Appelfeld’s fluid, limpid, trick-free prose contains pockets of beauty (“The flaming sky faded, and in its place stretched a sapphire curtain sown with stars”), and he routinely captivates with various tales and set-piece scenes. There is a gripping account of

Yaakov’s parents’ desperate flight to safety through a range of hideouts — or “stations in a long, arduous reckoning of the soul.” We read Wanda’s stark depiction of the fate of Szydowce’s Jews with mounting dread and feel the expertly calibrated tension in the exchanges between Yaakov and that “slick extortionist,” the mayor.

This is a slow burn of a book, and it is all the better for it. It doesn’t ever ignite into a fierce and impassioned drama but rather smolders with urgency and potency. We follow Yaakov eagerly to his journey’s end, where he learns that “Poland itself is a plowed-over cemetery.” But what matters more to him, and to us, is all that he learns along the way about who he is, who he loves, and where he has come from.

Malcolm Forbes has written for the Economist, the Wall Street Journal, and the Washington Post. He lives in Edinburgh.

BOOKS

Elite Striver Elegy

By Tim Rice

Criticizing a memoir is an odd task. It’s like if someone told you they’d just been pelted with rotten tomatoes and you criticized the stain on their shirt. It’s not like they asked to become a human French fry, and it makes perfect sense that they would want to share such a wild story. But Monica Potts’s *The Forgotten Girls* is not just, as its subtitle promises, “A Memoir of Friendship and Lost Promise in Rural America.”

Potts, a senior politics reporter at *FiveThirtyEight*, infuses her tale of growing up in rural Arkansas with enough social science research to choke a graduate student. The book frequently veers from memoir into data-driven critiques of the politics and religion of her hometown, only to lurch back into autobiography before Potts has a chance to offer thoughts on a solution to the socioeconomic problems she identifies. The result is a frustratingly inconsistent book, which buries an honest and evocative story of female friendship and life’s bitter injustices beneath what often feels like an effort to expand on Barack Obama’s quip that rural people are ignorant brutes who “cling

to their guns and their religion.”

To her credit, Potts seems to be grappling with her affection for her hometown, where she now resides, and her rejection of the lifestyle embraced by her neighbors. But that internal struggle can only explain so much — because *The Forgotten Girls* is not just Potts’s story about how she got hit with a rotten tomato; it’s her attempt to throw them.

The Forgotten Girls is as much Potts’s memoir as it is a biography of her childhood best friend, Darci. Equally intelligent and driven to escape their hometown as girls, Monica and Darci eventually take different paths: the former to elite universities and a career in journalism, the latter to a life of unwed motherhood and addiction all too common in their Arkansas hometown. After reconnecting with Darci in 2015, Potts made it her goal to determine why so many women get stuck in towns like theirs, Clinton, in an effort to explain why her life played out so differently from her friend’s. *The Forgotten Girls* is the result of this yearslong study, helpfully divided into two sections: “Causes” (“Church,” “Trauma”) and “Effects” (“Motherhood,” “The Downward Spiral”).

Potts’s analysis won’t come as a shock to anyone familiar with the plight of rural America. She attributes her success to a relatively stable home life, an attentive mother who made sure she worked hard in school, and, crucially, the fact that she largely avoided sex, drugs, and alcohol in high school. Darci, meanwhile, had parents who let her get away with everything, which included the youthful drug use and promiscuity that led directly to her becoming pregnant and dependent on drugs by the time she turned 21.

Time after time, Potts shows how the key to her success was a combination of hard work, education, and personal responsibility. When she discusses her own path out of Clinton, Potts sounds awfully similar to Sen. J.D. Vance, who offers much the same narrative in his bestselling 2016 memoir, *Hillbilly Elegy*. But while Vance uses his experience to critique federal welfare programs and argue for structural changes to the American economy, Potts refuses to acknowledge the importance of personal responsibility outside of her own life. Rather than explain Darci’s struggles by showing how she chose poorly, Potts attempts to blame Darci’s destructive

behavior on the oppressive societal expectations forced on women in rural America by the white male Christian conservatives who want to exploit and oppress them.

It would be unfair to say that Potts is just engaging in a standard progressive critique of “real America.” For one thing, she both hails from and lives in the place she is scrutinizing, a connection and commitment that gives her some standing. Moreover, her analysis is often correct. The book’s best chapter details the sexualization of young girls by grown men in the community and the willingness of their parents to countenance these inappropriate relationships, which is as backward and condemnable as Potts suggests. This nuance makes Potts’s visceral dislike of her neighbors’ politics and religion all the more vexing. She reports that local churches hold multiple weekly services and host summer camps for children as if she’s revealing the secrets of a cult compound, not relatively standard church offerings.

“When faced with any disaster,” she notes derisively, “the voting people of Van Buren County ... largely doubled down on their conservatism, religiosity, and isolationism.”

Curiously, it’s precisely the qualities generally promoted by conservatism and religiosity that Potts credits with her own escape. She suggests that Darci was doomed to fail once the moralistic parents and teachers of Clinton wrote her off as having “crossed the unspoken line between rowdy redneck and college-bound scholar.” But Potts also notes that it was her own “severe” judgment of girls like Darci, bolstered by her mother’s own insistence that she led a chaste, sober life, that helped her succeed.

Potts seems to suggest that her judgmental behavior, while no different from that of the teetotalers at the First Baptist Church, is better precisely because she isn’t religious. She takes pains to note that she was “liberal for the town, less concerned with enforcing a moral code.” She likewise mentions that her mother hates the town’s embrace of Donald

Trump, a detail utterly ancillary to a memoir largely set in the 1990s, because it “combin[ed] two things that tormented my mother: conservative politics and evangelical religion.”

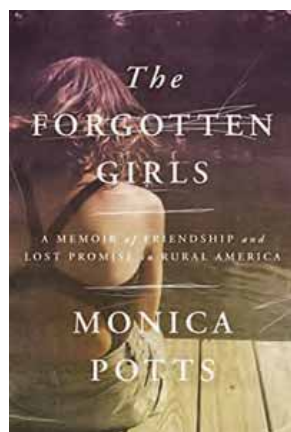
Herein lies the somewhat absurd argument at the heart of *The Forgotten Girls*. Potts convincingly argues that by avoiding vice and working hard, you can beat the odds and escape poverty — but only if you’re smart enough to brush aside the religious and political traditions that generally impart these lessons. You need to be as suspicious of prayer as you are of booze and sex. You have to believe in self-determination and personal responsibility but scoff at anyone who embraces rugged individualism.

For most of the book, Potts comes across as either arrogant or hypocritical. But after the book’s raw final chapters, which find Potts back home, struggling to save Darci from herself, it’s hard to see her that way. Instead, it seems like she’s making desperate attempts to explain the unexplainable. For people

like Potts, who have built their life around the ability of data to explain and perfect everything from online poker to presidential primaries, confronting the limits of the empirical can be jarring. People who rely on data to explain the world may say they want empirical truth. But more often than not, they just want empirical support for comforting ideas. Potts’s boss, *FiveThirtyEight* founder Nate Silver, recently acknowledged as much, telling the *New Yorker* that the site’s liberal readers felt betrayed when the data stopped predicting Democratic victories.

Quantifying unfairness doesn’t make it any less unfair, and understanding why someone got caught in poverty doesn’t make it easier to pull them out of it. *The Forgotten Girls* makes this harsh truth very clear, though Potts can’t bring herself to say it outright. Instead, she remains firmly split between memoir and analysis, refusing to land entirely on one side.

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The Forgotten Girls: A Memoir of Friendship and Lost Promise in Rural America
By Monica Potts
Random House
272 pp., \$28.00



SPORTS

The Story of UFC, Business and Sport

By Oliver Bateman

The Ultimate Fighting Championship, the world’s largest mixed martial arts organization, generates over a billion dollars in revenue annually for parent company Endeavor Group Holdings. It is the only profitable MMA organization in the world; the rest are loss leaders. This exhibition of cost-effective business acumen is chronicled by longtime video game writer Michael Thomsen in his recent book, *Cage Kings: How an Unlikely Group of Moguls, Champions, & Hustlers Transformed the UFC into a \$10 Billion Industry*.

Thomsen chronicles the UFC from its humble beginnings in 1993, when figures such as Bob Meyrowitz, Art Davie, and Rorion Gracie launched a no-time-limits, few-holds-barred fighting tournament that quickly gained national notoriety and surprising pay-per-view success. Early on, national efforts led by late Arizona Sen. John McCain sought to limit its reach, which thrust it into financial uncertainty. The beleaguered UFC was sold in 2001 to the Fertitta brothers, casino magnates who transformed the company, under the stewardship of their high school friend Dana White, into the industry leader it is today.

Together, the trio was able to weather significant financial losses for several years. Homegrown stars like Tito Ortiz and Chuck Liddell emerged. Then-global leader PRIDE Fighting Championships saw its own profitable business wracked by revelations of yakuza involvement. And *The Ultimate Fighter* reality show, buoyed by a bloodbath main event between light heavyweights Forrest Griffin and the recently deceased Stephan Bon-



Dana White speaks to the media following week 7 of the Dana White Contender Series on Sept. 6 at the UFC APEX in Las Vegas.

nar, became a surprising hit for Spike TV.

Thomsen's narrative traces the careers of influential UFC fighters Randy Couture, Nick Diaz, Ronda Rousey, and Conor McGregor — well-known stories sourced largely from existing autobiographies or biographies of these individuals. However, it's the character of Dana White, and his uncompromising strategy to maintain cost and message control, that command our attention.

The most crucial component of the UFC's success has been its astoundingly low costs, primarily achieved through a deliberate policy of fighter pay so low it has been the subject of litigation for the better part of a decade. Endeavor only pays 17.5% of its 10-figure revenue back to the 600 or so fighters on its roster. This model is an incredible bargain for UFC management next to higher-revenue unionized sports like the MLB (54%), the NBA (50%), or the NFL (48%). Even smaller, similarly union-free MMA competitor Bellator, run by White's long-time fight-promoter rival Scott Coker, returns 44% of a much smaller pool of revenue (\$6 million in 2022). Many journalists covering MMA, such as Jonathan Snowden and Ariel Helwani, highlight these disparities in their work, which Thomsen draws on. Yet the cost of

critical coverage is that those two were personally blackballed by White, underlining the UFC's tenacious control over media messaging — a crucial factor in maintaining its image and negotiating power. In its current form, the UFC essentially covers itself, with most of the reporting on broadcast partner ESPN done by UFC employees.

Thomsen reveals how White compensated star fighters off the books to avoid disclosure and thus maintain lower salary expectations across the roster. Still, this genius for nuts-and-bolts tactics doesn't render White strategically infallible; he has launched disastrous personal ventures into boxing promotion and, most recently, a ludicrous foray into slap fighting. Thomsen wisely spends minimal time on White's politics, aside from noting that he supported Donald Trump and wants to pay as little tax money and deal with as little regulation as possible — a refreshing change from Abraham Josephine Riesman's dreadful Vince McMahon biography, *Ringmaster*, which spends 300 wafer-thin pages tying the WWE magnate's every move to the former president's.

Given its recency, Thomsen can't delve into the Endeavor Group's recent acquisition of the WWE. Despite supe-

rior production values and brand recognition, the WWE has a lower annual revenue and a lower overall valuation than the UFC, and it will be interesting to see if staff positions will be slashed at both organizations as a result of the merger, as they were when Endeavor acquired the UFC in 2016. Under the administration of CEO Nick Khan, the WWE has done a fair bit in the past half-decade to improve wrestler and staff pay. Even so, the world's largest wrestling company paid out \$112 million to its 224 active wrestlers in 2022, or a measly 8% of annual revenue — meaning Endeavor will now have two of the most cost-effective nonunionized producers of streaming sports content under one roof.

The success story of the UFC, as Thomsen emphasizes, is deeply American. It mirrors corporations like Amazon and Walmart in its low-cost, high-revenue model. The UFC proved its worth as a content producer by remaining open during the pandemic; it had no union of athletes that could stop it, and its shows could be hosted in their small Apex facility in Las Vegas. And it had a more or less captive, entertainment-starved audience for several months to grow its brand and further increase its revenue. Partnering with countries such as China, Russia, and the Gulf States underscores the UFC's relentless pursuit of profit. In that sense, it is a truly modern business enterprise, a child of the anything-goes 1990s corporate world: Cut everything to the bone, expand everywhere, innovate only in areas where a return can be expected — for example, the UFC video packages and fighter kit designs remain mediocre relative to the size of the company because they don't add much to the business.

Cage Kings delivers a solid summary of the UFC's ascendance, drawing on a wealth of existing work to spotlight some of the company's many successes and occasional missteps. Thomsen's book is hopefully the first of many mainstream releases to explore the inner workings of a company that has excelled at resisting scrutiny, reminding us that beneath the bloody spectacle lies a complex, and often ruthless, business machine.

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FILM

Raunch Returns

By Peter Tonguette

When the history of popular culture in our age is written, the period will be remembered as one of willful deprivation. We seem singularly devoted to denying ourselves those things that give us pleasure. Beloved books, such as works by Roald Dahl, have been revised in accordance with the standards of political correctness; major movies, among them works by Roman Polanski and Woody Allen, have sat unreleased as atonement for their makers' sins. Even a sexy holiday song that was for decades a source of uncomplicated fun is not exempt: Remember the attempted cancellation of Frank Loesser's pop standard "Baby It's Cold Outside"?

Among the simplest pleasures to have been revoked during the present madness is the grand old tradition of the teen sex comedy. Once, high school horniness was tolerated in the same manner as middle-aged weariness or elderly orneriness: not exactly commendable but a fact of life. Hollywood saw dollar signs. In the early 1980s, films like *Porky's*, *Fast Times at Ridgemont High*, *The Last American Virgin*, and *Risky Business* both lampooned and validated the shenanigans of high schoolers. Hormones being what they are, the genre persisted well into the 21st century. Think *American Pie* and its sequels, *The Girl Next Door*, *Superbad*, and so on.

Baked into these films is a practical (though unintentional) species of conservatism: They admit gender differences, often to preposterously exaggerated degrees, but also make allowances for the rambunctiousness, lustfulness, and stupidity of the young American male — not because such things are noble but because they are inevitable.

Happily, 32-year-old Oscar winner Jennifer Lawrence is just old enough to remember the teen sex comedy before

wokeness rendered it obsolete. Seeking to rekindle a healthy raunchiness on movie screens, Lawrence starred in and produced a fresh entrant in the genre, *No Hard Feelings*.

Lawrence is a bombshell unafraid to drop F-bombs. Her combination of soft features and hang-with-the-guys coarseness also recalls a movie star of considerably older vintage: Carole Lombard, a beauty whose reported off-screen language would have given the Production Code fits. But how do you market a teen sex comedy in an age when teenagers, by and large, seem to be prigs?

For director and co-writer Gene Stupnitsky, the answer is to write the problem into the script. Lawrence stars as Maddie Barker, a born-and-bred Long Islander, a millennial, and an all-around good-time gal. In the manner of many of her generation, she is an intrepid par-

ticipant in the gig economy; she supplements a bartending job with income generated as an Uber driver. She is happy watering flowers outside her little Cape Cod-style house, hanging out with her hipster friends, and sleeping with whom-ever she pleases. She fulminates against the island's invasive rich vacationers, to whom she relishes in denying service at her bar if they show up a few minutes before opening.

If Maddie represents the demographic raised on *Fast Times at Ridgemont High* on videotape and *American Pie* in theaters, 19-year-old Percy Becker (Andrew Barth Feldman) is surely the stand-in for present-day teenagers who, if they can manage to divorce themselves from their phones, could conceivably find their way to a multiplex to see the movie. Percy is pampered in the peculiar manner of Generation Z: Coddled by a male



Andrew Barth Feldman and Jennifer Lawrence in *No Hard Feelings*.

nanny, ceaselessly monitored by his well-off Apple Watch-wearing parents Laird (Matthew Broderick) and Allison (Laura Benanti), the lad regards his pending adulthood not as an entree to freedom but an occasion for dread.

Stupnitsky's conception of the character is inspired: Percy is too timid to operate a motor vehicle, too fearful to ride a bike without a helmet, and much too mild-mannered to find employment anywhere other than at an animal shelter. Whatever aggression he has is channeled into video games; predictably, he has been admitted to Princeton, a safe space for someone who has known nothing but safe spaces.

Maddie is drawn into Percy's orbit after his parents make a rather desperate last-minute bid to put some hair on his chest: In a flagrant misuse of Craigslist, Laird and Allison post an ad soliciting a young woman to "date" their son with the promise of a free car. It's sufficient incentive for Maddie, whose own vehicle has been repossessed following her failure to pay property taxes. "I've had one-night stands before and haven't gotten any Buick Regals out of them," Maddie says in an example of the sort of impossible dialogue that Lawrence can deliver breathlessly and unblinkingly.

Stupnitsky gets much comic mileage out of contrasting the agreeably louche Maddie with the insufferable nouveau riche Beckers, who live in an appalling example of modern architecture and speak in the cautious language of respectable arrivistes everywhere. "I just want you to know I have the utmost respect for sex workers," Laird tells Maddie, who laughs off the insinuation that she is a prostitute. "He's not gay?" Maddie asks of her hosts' son while freely munching on their bowl of nachos. No, Allison insists, because she is familiar with his internet history: "The porn is graphic but not gay."

Having won the assignment to seduce Percy in exchange for a subpar American-made car, Maddie proceeds to subject the celibate whiner to an unceasing series of come-ons, an unwieldy lap dance, and a disastrous attempt at skinny-dipping. Not all of these scenes are winners, but Lawrence marches through each with a spirit of raunchy gusto that is contagious. She is unapologetic and unafraid. Lawrence also manages to make Maddie both 10 steps ahead of Percy

(when she orders him a Long Island iced tea, he assumes that it is, in fact, a tea-based beverage) and 15 steps behind him (commenting on the artwork on his T-shirt, she assumes anime is synonymous with cartoons).

At its heart, *No Hard Feelings* is a generation gap comedy whose appeal rests on an A-list movie star calling out the excesses of the times. When Maddie crashes a high school party, she interrupts two guys recording selfie videos warning against the dangers of bullying; when they turn their phones on her in an attempted doxxing, she flips them off. It is heartening to suppose that Lawrence, as a producer and prime mover behind the movie, might in real life echo Maddie's eye-rolling incredulity at these children today.

As presented in the film, Maddie might be considered the latest incarnation of the Manic Pixie Dream Girl, an archetypal male fantasy figure in many contemporary movies. Yet details matter: Lawrence is droll, not manic; big and broad-shouldered, not pixie-ish; and a maneater, not a dream girl. (The Hall and Oates song of that title figures in the story.)

No Hard Feelings errs in insisting that Maddie must learn a lesson or two from Percy, who is hardly an oracle of wisdom; the character becomes tolerable only thanks to Maddie's no-nonsense sexual forwardness. This maudlin turn is unworthy of a spiritual successor to *Porky's*, but Lawrence is clearly pushing the right buttons. Laughably, the film has already been accused in *Bust* of celebrating a "groomer," and co-star Feldman felt the need to explain to *The Independent* that the movie "never condones the things that Jennifer's character does or my character's parents do. ... You're meant to sit with those uncomfortable feelings" — which is just the sort of self-serious pearl-clutching Lawrence is inveighing against.

"The reason you haven't found anyone is because all young girls are idiots," Maddie flatly tells the Beckers during their first meeting — and how right she is. Confident, coarse, and whip-smart, Lawrence has taken it upon herself to goad a humorless generation into having some fun again. What if she succeeds?

Peter Tonguette is a contributing writer to the Washington Examiner magazine.

TV

Our (Warming!) Planet

By Graham Hillard

The new *Our Planet II* offers up a veritable feast of whoa-can-you-believe-that imagery. A male lion leaps atop a Cape buffalo like a piggyback rider, the better to bring down its prey. Pristine Arctic water erupts with a stalking polar bear. A swarm of locusts sweeps from Kenya to Saudi Arabia, blocking out the sun as if reenacting a biblical plague. The ability of modern technology to capture such sights is as startling now as it was in 2006 when David Attenborough debuted *Planet Earth* on the BBC and launched a revolution in high-definition nature documentaries.

As its first season did, *Our Planet II* splits itself into 50-minute episodes shaped around a central motif. In the first series, these dividing lines were location-based, taking the viewer from coastal seas to grasslands to forests. The new season, by contrast, employs variations on the grand theme of migration. Episode one, "World on the Move," sets the premise that animal survival depends on transit. Further installments develop this idea, portraying movement as a seasonal phenomenon that unites the creaturely world across the generations.

Though it would be unfair to say *Our Planet II* is badly put together, the viewer may well find the new series to be less organizationally coherent than its predecessor. So broad is each episode's topical sweep that individual scenes can feel haphazardly arranged. Without the backbone of a dedicated ecosystem, the season's flesh sags. For many audiences, especially younger ones, this flaw will hardly register: The animals are still there, still beautiful, and still thrillingly alive. My own view, however, is that the new episodes have lost more than their structure in putting aside the previous approach. By de-emphasizing place, the show has sacrificed the sense of global exploration that contributed so mightily to its success.

As for *Our Planet II*'s other foibles, they are by now familiar to all but the most credulous of viewers. Incurable anthropomorphists all, Attenborough



and company can't resist putting a metaphorical bow tie on the neck of every gorilla. Thus does a honeybee scout "convince" his fellows to change trees when the colony outgrows its hive. Thus, too, does a Laysan albatross look to the horizon with "hope" that his parents will soon arrive with a meal. Such gestures are not always verbal — a seabird prancing to bal-musette might as well be smoking a Gauloise and wearing a beret — but they are *uniformly* dishonest. More specifically, they posit something false about animal consciousness in the hope that "climate action" will result. That polar bears have resting sad face is a mere quirk of nature. Yet the show's editors would have us believe that such creatures know about climate change, grieve it, blame us, and wish we'd knock it off.

If the show's anthropomorphizing tendencies are relatively subtle, its "climate emergency" narration is a veritable smack upside the head. Humans are "cutting off ancestral routes," Attenborough intones, "and impacting even the most remote corners of the globe." "Summer sea ice [is] melting earlier than we've ever known" and "could disappear altogether" in the next decade. Fundamental to Attenborough's project is the

notion that, while the Earth belongs to all of us, it's up to our betters to tell us how to use it. Hence the endless climate hectoring that marked the original *Our Planet* (2019) and carries over into the new sequel. The world may be "ours" in a narrow right-of-occupancy sense, but its administration is the province of the Inner Party. An alternate title — say, Davos's Planet — might lack a certain democratic ring, but it would more accurately assess where we all stand.

Even Attenborough can't keep up the game forever, admitting in a string of conciliatory asides that nature is adapting to human activity. In one such moment, the beloved narrator notes that oil platforms have created inadvertent fish-spawning sanctuaries in the Persian Gulf. In another, he decries "industrial farmland" before allowing that "the fields of America's breadbasket country" provide snow geese with a "vital pit stop" on their flight to the Arctic. If the point of these whispers is to acknowledge that reality is complicated, then the show's writers ought to be praised. One wonders, however, if they are the brainchild of a bottom-line-driven Netflix executive. To paraphrase Michael Jordan, Republicans watch nature documentaries, too.

Attenborough, following the thinking of *The Population Bomb* author Paul Ehrlich, works with Population Matters, a U.K. charity that seeks to limit the human population, and has commented that "either we limit our population growth, or the natural world will do it for us, and the natural world is doing it for us right now." Perhaps the most useful function of the *Our Planet* series is that it gives the lie to Rousseauian hogwash about the innocence of nature. Preach that to the albatross chicks being eaten by tiger sharks at the end of episode one or the Christmas Island crabs consumed, grotesquely, by their own mother. At the far end of Rousseau's ideology lies Pol Pot, who liked to "cleanse" intellectuals through farm labor before murdering them. Somewhat closer to sanity sit Attenborough and his ilk, who see nature as virtuous and civilization as its inexorable foe. Like much utopianism, that way of looking at the world offers calming reassurance that a pristine existence is possible. If only the animals would cooperate.

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ON CULTURE

The Ballad of Bruce

By Jesse Adams

Once inadvertently torpedoed a budding relationship when I told the girl in question that The Boss was what rich people liked to play to pretend they gave a damn about the working class.. Word to the wise: some of these Northeasterners take their Springsteen awfully seriously. It's like he's not just an entertainer, not just a rock star, but somehow the voice and conscience of America itself.

If I've grown cynical about Bruce, it's because his best work has meant so much to me and now feels so far away. He had a nearly two-decade run of some of the greatest records and concerts ever, but the once working-class hero has turned plastic celeb sipping almond milk with Barack Obama.

A little history of how Bruce became The Boss and how The Boss, perhaps inevitably, became the troubadour of management: After his verbose early period, by mid-1972, Springsteen had discovered the winning formula later crystallized for all time on *Born to Run*: molten hunger and ambition poured into searing projections of his internal drama upon a mythologized vision of the New Jersey proletariat. My mother's a Jersey girl of Bruce's vintage who assures me the local greasers were nowhere near so poetic, but no one's ever better captured the feeling of restless dreamers staring up at the stars.

The litigation with his manager that held up *Darkness on the Edge of Town* was



Bruce Springsteen had a nearly two-decade run of some of the greatest records and concerts ever, but the once working-class hero has turned plastic celeb sipping almond milk with Barack Obama.



Then-President Barack Obama and Bruce Springsteen wave to the crowd at a campaign event in 2012 in Madison, Wisconsin.

perhaps the greatest thing that ever happened to Springsteen creatively. It gave him the opportunity to write and rewrite, hone the live act, and start universalizing his preoccupations into more political contexts. It all turned out brilliantly, and by the time of the stark *Nebraska* in 1982, he'd become an explicitly if hazily political figure, a blue-collar persona he leaned into for the populist anthems of the multiplatinum *Born in the U.S.A.*

To Springsteen's credit, he seems to have realized that megastardom meant his workin' man schtick was becoming untenable; he'd lost any connection with the kinds of people whose stories he purported to tell. He'd moved to Hollywood, and life had become more Michael Jackson than Joe Lunchpail. And so he stepped away from the E Street Band for his next album, *Tunnel of Love*, a self-consciously mature portrait of his crumbling marriage that closed out his classic years.

Few would call the ensuing *Human Touch* and *Lucky Town* great records, but at least they were authentic: the middle-aged celebrity father reflecting on his life and career, along with some undistinguished genre exercises. The problem was that they didn't sell, not in anything like the numbers he expected, not even after MTV started airing a "Plugged" special that likewise underperformed.

With the success of "Streets of Philadelphia," from the movie, came a hastily assembled greatest hits with a few new tracks from a tentatively reassembled E Street Band and, before long, a nearly tuneless acoustic sequel to *Nebraska*. Even with the ubiquity of "Secret Garden," as heard in *Jerry Maguire*, the former arena god was still stuck playing theaters. It was becoming inevitable that, probably sooner rather than later, there'd be a nostalgic reunion tour and that it might not go so great. The resulting concert film and double CD, *Live*



in New York City, is easily Springsteen's worst release up to that point. The band was way off its game, and Bruce had adopted an affected Okie drawl he's leaned on ever since. But the tour made boatloads of money from aging fans who wanted to feel like it was 1986 again.

The comeback album, *The Rising*, was better, but the sound was unrecognizable. The band was buried under glossy digital production like the bastard spawn of Pearl Jam and Train, or a campaign commercial. And the songs were almost as synthetic, as if Springsteen and company were methodically manufacturing anthems instead of channeling personal experience. He had several releases like that in the 2000s, records that were solid, professional, poorly produced, and clinically calculated. (The less said about the cringey NPR hootenanny that was *The Seeger Sessions*, the better.)

Contrived is one thing, offensive is another: My fandom came to an abrupt

halt in 2009 with the release of his Obama inauguration album, *Working On A Dream*. It was bad enough to start with "Outlaw Pete," an abysmal Western pastiche, but a song called "Queen of the Supermarket" was the kind of bad that made me wonder if Springsteen had ever been good in the first place. It was a cloying, condescending caricature of a poor workin' stiff dreaming of that cute checkout girl down at them thar grocery store — as if Bruce was mocking those he'd long claimed to represent and whose image he was long since back to appropriating. His whole act had turned more and more a kind of bougie minstrel show, helping enable the privileged to read whatever their priorities into the supposed people's struggle.

Periodically I've dipped back into what Springsteen Inc. has been up to lately, hearing the material how one might slow down to gawk at a wreck on the highway. I had plenty of opportunity to go see Springsteen on Broadway but wasn't about to drop several hundred bucks on the privilege. Today tons of progressive ticketholders still cheer on The Boss from front rows and luxury boxes, shouting along with "The Promised Land" as if 40-odd years later, the downscale protagonist wouldn't likely be a Trump supporter adamantly against the Green New Deal, critical race theory, top surgery, and whatever else is fashionable on Martha's Vineyard. As Bruce readily admits, myth almost always sells better than reality. Even if the shows were vastly more affordable, the Bruce that means anything to me survives only on tape, no matter how well rehearsed the stage monologues. He can't properly perform the old songs like "Thunder Road" or "Racing in the Street" anymore, let alone write new ones, because he's forgotten what they mean.

In this late day and age, it's better that the man has finally turned to extraneous cover albums. If it's going to be exhausted oldies karaoke, best to take on material he still retains some capacity to interpret. As Bruce himself sang on "Better Days" back in 1992, "it's a sad funny endin' when you find yourself pretendin', a rich man in a poor man's shirt."

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DOWNTIME

The Pink and Green

By Eric Felten

About a century and a half ago, there was a bartender named A. William Schmidt who styled himself as "The Only William." There is no doubt that he was, as his handle suggests, unique. In particular, The Only William created cocktails of such inscrutable complexity as to be expressions of radical individualism. If only they were as good as they were elaborate.

There is a general rule in the making of mixed drinks: Combine more than three ingredients, and you'll likely end up with a mess. That risk didn't daunt William, who wrote an 1892 book, *The Flowing Bowl: When and What to Drink*, full of drink recipes crowded with extraneous ingredients. Consider a drink that only The Only would slide across the mahogany, an extravagance he named the New York Herald. The drink is made for two, and William declares it to be "intended for an evening drink, only on special occasions." The recipe calls for two egg yolks (save the egg whites for later), the juice of an orange, a splash of pineapple juice, a spoonful of sugar, a couple of ounces of fine brandy, an ounce of kirschwasser (that is, unaged cherry brandy), half an ounce curacao, half an ounce maraschino liqueur, half an ounce creme de roses, two dashes of Benedictine, and two dashes creme de cocoa.

I made the New York Herald cocktail as the recipe specified, including whipping up the egg whites for a merengue-y topping. It was vile.

I tried it again, this time without the egg yolks. It still scored deep in the red on the vile-ometer. I went back to the shaker and mixed it all up again minus the egg yolks and without the Benedictine and chocolate liqueur. Nasty. How about without the orange juice? Nasty nasty.

What if we get rid of the pineapple juice, the cherry brandy, and the mara-

schino liqueur? Not nearly as emetic, perhaps because cognac (the “fine” brandy William calls for) is nearly the only ingredient left. Alas, cognac is better than cognac with creme de roses.

Which raises the question: What is this creme de roses business anyway? The Only William clearly liked the sweet, pink stuff, a liqueur made by macerating rose petals in alcohol and adding sugar. William used it in his various kitchen-sink cocktails, such as the drink made by combining creme de roses with anisette, maraschino, vanilla liqueur, a fruity cordial called Parfait D’Amour, chocolate liqueur, brandy, Benedictine, and another monastic product, Celestine. I’m beginning to suspect our friend Willie was the bartender at Bellevue.

In these 17-car pile-ups, there’s no making out the flavor of the rosy cordial. So, what is it good for? Notwithstanding The Only William’s habit of tossing it into just about anything, and notwithstanding professor Schmidt’s taste in matters involving liqueurs having already been proved suspect, there was one sort of cocktail where it did excel, and that was in *pousse cafes*. These are unmixed drinks made by pouring — carefully over the back of a spoon — half a dozen liqueurs of various colors into a small glass. The rainbow of layers makes for a visually stunning drink, though one too sweet to actually be consumed with pleasure.

So, what is this liqueur good for? The French cordial company Combier suggests using it for a spritz by mixing it with either Champagne or prosecco. A dry Champagne is far and away the better of these two choices because adding a sweet liqueur to fizzy wines as sweet as most Italian bubbly will make your teeth hurt.

But I do think I’ve stumbled on a perfect purpose for creme de roses. One of the great drinks of summer, and a particular favorite of preppies, is the gin and tonic. It isn’t much to look at, as gin and tonic water are both usually colorless ingredients. A properly made G&T uses the juice of half a lime, the shell of which is dropped into the glass. Add a little rose liqueur, and the tonic turns to the exact hue of a Brooks Brothers pink oxford button-down. I call it a “Pink and Green,” the definitive preppy color combination. Just please don’t muck it up with Benedictine and Celestine.

Eric Felten is the James Beard Award-winning author of How’s Your Drink?

LONG LIFE

A Scofflaw Celebration

By Rob Long

Two weeks ago, I drove 90 minutes from my house and crossed into a state that allows the sale of fireworks, unlike the one I was in. (You’ll understand, I’m sure, why I need to keep this vague.) And not just the lame ones — sparklers and those unimpressive kind that look like inverted ice cream cones — but the good ones, what those in the fireworks trade call aerals.

I loaded up on aerals and transported the materiel across five state lines because Article I, Section 8, Clause 3 of the Constitution of the United States gives me the OK to do so. (As I understand it.) As night fell on the Fourth, we headed to the beach, set up the boxes and contraptions at water’s edge (safety first!), and set off a 30-minute fireworks display that had people “oohing” and “ahhing” up and down the beach. And then we doused everything with wet sand, carried the spent ordnance to the trash bins, and secured the area.

Of course, the entire process was totally illegal. But that’s what made it patriotic fun. Looking out for the police, driving across state lines, scuttling along the dark beach like commandos — what better way to commemorate Independence Day? And because I know you’re wondering: Yes, we all still have our fingers and toes. And no, no one lost an eye.

But that was only the second-most deadly thing I did over the Fourth of July holiday.

The day after the beachside display of free-spirited Americanism, I took my life into my own hands once again and gave my 14-year-old niece a driving lesson. Again, this was technically illegal. The law is clear. If you are 15 or older, you can get a learner’s permit in most states in the United States. A learner’s permit allows a young person to practice driving under certain restrictions before obtaining a full driver’s license.

In other words, before you can even begin to learn to drive, you need a permission slip from the state authorities, which sounds a lot like communism to me. In America, we don’t rightly cotton to the idea that we have to ask permission

to learn a new skill, especially one such as driving, which embodies the wandering freedom of the American soul.

But I don’t have a death wish. So, I found a large empty space, bordered by soft grass and dirt, far from the prying eyes of the regulatory state. In fact, we conducted our lesson in the parking lot of the VFW hall. My thinking was, these people have already seen the violent destruction of war, so they should be able to handle a 14-year-old behind the wheel.

I was right. A few of the vets stood on the front steps of the hall to watch my niece execute the basics: turning, parking, reversing along a straight line, making “S” formations across the lot. And I could swear that once or twice, after a particularly adroit move, I heard one or two of them “ooh” and “ahh” at my niece’s natural skill at the helm. It was, in a way, an Independence Day fireworks display of its own.

And because I know you’re wondering: The car is fine. No dents and no casualties. The car, by the way, is a 2018 Subaru Outback, built by a Japanese company that made aircraft during World War II. After Emperor Hirohito’s war machine was smashed by American might and know-how, and maybe, I like to think, some of the guys watching the driving lesson on the steps of the VFW hall, it became a solid and dependable car manufacturer, proving once again that America and its unique brand of redemptive capitalism have brought light and freedom to the world.

That’s worth breaking a few stupid laws to celebrate.

Rob Long is a television writer and producer, including as screenwriter and executive producer on Cheers, and he is the co-founder of Ricochet.com.



Looking out for the police, driving across state lines, scuttling along the dark beach like commandos — what better way to commemorate Independence Day? And because I know you’re wondering: Yes, we all still have our fingers and toes. And no, no one lost an eye.

OUR NATION MUST MAKE SOME SERIOUS DECISIONS

The United States' population now stands at more than 335 million people. Experts from the Census Bureau predict we could reach more than 400 million by 2060 unless we change course now.

Do you believe continued growth is good for the nation?

Negative Population Growth, Inc. was founded more than 50 years ago to educate all who will listen to our calling for a smaller, truly sustainable, U.S. and world population. We believe our nation is already vastly overpopulated in terms of our long-range carrying capacity.

To reach a smaller population, NPG recommends:

Reducing levels of legal immigration to no more than 200,000 per year. This amount would allow U.S. population to begin to shrink while maintaining our status as a welcoming nation. The U.S. has the most generous immigration policy in the world. Setting a numeric limit is completely reasonable and within our rights.

Ending illegal entry and all the special programs that accompany it. Illegal immigration, by its very definition, should be seen as a serious problem by all Americans – it is, in fact, ILLEGAL. Unfortunately, many media outlets portray this very serious problem as a humanitarian crisis as opposed to the breaking of American law. Every nation has the right to defend its borders and to control the entry process.

Promoting smaller family size and the ideal of the two-child family. If most couples had, at most, two children, our population would begin to shrink over several generations. Most traditional American couples do have only one or two children, on average, and U.S. population would have stabilized naturally in about 1970 had it not been for the increased levels of immigration in the 1960s and their future offspring. Today, first generation immigrants and their American-born children account for nearly all population growth in the U.S.

Now back to those serious decisions our nation must make...

- Do we want to continue our recent course of growth with no end in sight?
- Or do we want to take the necessary measures to stop growth and allow our population to slowly shrink to a smaller, truly sustainable, size?

For the latter, it all starts with efforts to secure our borders and stop the flow of illegal aliens from all over the world.

You can help by doing two things today:

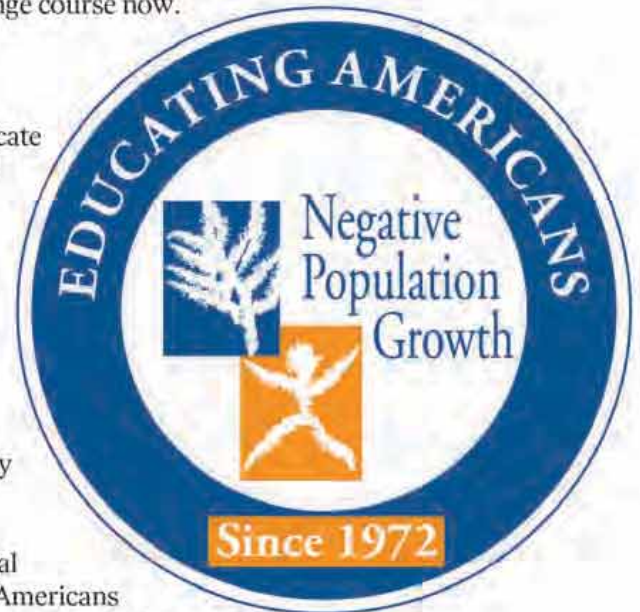
- Call the White House (202-456-1111) and your Senators and Congressional Representative (202-224-3121) and voice your frustration over weak border security and a constant flow of illegal immigrants entering our nation without proper authorization.
- Join Negative Population Growth as our newest member and help us continue to fight for common-sense immigration reform and an end to the "growth at any cost mentality" that is ruining our great nation.

To learn more about NPG and our various programs, please visit our redesigned website at www.NPG.org.

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2861 Duke Street, Suite 36
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www.NPG.org



GURDON

Messaging vs. reality: Democrats leave ordinary Americans behind



A car in front of me recently at a traffic light had a political sticker on its rear bumper that read, “Leave no one behind — vote Democrat.” The message isn’t new, and I’ve seen the sticker before, but I found it freshly notable because it has surely never been more obviously false than it is today.

It expressed the quintessence of the party’s message that Democrats are for the masses, the millions of little guys, rather than the big guys who have too much power already. The Blue party supposedly considers everyone and ensures that all stragglers are given a helping hand.

In one form or another, that’s the core of almost any Democratic slogan you read or debating point you hear expressed by their legion of TV pundits. It is the justification for every item on the Left’s agenda — we’re making sure no one is stranded, hurt, forgotten, or dismissed.

But the reality is that there is an adamant vein of contempt in Left-liberal politics for the opinions and concerns of ordinary people, who are regarded as too stupid or selfish to know what is good for them. In theory, it may be that no tiny niche is neglected, no outré caste is too small or unworthy of the Democrats’ balkanizing attention. But the great and sensible majority will, almost as a matter of principle, be ignored.

The inflation that President Joe Biden and the Democrats unleashed with two years of spending that added more than \$5 trillion to the national debt, for example, has left everyone behind who hasn’t received an 18% pay increase since he took office. That would be most people.

The Left’s response to the Supreme Court’s decision to strike down

racial affirmative action in college admissions is another case in point. More than twice as many members of the public oppose racial preferences in admissions than support, and a clear majority (52%-32%) support the justices ruling.

Yet the Left responded angrily to it as though the party commanded the moral high ground on behalf of enlightened and majority opinion in its opposition. Vice President Kamala Harris said the decision was “about being blind to history, being blind to data, being blind to empirical evidence about disparities, being blind to the strength that diversity brings to classrooms and boardrooms.”

Likewise, college administrators from Harvard on down promised to side-step the spirit of the court’s landmark reaffirmation of the 14th Amendment by finding new ways of achieving race quotas in their student bodies. Their attitude toward the constitutional judgment of the court and the moral compass of the majority is one of disdain.

Leave no one behind except most Americans — vote Democrat.

The public also wants school choice in K-12 education. This is hardly surprising, given that most people are not wealthy enough to pay for their children to be privately educated at fee-paying schools. The numbers are not even close. By a margin of 62%-22%, people want parents and children to be able to escape the throttling clutches of failing traditional public schools that operate for the benefit of the teachers’ unions and their political client, the Democratic Party. This vested Big Labor interest and the party that is its financial beneficiary are only too willing to leave behind all the

children who attend these sinkholes of insouciant ignorance.

And Democratic governors — you know, the chief executives of the party that won’t leave anyone behind — are finding all sorts of ruses to bypass the wishes of the people who elected them and do the bidding of the teachers’ unions who back them so handsomely with money and time during election campaigns.

Gov. Josh Shapiro (D-PA) double-crossed voters, winning office last November promising school choice and then going back on his word, saying he’d use a line-item veto to nix his state’s \$100 million school voucher program. Sorry, you kids in failing schools, we’ll leave you behind because your teachers, who are betraying you, also have me in a financial armlock.

Two other Democratic governors used risible chicanery to defeat popular moves in education. In Wisconsin, Gov. Tony Evers used his line-item veto to extend per-pupil spending by 400 years — yes, 400 — and to prevent the sacking of 188 bureaucrats wasting money on diversity, equity, and inclusion programs. North Carolina Gov. Roy Cooper, almost unbelievably, used his power to declare a state of emergency to block the Republican-majority legislature from passing a law to widen the state’s school choice program.

For Democrats, it’s an emergency if the will of the people seems likely to be acted on. The party that boasts that it leaves no one behind will leave anyone and everyone behind when it is expedient to do so in the pursuit of power. ★

Hugo Gurdon is editor-in-chief of the *Washington Examiner*.

YORK

The last day of the old GOP order



July 13, 2015, marked the last day that old-style Republican politics dominated the GOP presidential race. The day saw Jeb Bush, the former Florida governor and third Bush to run for the Republican nomination, firmly in the lead in a highly fractured GOP field, with 17.8% of the national vote in the *RealClearPolitics* average of polls. That was 8 points ahead of Wisconsin's then-Gov. Scott Walker and 8.5 points ahead of a candidate who had never run for office before, Donald Trump.

A week later, on July 20, 2015, everything had changed. Trump shot from being 8.5 points back to 3 points ahead of Bush. By the end of August, that lead was more than 20 points. Trump led the race the entire way after that, with the exception of a minute or two in November 2015, when rival Ben Carson briefly took a lead of 0.2 percentage points.

Trump had declared his candidacy, famously coming down the escalator, on June 16. That started a slow rise in his poll ratings, which was followed by a fast rise in his poll ratings. Trump's rapid ascent was attributable to his brash, entertaining style, his

In any event, July 13, eight years ago, was the last day when a Reagan-Bush-era Republican was measurably at the top of a Republican presidential contest.



Then-Republican presidential candidate former Florida Gov. Jeb Bush speaks to local residents during the Judge Joseph Story Dinner on July 13, 2015.

unprecedented ability to take control of a news cycle, and his willingness to speak frankly about one particular issue, immigration, that many Republican voters felt strongly about.

This is from a *Washington Post* article on July 20, 2015, headlined, "Trump surges to big lead in GOP presidential race." In the piece, reporter Dan Balz noted that "Trump has dominated campaign news since he announced his candidacy. His comments about illegal immigrants have drawn strong responses, pro and con. ... Through nonstop media interviews and some high-profile appearances, including a big rally in Phoenix on July 11, he has drowned out his opponents."

Balz added that Trump's rivals had been "tentative in taking issue with his immigration comments." But they saw an opportunity and pounced when Trump famously counterattacked

then-Sen. John McCain. It didn't work. "Trump has struck a chord with at least a part of the Republican electorate," Balz wrote, although it was not clear at that time just how big a part of the GOP electorate would come to support Trump.

In any event, July 13, eight years ago, was the last day when a Reagan-Bush-era Republican was measurably at the top of a Republican presidential contest. Now, another race is underway, with a renewed battle between Trump and old-style Republicanism — representatives of what might be called the Reagan-Bush-Romney-Ryan-era GOP. The aftereffects of the change that took place in June and July of 2015 are still roiling Republican presidential politics. ★

Byron York is chief political correspondent for the *Washington Examiner*.

GREEN

The Vilnius summit marks the closing of Ukraine's window of opportunity



The NATO summit in Vilnius, Lithuania, could mark the beginning of the end of the war in Ukraine. This does not mean that the war has to end soon. So long as Russian troops are on Ukrainian territory and the fighting is contained within Ukraine's borders, the war can continue for as long as the country is willing to fight Russia to the last Ukrainian. But Vilnius, like all summits, marks a watershed.

The summit declared that "Ukraine's future is in NATO." Ukraine's future is in pieces. Russia has dismembered Ukraine. All the Abrams tanks and presidents' words cannot put it back together again. The Czech president said the quiet part out loud in Vilnius. The spring offensive is Ukraine's "window of opportunity." If there is no breakthrough, then "war fatigue" may set in.

Ukraine's soldiers may be fatigued, but they have no choice. They are fighting for their homes and their freedom. Ukraine's problem is donor fatigue. The peevish public statements from senior American and British officials in Vilnius suggest that Volodymyr Zelensky's patrons are getting tired of him. The hero of democracy is now a freeloading ingrate, always asking for more and better weapons systems.

"We're not Amazon," British Defense Minister Ben Wallace complained in Vilnius, adding that "people want to see a bit of gratitude" from the Ukrainians. White House national security adviser Jake Sullivan used the same language before Zelensky's audience with President Joe Biden: Zelensky owes "a degree of gratitude" to the United States, which has spent billions on Ukraine's defense.

Zelensky knows his window of

opportunity is closing. Ukraine's spring offensive has yet to make significant gains. A few weeks ago, American media were talking up a breakthrough, and even a Ukrainian recovery of Crimea. Now, the same voices are adjusting expectations with talk of "attrition" and artillery ratios. Like the poor craftsman who blames his tools, unnamed American officials blame the Ukrainians for underperforming.

As one window of opportunity closes, another opens. As the Vilnius summit convened, Zelensky discovered that NATO, which means the U.S., intends to defer the future in which Ukraine is an alliance member. Even after the war is over, Ukraine would still have to make "democratic and security sector reforms" and improve its shady economy and shaky legal system. It is rumored that President Joe Biden insisted on these terms.

Zelensky called this "unprecedented and absurd." It seems, he said, that there is "no readiness" to make Ukraine a NATO member. "This means that a window of opportunity is being left [open] to bargain Ukraine's membership in NATO in negotiations with Russia." After Sullivan and Wallace had reminded him to remember his manners, Zelensky produced the required words of gratitude. Meanwhile, Sullivan said that the "inescapable fact" is that Ukrainian membership of NATO would bring the alliance into direct conflict with Russia.

Biden promised in Vilnius that NATO's support for Ukraine "will not waver," but words cost less than munitions. And munitions cost more when you send them in an election year. The window of opportunity for the White House to declare a proxy victory in a proxy war for democracy will close by the end of 2023. If Biden's team fails to close it, then former

President Donald Trump's quiff may well loom through from outside. Trump claims, not without basis, that Putin would not have invaded Ukraine if he, not Biden, was the president. He also claims that if he regains the presidency, he would negotiate an end to the fighting "in one day."

Trump is trumping as usual, but his claims would focus attention on whether the Biden administration's Ukraine strategy has benefited the U.S. in the long term. Russia's invasion was a direct challenge to the American-led order in Europe. The Biden administration responded by rallying NATO. In this, he succeeded where his two predecessors failed. President Barack Obama grumbled about "freeloaders," and Trump gave the alliance a collective panic attack when he demanded that its members pay their way. Biden has squeezed spending commitments, especially from Germany.

All this is a strategic gain. But the administration has voluntarily increased America's burden of strategic pain. Putin has twice invaded Ukraine because he sees a NATO member state on Russia's southwestern border as a threat to Russia's survival. This is not hyperbole: Look how quickly Yevgeny Prigozhin's Wagner Group turned from fighting Ukrainians to marching on Moscow. The administration's tit-for-tat admission of Sweden and Finland into NATO replicates that threat on Russia's northwestern borders. Just when the U.S. is supposed to be focusing on the Indo-Pacific, it is returning an overstretched military to a Cold War-era commitment to the Baltic.

The U.S. never quite makes its "pivot to Asia," but America's Ukraine policy has encouraged Russia to make its pivot to China. The Ukraine war will become a contained, low-intensity, long-running conflict (which might suit Putin and embarrass Biden), or it will be resolved by negotiation and partition (which would suit everyone except Zelensky). When that happens, the answer to the key strategic question will become obvious. Who really won in Ukraine: Russia, the U.S., or China? ★

Dominic Green is a *Washington Examiner* columnist and a fellow of the Royal Historical Society. Find him on Twitter @drdominicgreen.

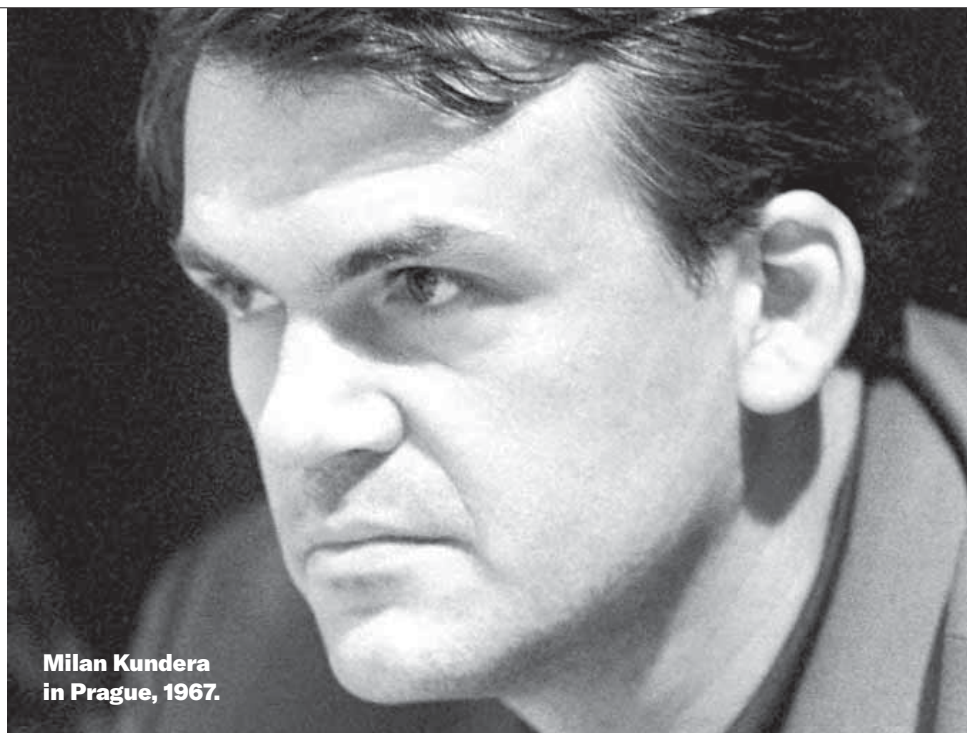
Milan Kundera, 1929-2023

He finally found freedom in art, and in exile

By Daniel Ross Goodman

If the death of Cormac McCarthy and Martin Amis over the past two months didn't make one feel as if a certain literary era has come to an end, Milan Kundera's death in Paris this week at the age of 94 surely must. Kundera, like McCarthy and Amis — and like Kundera's great American champion Philip Roth, whose death five years ago marked the beginning of the end of this era — was part of a generation of writers who believed wholeheartedly in the art and power of the novel. Working in the artistic tradition of Franz Kafka, Joseph Conrad, Henry James, and Gustave Flaubert, Kundera wrote about big themes and important ideas with elegance. He broached the kinds of momentous topics that his Anglophone counterparts did not, because they could not: the challenges of creating genuinely honest, uninhibited art while living under one of the most censorious regimes in modern history; the struggle of maintaining one's intellectual freedom under communism; and the imperative of preserving one's emotional and psychological freedom (and especially one's ability to love and to laugh) while living under the crushing weight of the Iron Curtain.

Born in the Czech city of Brno, Kundera was raised in a household full of music. His father was a well-regarded concert pianist as well as the director of the Janacek Academy of Music and Performing Arts. Like many Eastern and Central Europeans of his era, Kundera was a communist, at least at first, because it was Soviet communism that had liberated his country from German Nazism. But when the



Milan Kundera
in Prague, 1967.

communists themselves began to exert the kind of totalitarian control that the Nazis had exhibited, Kundera began to change his tune. After the Soviet Union tightened its grip over Czechoslovakia in the wake of the Prague Spring in 1968, Kundera joined other Czech activists in protesting the communist clampdown on their freedoms. Kundera was particularly incensed over the communists' incursions on his and other writers' freedom of speech.

The communists' response, at least in hindsight, was eminently predictable — they curtailed Kundera's and other writers' freedom of expression even further. Kundera was censored, forced out of his university job, and rendered persona non grata. His 1967 novel *The Joke* was banned, and all of his books were removed from public library shelves. Unable to get any other teaching jobs, Kundera supported himself through piano-playing gigs and by writing anonymous horoscopes for Czech magazines. When he finally decided that his situation in his native land was untenable, in 1975, Kundera emigrated to France. Kundera's Czech citizenship was revoked, but he acquired citizenship in another domain — the realm of exiled writer, a distinguished literary tradition in its own right that stretches from Dante to Nabokov.

Although *The Joke* was esteemed in certain literary circles, it was his 1984 novel *The Unbearable Lightness*

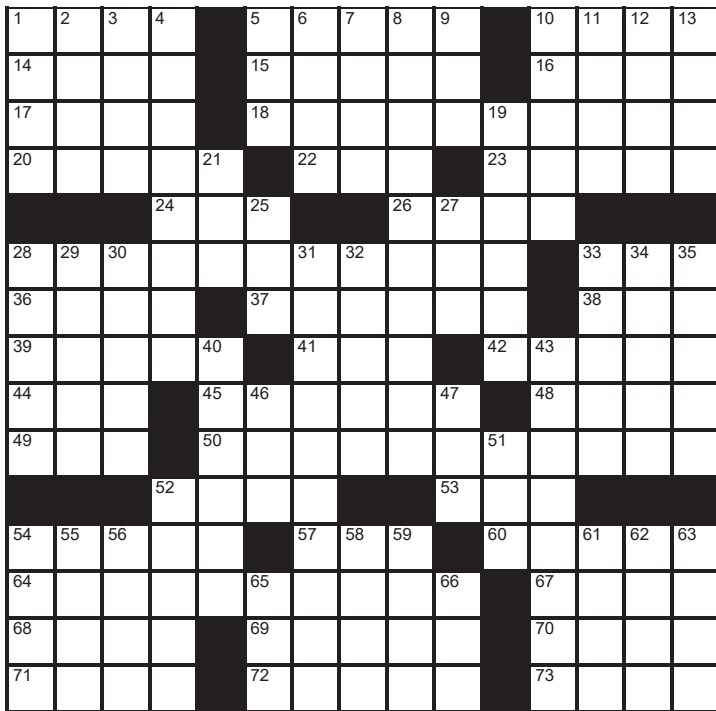
of Being that would make Kundera an international literary superstar. The erotic philosophical novel about a doctor and his two lovers who flee from Prague to Geneva following the Prague Spring, *The Unbearable Lightness of Being* was an immediate success. It was translated soon thereafter into over 20 languages and was made into a major Hollywood film in 1988. The movie, directed by *The Right Stuff* director Philip Kaufman and starring Daniel Day-Lewis and Juliette Binoche in their first major lead roles, was an artistic success in its own right, receiving multiple Oscar nominations and heaps of praise.

From 1995 on, Kundera wrote almost exclusively in French. His last published novel was *The Festival of Insignificance* (2015), which has received mixed reviews. In 2019 the Czech Republic at last restored Kundera's citizenship, an important and deserved gesture, though it was clear that Kundera would never return to live in the land of his birth. ★

Daniel Ross Goodman is a Washington Examiner contributing writer and an incoming postdoctoral fellow at Harvard Divinity School. His latest book, Soloveitchik's Children: Irving Greenberg, David Hartman, Jonathan Sacks, and the Future of Jewish Theology in America, is being published this month by the University of Alabama Press.

The White Stuff

By Brendan Emmett Quigley



ACROSS

- 1 Actor Hemsworth
- 5 Missouri River city
- 10 Way off
- 14 Sea World attraction
- 15 Yale, to Harvard
- 16 ___ state
- 17 Bop
- 18 Explode completely
- 20 Prepare to propose
- 22 Some forensic evidence
- 23 See 54-Across
- 24 One of the Cyclades
- 26 “Dial of Destiny” hero, for short
- 28 Clumps that collect under couches

- 33 Memorial Day month
- 36 Tag sale tag
- 37 Blunder
- 38 ___ Bongo Ondimba (Gabon’s president)
- 39 House style
- 41 Even if, briefly
- 42 Elbow
- 44 Poetic palindrome
- 45 Visiting locally
- 48 Leave in a hurry, with “out”
- 49 Mudbath locale
- 50 Endangered mountain cat of Asia
- 52 Penthouse feature
- 53 Nice hot drink?

- 54 With 23-Across, Washington Union Station, e.g.
- 57 “Alley ___”
- 60 Boris and Natasha’s boss
- 64 Common Zen temple feature
- 67 Contents of a bag found in the West Wing on July 2, and another name for the starts of 18-, 28-, 50- and 64-Across
- 68 “Understood!”
- 69 Penned
- 70 Customer
- 71 Hodgepodge
- 72 Harps for Zeno
- 73 Commanders, Nationals, Wizards or Capitals, e.g.

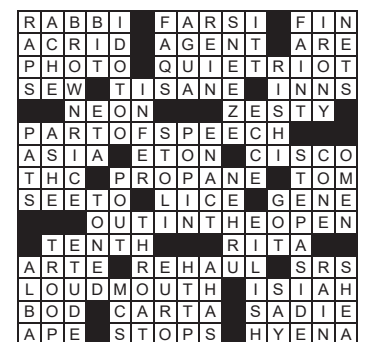
- 30 Half of an LP
- 31 “Relax! Everything will be fine”
- 32 Not at all
- 33 ___ mistake (goofed)
- 34 “Ragged Dick” author Horatio
- 35 Traffic sign
- 40 On the upswing
- 43 Knockout punch, at times
- 46 Direction opposite SSW
- 47 Clear
- 51 Unit whose symbol is an omega
- 52 Minnesota NFLers, to their fans
- 54 Well-groomed
- 55 See 59-Down
- 56 Gets a perfect score
- 58 Emanation
- 59 With 55-Down, Ballplayer nicknamed “Charlie Hustle”

DOWN

- 1 Wrestling hold
- 2 Wrinkle remover
- 3 Clearasil target
- 4 “That’s an order!”
- 5 Eyeball
- 6 Temperate
- 7 Skin care brand
- 8 Annual college football game played in Honolulu
- 9 Height: Abbr.
- 10 Friar’s home
- 11 Impertinent
- 12 Saturn or Mercury
- 13 Sheet music symbol
- 19 Most likely to succeed
- 21 High ball
- 25 Hero
- 27 Modern: Prefix
- 28 Takes out
- 29 Seize

SOLUTION TO LAST

WEEK’S CROSSWORD: WRONG ADDRESS





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