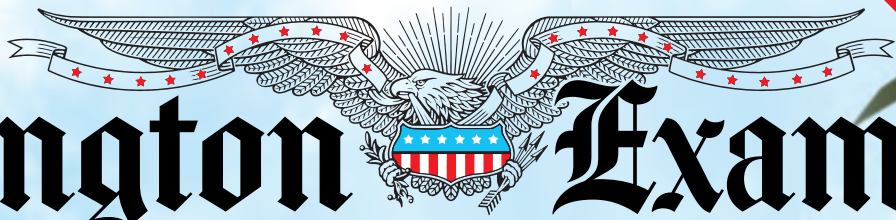


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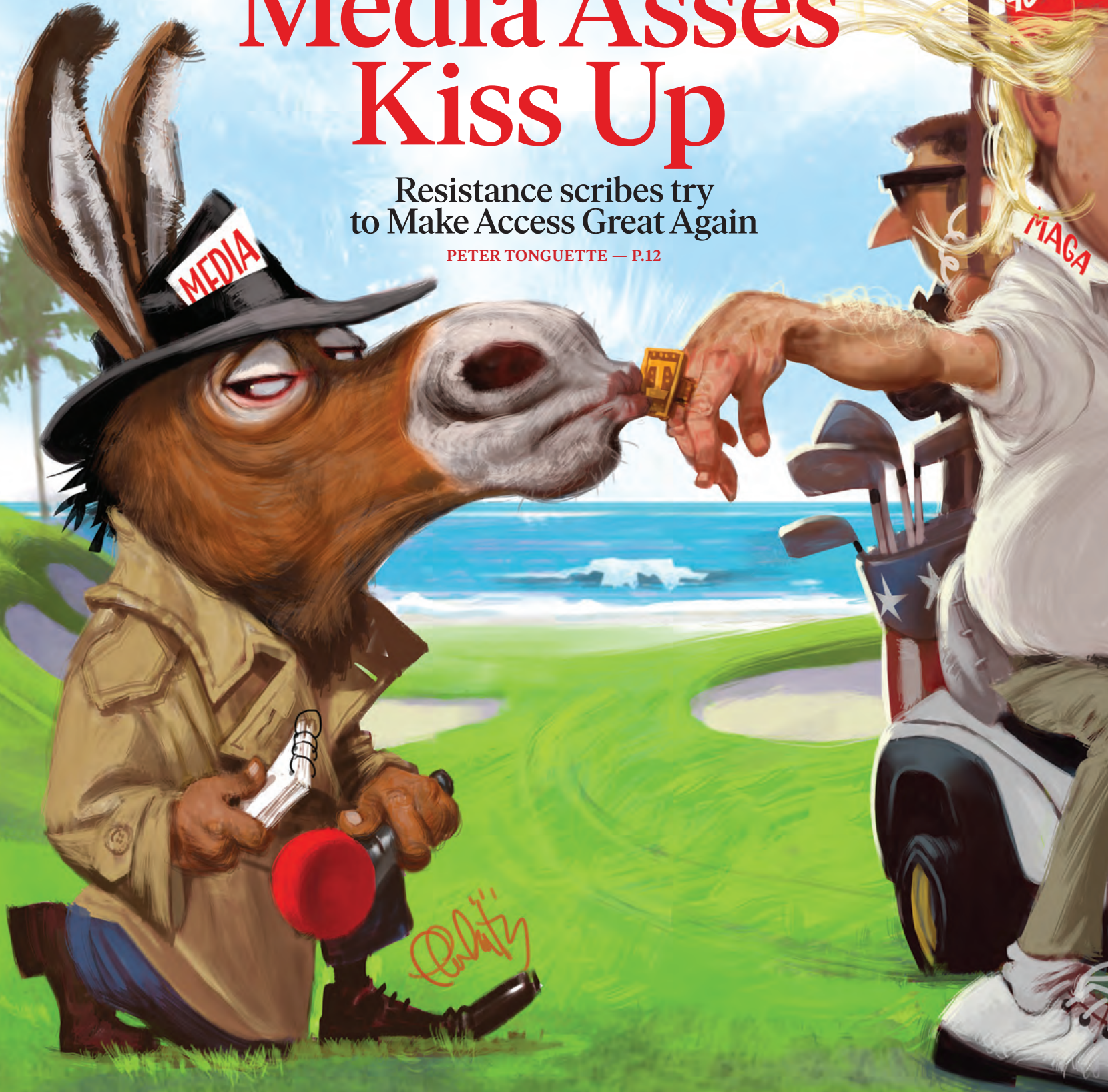
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Californians will pay for Newsom's electric vehicle war on Trump

Democratic governors and mayors seem to be competing to show Democratic primary voters who is most opposed to President-elect Donald Trump. Gov. Gavin Newsom (D-CA) is competing hard for the laurels in this race.

Days after the nonpartisan Legislative Analyst's Office predicted California would run a \$2 billion deficit next year and "does not have capacity for new commitments," Newsom announced that if Trump keeps his promise to end federal tax credits for the purchase of electric vehicles, he will create a new state program in its place.

"We will intervene if the Trump administration eliminates the federal tax credit, doubling down on our commitment to clean air and green jobs in California," Newsom said. "We're not turning back on a clean transportation future. We're going to make it more affordable for people to drive vehicles that don't pollute."

Under President Joe Biden's Inflation Reduction Act, the federal government forks out \$7,500 in tax credits for each EV built in the United States. The Congressional Budget Office estimates this will cost taxpayers \$622 billion by the end of 2031. As Trump and Republican tax reform writers seek ways to offset the cost of extending the 2017 Tax Cut and Jobs Act permanently, the \$7,500 giveaways will be on the chopping block.

Before 2023, California had its own tax rebate program for EVs, offering buyers \$2,500 against the average \$56,902 cost of a new electric car. The money came from the state's Greenhouse Gas Reductions Fund, which receives revenue from California's carbon emissions cap-and-trade program. However, the cap-and-trade system was so volatile that car buyers often had to wait months

to get their rebates. The same fund is used to pay for housing, water infrastructure, mass transportation, and even the state's high-speed rail project. Wherever Newsom takes money from to pay for an EV rebate program would mean less for housing, water, etc.

EVs are more popular in California than in any other state. Over a quarter of vehicles bought in California are electric. However, even that high uptake isn't enough to meet the state's EV mandate, which bans the sale of all gasoline cars by 2035.

Trump will almost certainly challenge that regulation by arguing in his administration's own rulemaking that California should not be allowed to set stricter emissions standards than those of the federal government. If and when Trump issues such a rule, Newsom will surely fight it in court. Not only did California sue the Trump administration more than 100 times during his first term in office,

but Newsom even called a special legislative session to appropriate more money to fight Trump in court.

However, no matter who wins in court, Californians will be the big losers. The California Air Resources Board issued strict low-carbon fuel standards this month that are expected to raise gasoline prices by 65 cents per gallon next year. According to a University of Southern California Marshall School of Business study, the regulation, plus the state's new refinery storage mandate and the state's automatic gasoline excise tax, will hike the price of gasoline by 89.8 cents per gallon in 2025. An average California middle-class family with two drivers will pay almost \$1000 a year more in gas taxes because of Newsom's assault on internal combustion engines.

New numbers from the National Association of Realtors show that 87,000 professionals left the state in the past three months. Texas and Arizona were their top destinations. Maybe someday, Newsom and California Democrats will work with Trump and the Republican Party to help lower the cost of living in the Golden State. However, today is not that day. Newsom is instead planning on more tax hikes, more regulation, and more lawsuits. We expect even more residents to give up and go. ★

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The path to responsible tax reform

President-elect Donald Trump will face significant challenges when he assumes office on Jan. 20 on foreign and domestic matters. Long-term solutions to all of these problems will require cooperation from Congress. But when it comes to dealing with China, Ukraine, and illegal immigration, Trump will be able to make significant short-term progress with executive action alone.

The same is not true on the economic front. The clock is ticking on the signature domestic achievement of Trump's first term, the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act. Without congressional action, it will expire on Dec. 31, 2025, which would directly raise individual taxes on almost everyone and would indirectly raise them on everyone through higher corporate rates.

A permanent extension of the 2017 tax law should be Trump's top legislative priority after he is sworn in for his second term.

One reason voters remember the Trump economy fondly is that, contrary

to false claims from the Democratic Party, the 2017 tax law's reforms delivered higher after-tax, take-home pay up and down the income spectrum. Its corporate reforms also boosted capital investment, delivering greater economic growth, higher pay, and lower prices for everyone. Additionally, Trump made room for family-friendly tax relief by doubling the child tax credit from \$1,000 to \$2,000. His top priority should be to retain all of these changes.

A challenge will be recouping reductions in revenues when the federal government is already running at record-high deficits that apply upward pressure on inflation, which Trump has promised to bring down.

Congressional tax reform authors could start by repealing President Joe Biden's massively expensive and inaptly named Inflation Reduction Act. Mere months after passage, the Congressional Budget Office revised its original cost estimates of the new law's green energy tax credits as the scope of these

corporate giveaways came into focus. Estimates vary, but a full repeal of the Biden tax credits could net the Treasury between \$900 billion and \$1.2 trillion in revenues.

The Tax Foundation estimates that on a dynamic basis, the cost of extending Trump's tax reforms permanently would be \$3.5 trillion, so repealing the Inflation Reduction Act's tax credits will get about a third of the way toward making the extension revenue neutral. Other reforms will be needed.

The answer might just come from within the law itself. One of the first principles of effective tax reform is simplifying the tax code by broadening the base and eliminating loopholes, especially those that benefit predominantly wealthier taxpayers. Trump started down this road by capping the state and local tax deduction at \$10,000 and setting the mortgage interest deduction ceiling at \$750,000. These were brave beginnings, and a permanent extension of the 2017 law could be funded by eliminating both entirely.

Trump made other tax promises on the campaign trail, and while those ideas should be considered, tax reformers should weigh their costs and benefits before rolling them into a tax bill next year. Is a narrow exemption for taxes on tips worth higher income taxes for everyone else? Are lower taxes for Social Security benefits for the elderly really more important than keeping the tax bills of young families trying to have more children as low as possible? These are real trade-offs that tax writers must consider.

Trump has made comments about using tariffs to pay for other tax cuts, rhetoric not unlike what he used in his first term when he raised tariffs on steel, aluminum, and washing machine imports. Tariffs might be used strategically to extract concessions from unfair trading partners, but it is unrealistic to expect them to produce revenue to replace the income tax code.

Trump already has a proven formula for delivering widespread economic growth and prosperity in his last round of tax reforms. His administration should build on that successful model, not scrap it for an unproven and risky alternative. ★



President-elect Donald Trump speaks about the tax code and U.S. manufacturing during an event on Sept. 24 in Savannah, Georgia.

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Comeback Kamala?

Come January 2025, Democrats will not control a single branch of the federal government, as Republicans take the White House and Senate while retaining a slender House majority. The real action in Washington will largely be on the right side of the aisle.

But in a polarized country, an out-of-power party's time in the political wilderness can be brief. The last time a Republican presidential nominee won the popular vote, 20 years ago, Democrats retook Congress just two years later. Democrats will have high hopes for the midterm elections in 2026, and soon it will be off to the presidential races once again.

Thus, even on the eve of President-elect Donald Trump's return to office, it matters whether the Democrats have learned any lessons from their November defeat. The party's operatives are talking about tacking back to the center. There has been some discussion of moving away from identity politics. "Race is a social construct, biological sex is not," liberal commentator Matthew Yglesias wrote in a postelection manifesto.

So far, so good, though certain progressive attitudes on these subjects have become deeply entrenched. There remains evidence that old habits die hard.

It appears that some Democrats aren't ready to quit Vice President Kamala Harris. President Joe Biden's stubborn commitment to a reelection bid despite widespread concerns about his age is getting more of the blame for the Democrats' loss than Harris's unwillingness to sit down with podcast host Joe Rogan. Democrats may also have developed a greater appreciation for Trump's political talents, no longer believing that only a uniquely incompetent politician can lose an election to him. Harris, Democrats keep reminding us, had just 107 days to run a presidential campaign.

All this gives Harris hope, which she implores us to hold on to even when it appears to be in short supply. *Politico* reported that Harris has been phoning advisers and allies to say, "I am staying in the fight."

"There will be a desire to hear her voice, and there won't be a vacuum for long," an unnamed "person close to Harris" told the outlet.

Alas, Harris attempted to satiate this desire with an ill-advised video released shortly before Thanksgiving. "I just have to remind you," she exhorted Democrats on social media, "don't you ever let anybody take your power from you. You have the same power that you did before Nov. 5. And you have the same purpose that you did. And you have the same ability to engage and inspire."

There was much engagement on X and elsewhere, but less inspiration. The video was widely mocked. And it was a reminder of the qualities that made Harris a poor candidate.

Some of this is the inevitable letdown of framing the presidential race as a defense of democracy against a Hilterian opponent, who had inconveniently already served a term as president, and then losing. What does that leave you, other than to ponder the California governor's race? Fascism has not historically been beaten by motivational speakers.

Harris has really never been able to answer the basic Roger Mudd question that stumped Ted Kennedy in 1979: Why do you want to be president? The imperative of stopping Trump seemed like a good enough substitute for most Democrats, but not most of the country.

If Democrats learn their lessons, there will be no Kamala comeback. ★

Hugo Gurdon will return next week.

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Your Land



President-elect Donald Trump throws a football into a crowd during a visit to the Alpha Gamma Rho fraternity before a football game between Iowa State University and the University of Iowa on Sept. 9, 2023, in Ames, Iowa.

The Youth Are Feeling Trumpy

It wasn't that long ago that the phrase "the children are our future" was a source of consternation among Republicans who believed young people were overwhelmingly embracing the Democratic Party. No one told that to President-elect Donald Trump, who has found a new fanbase with Generation Z. A new poll from CBS and YouGov has

some pretty remarkable results. Among respondents under the age of 30, a solid majority of 57% said they are either happy or satisfied with the election results that sent Trump back to the White House, 56% said they are optimistic or excited about what he will do as president, and 65% said they approve of the way the

president-elect is handling his transition.

The poll results show an improvement in Trump's support among the 18-29-year-olds at the ballot box, which was itself an improvement from his previous campaigns for president. According to exit poll data from the Associated Press, Trump's support among the



youth in the electorate was at 46%, the best performance for a Republican presidential candidate with the demographic since former President George W. Bush.

Fueled by a never-ending cascade of memes, viral moments, hilarious quotes, and a new social acceptance, the youth are feeling Trumpy and have given the Republican Party hope that Gen Z is not a drone generation of liberal activists and may actually be on their side after all, as long as the party can reach them.

Over the past eight years, Gen Z has been through a rough time. The cost of living has soared, their dreams of owning a home seem a faraway possibility, COVID-19 wrecked their college experience, and social isolation left them feeling depressed and lonely. A significant portion of these things occurred under the watch of President Joe Biden.

There are no doubt many reasons why Trump did better with young voters, but his status as a cultural influencer cannot be overlooked. The Trump campaign outpaced the campaign of Vice President Kamala Harris on TikTok, the preferred social media medium of young people by several million. Trump also had significantly more followers than Harris on his individual account.

The contrasts went further than the number of followers. The president-elect's TikTok content was light on policy and heavy on personality and memes. It was fun! You couldn't go a day without seeing a video of Trump dancing to YMCA, while Harris's campaign account was heavy on reminders that celebrity X had endorsed her, alongside preachy pushes for people to vote for her.

It turns out young people are pretty much like everyone else: they want to feel excited and inspired about their candidates. They don't want to be lectured to or told to support someone because not doing so will disappoint a pop singer that peaked when they were in middle school. Instead, they want a vision of America that makes them feel like they have an opportunity to succeed in building a life worth living.

If that vision comes with memes, UFC walkouts, Joe Rogan interviews, and a silly little dance, then all the better. It makes politics exciting and entertaining again while giving Gen Z a movement it can be a part of.

—By Jeremiah Poff



Jaguar's Last Woke Gasp

The 2024 elections seem to be, at least for now, proof that Americans have rejected woke liberal messaging. Evidently, our brothers and sisters across the pond missed that memo as they/they try to import those ideas with their ... luxury cars?

Jaguar, the luxury car brand of Jaguar Land Rover, has committed to a bizarre rebrand designed to appeal to the weirdest, terminally online, queer, nonbinary, antiracist, unemployed liberal arts major who everyone hopes not to know in life. The company's latest ad features people in bizarre makeup and clothes that make them look like aliens on a pink version of Mars, urging people to "copy nothing" and to "delete ordinary." One clip from the ad features what looks like a man in a dress wielding a sledgehammer, with the on-screen texting saying, "break moulds."

Not featured in this commercial from a luxury car company: a car.

The ad campaign comes as Jaguar is launching a rebranding, jettisoning the cool jaguar logo that has become syn-

onymous with the company and instead going with boring generic text script. The company is using this opportunity to debut a new electric GT model during Miami Art Week as it tries to convert to 100% electric vehicles.

Nothing says luxury sports cars quite like nonbinary fashion show aliens at something called "Miami Art Week."

Jaguar has been struggling in recent years in both the U.S. market and around the world. The company's American sales peaked in 2018, and worldwide sales have halved since the pandemic. The company intends to shift entirely to EVs in 2025, which is awkward timing as U.S. car manufacturers worry they will lose their investment

★★★

Jaguar has committed to a bizarre rebrand designed to appeal to the weirdest, terminally online, queer, nonbinary, antiracist, unemployed liberal arts major who everyone hopes not to know in life.

in EV production if President-Elect Donald Trump doesn't force their manufacturing and bribe consumers with subsidies to buy them. The pace of purchases for EVs is slowing in the United States, just as Jaguar embraces them in an effort to revive its sales in the world's biggest "car guy" market.

(Then again, maybe not so awkward timing on the all-EV shift after Chinese lenders gave the company a bailout loan of \$705 million in June. Who knows?)

Then again, "car guys" aren't exactly the target market for Jaguar anymore. Managing Director Rawdon Glover said in July that the company anticipated only 10%-15% of current customers "will follow us" through the rebranding effort. Santino Pietrosanti, head of brand strategy, boasted that the company is "on a transformative journey of our own, driven by a belief in diversity, inclusion, creativity, policy and most importantly, action." Big selling point? "We've established over 15 DEI groups."

Glover has made it clear that the new target audience is the very woke scolds who have fallen out of fashion in the U.S. He decried the "vile hatred and intolerance" in the backlash to the bizarre ad campaign and rationalized, "If we play in the same way that everybody else does we'll just get drowned out."

Instead, he said, "We shouldn't turn up like an auto brand. We need to reestablish our brand, and at a completely different price point, so we need to act differently."

So, Jaguar seems to have figured out its new identity. No one wants to buy a car from an auto brand. They want to buy a car from a nonbinary DEI alien brand. Or something like that. Surely, you can count on the brilliant minds at Jaguar, who have overseen years of declining sales, to turn their fortunes around for the better, right?

—By Zachary Faria

Is Mowing Your Lawn Really the End of the World?

President-elect Donald Trump has promised a mass deportation of illegal immigrants once he takes office, and while many people

are over-selling what he will be able to achieve, the picture his open-borders opponents are painting of an illegal immigrant-free United States is just not as dire as they think.

Estimates on the size of the illegal immigrant population in the U.S. are just that: estimates. No one has a firm count of how many illegal immigrants there are in the country. The open-borders Migration Policy Institute estimates there are 11 million. The conservative Center for Immigration Studies puts the number closer to 14 million. The Trump campaign says 20 million. The truth is somewhere in between.

Interior deportations, which include illegal immigrants arrested already inside the U.S., not those detained and removed at the border, reached new lows when President Joe Biden first took office but increased a little in 2023, the last year we have data for.

According to the Immigration and Customs Enforcement's annual report, the Enforcement and Removal Operations office deported more than 140,000 illegal immigrants in 2023 to more than 170 countries worldwide. Even if Trump were able to snap his fingers and magically increase ICE's deportation capacities tenfold, that would mean just 1.5 million deportations a year, which means it would take about ten years to deport every illegal immigrant currently in the country today.

That isn't happening. Especially when you consider what Trump's border czar, Tom Homan, has identified as his top three priorities: shutting down the border, deporting illegal immigrants arrested after committing other crimes, and finding the 300,000 missing children Biden released into the country.

In other words, if you are an illegal immigrant who has a DUI or was arrested on charges of theft, you should definitely be worried. However, if you are just peacefully living in the U.S., you probably don't have too much to worry about as long as you don't get in trouble with the law.

These realities aside, many Democrats and their libertarian open-border allies are trying to make it seem like the world would end if Trump somehow did manage to remove every illegal immigrant in the country overnight.

Cato Institute Vice President Scott Lincicome, for example, posted a chart on X with data from Goldman Sachs estimating what percentage of each sector of the economy was comprised of illegal immigrants. At the top of the chart was "landscaping services" at 19.4%, followed by "private households" at 17.9%, then "service to buildings" at 16.9%, and finally "crop production" at 16.7%.

One of Lincicome's followers then reposted the chart adding, "Americans are about to learn how to maintain their own lawns, clean their own house, make home repairs themselves, grow a home garden. Everyone nostalgic for the 1950s might not realize what that actually entails."

Oh no! More Americans are going to have to mow their own lawn and clean their own house!?!?! Whatever will we do!?!?!?

If you are anything like most Americans, you already mow your lawn, if you are lucky enough to have one, and clean your house like a grown adult. That a segment of the online Left is so out of touch with reality that they thought it would be some huge burden for people to mow their own lawns only demonstrates how Trump won such a commanding victory.

—By Conn Carroll

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When Reality TV Gets Too Real for TV

A decade into its run, when most reality TV series have either died an ignoble death or are simply awaiting the axe of cancellation, Bravo's *Vanderpump Rules* stumbled upon a late-career renaissance.

When TMZ broke the news that the show's leading lad, Tom Sandoval, was carrying on an affair with the best friend of his live-in girlfriend, Ariana Madix, of nine years, her heart may have been broken, but a star was born. Blindsided by TMZ's bombshell, which broke midway through the show's 10th season, Bravo retroactively edited the second half of the episodes to foreshadow the "Scandoval," culminating with more than 10 million viewers and rendering *VPR* the highest-rated broadcast in the network's history. Madix, who became America's sweetheart overnight, forayed the betrayal into brand sponsorships worth a reported \$1 million, a record-setting gig starring in Chicago on Broadway, hosting *Love Island*, and publishing a *New York Times*-bestselling cocktail book.

Yet, just a few months after another ratings juggernaut of a *VPR* season came to a close, Bravo has announced that it is



Ariana Madix, host Andy Cohen, executive producer Lisa Vanderpump and Tom Sandoval during the *Vanderpump Rules* three-part reunion.

effectively ending the show as we know it, firing the entire cast and replacing them with a brand new crop of 20-something-year-olds for season 12.

What the hell happened? In the case of this reality TV series, social media and the cottage industry of "influencer"-hosted podsphere simply made the show too real for TV.

The original *VPR* began with the cast working as servers at a glitzy West Hollywood lounge owned by the eponymous Lisa Vanderpump, herself formerly of the *Real Housewives* fame. Even when the cast backstabbed, slept with, and cheated on one other, the fact that they actually had to work shifts for Vanderpump forced these wannabe actors and models to eventually break bread and create dynamite TV.

However, 10 years later, the cast has graduated to bonafide B-list celebrity status, multimillion-dollar homes in Beverly Hills, and a separate income stream on

social media. While the *Wall Street Journal* and the *New York Times* magazine breathlessly investigated "Scandoval," cast members Lala Kent and Scheana Shay broke the news in real-time on their own podcasts, sometimes spoiling the show months before airing. Petrified that Bravo would kill the program if Madix did not reconcile on-air with Sandoval, Kent and company tried to force confrontations between the exes on camera.

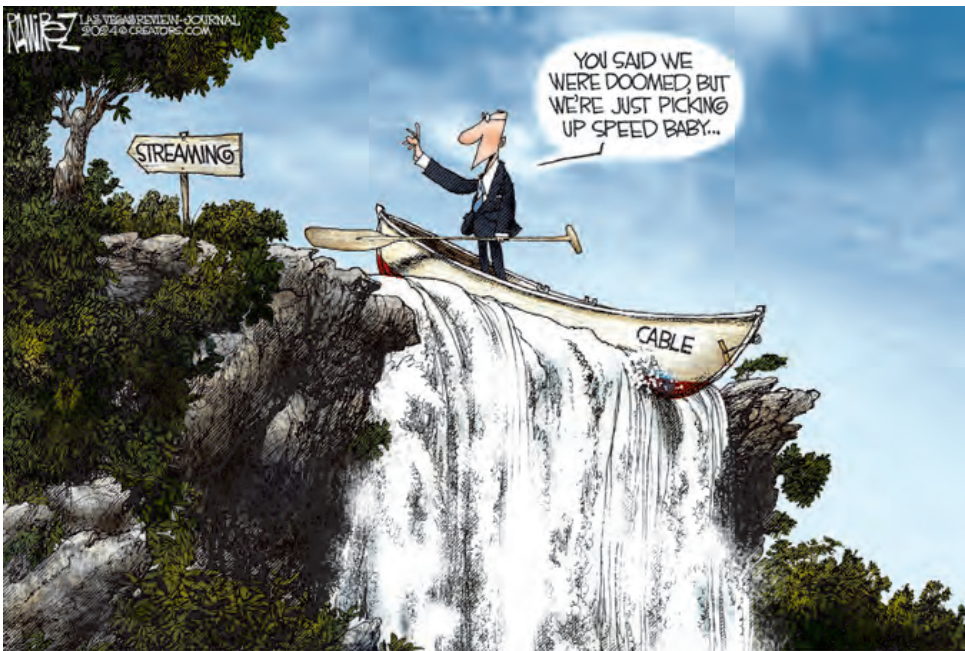
In a dangerous gamble that viewers wanted a showdown between Madix and Sandoval more than a season-long smackdown of the cheating cad, the *VPR* stars were visibly producing the show in real-time. They concluded the 11th season finale by lambasting a distraught and disturbed Madix for leaving a party to avoid being accosted by Sandoval.

"The world rallied around her, and she now thinks she's Beyonce — it's bulls*** that she can't film with someone that she stays under the same roof [with]," ranted Kent to the crew, sans Madix. "I get it, he f***ing cheated ... But he did not kill somebody!"

Alas, millions of *VPR* fans were not so sanguine. Unilaterally backing Madix, the *VPR* audience review-bombed Kent's podcast, drove Sandoval's Los Angeles restaurant to financial ruin, and pledged to boycott the show if Sandoval and his defenders returned for another season.

Madix no longer financially needs the show, and the viewers no longer want Sandoval and his sidekicks on their screens. How do you film a show about a bunch of people who hate each other when they no longer rely on shifts behind the bar at Vanderpump's happy hours? The answer, according to Bravo, is that you simply don't. A word of advice for the next generation of *VPR* stars: perhaps stay off social media, leave the producing to producers, and whatever you do, don't drain the content on-screen to your podcasts prematurely.

—By Tiana Lowe Doescher



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Course Correction

Trump's erstwhile critics in the press try to come to terms with four more years

By Peter Tonguette

Chuck Schumer is seldom thought of as an oracle of political precognition, but we have to hand it to the longtime Democratic senator from New York: On Oct. 17, at the Alfred E. Smith Memorial Foundation Dinner in New York, Schumer seemed to realize, before many of his colleagues and cohorts in the Democratic universe, that he would have to get used to the presence of then-former President Donald Trump once again.

At the annual shindig in support of Catholic charities, Schumer found himself seated mere inches from Trump, who was speaking at the podium in what was, for him, a relatively genteel speech. He wished good luck to the mayor of New York City in a pending criminal matter, and he reminisced about accompanying his builder father to Al Smith dinners of long ago. He joked that Vice President Kamala Harris, who made herself unavailable to attend, was busy on a hunting trip with her faux tough-guy running mate, Gov. Tim Walz (D-MN). "If Demo-



Donald Trump jabs at Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer during the annual Alfred E. Smith Foundation Dinner in New York City, Oct. 17, 2024.

crats really wanted to have someone not be with us this evening, they would have just sent Joe Biden," Trump said, who quickly began ribbing the man to his left. "Look on the bright side, Chuck: Considering how 'woke' your party has become,

if Kamala loses, you still have the chance to become the first woman president."

Through it all, Schumer was surprisingly staid and did not indulge in Trump "resistance"-style theatrics, such as, for instance, ripping up a copy of Trump's

MICHAEL M. SANTIAGO / GETTY

remarks ala Nancy Pelosi. Although he sat in a hunch as though he was on the verge, at any moment, of springing from his seat, the senator nonetheless remained seated, arms generally folded, through the evening. His pained smile suggested a man who was bound and determined to put on a brave face while waiting for a root canal. In short, Schumer had been mugged by reality: Harris was an awful candidate, Walz was a weird liability, the polls were too close for comfort, and Trump might soon be president-elect.

To function as a lawmaker and perhaps to preserve his own Trump Derangement Syndrome-impaired sanity, Schumer realized that he was going to have to become accustomed to the new normal of a second Trump administration. Schumer arguably arrived at this (for him) bleak conclusion sooner than most, but after the election, his allies in the establishment swallowed this bitter pill with surprising stoicism.

After the election, MSNBC's *Morning Joe* co-hosts Joe Scarborough and Mika Brzezinski apologetically revealed to their bewildered audience that they had traipsed down to Mar-a-Lago for a kind of peace summit with the president-elect. Not since Trump crossed into North Korea had two such dug-in adversaries met. "It was the first time we had seen him in seven years," Brzezinski said, an admission that, in itself, goes some way toward explaining the myopia in elite media circles: The *Morning Joe* duo has spent nearly a decade trashing and thrashing the president, ex-president, and presidential candidate, but they have done so largely in ignorance of the man himself and certainly of the millions of people who, to greater or lesser degrees, support his agenda of sensible foreign policy, robust border security, and consistent anti-wokeism. "What we did agree on was to restart communications," Brzezinski said glumly, sounding more like a police negotiator working with a bank robber than a television personality chatting with the president-to-be.

Despite making their faithful viewers raving mad, the *Morning Joe* co-hosts' great reversal represented another Schumer-style mugging-by-reality: The Electoral College had again made Trump president — and, worse from their perspective, the popular vote had rendered that victory unassailable — and a me-

dia strategy predicated on incandescent rage against the new administration no longer looked like a smart move.

For years, MAGA voters have been, to revise the immortal words of Timothy Leary slightly, dropping out from legacy media and turning to alternate forms of communication, such as Truth Social, the *Daily Wire*, or the right-wing-ish anti-"woke" podcasts that played host to Trump and running mate J.D. Vance. Legacy media institutions had surely noted this exodus, but they did nothing to ameliorate it because they had the captive eyes and ears of the people who mattered: the die-hard Democrats. For that demographic, there was no such thing as too much or too heated anti-Trump programming. In hindsight, though, this was akin to a classic error in electoral politics: Like a candidate for office who caters exclusively to his base, the legacy media had hobbled themselves with a message and mandate tailored to a sliver of the country. And, after the election, that sliver suddenly seemed a whole lot tinier.

Thus, we have entered an era of frantic, near-instantaneous media course correction. About two

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For die-hard Democrats, there was no such thing as too much or too heated anti-Trump programming. This, though, was akin to a classic error in electoral politics: Like a candidate for office who caters exclusively to his base, the legacy media had hobbled themselves with a message and mandate tailored to a sliver of the country.



weeks before the election, the *Washington Post* announced that it was heretofore declining to issue presidential endorsements. “Our job at the *Washington Post* is to provide through the newsroom nonpartisan news for all Americans, and thought-provoking, reported views from our opinion team to help our readers make up their own minds,” publisher and CEO William Lewis wrote, perhaps not realizing that this newfound mandate was at odds with his paper’s Trump-era branding as an instrument for social change: “Democracy Dies in Darkness.”

Indeed, in a perverse sense, the huffy 250,000 *Washington Post* subscribers who became nonsubscribers in the wake of their paper’s nonendorsement had a right to feel aggrieved: Like those base voters who find their niche priorities sidelined during the general election, *Washington Post* readers had become accustomed to having their anti-Trump obsession amplified in print. And what was this — the newspaper attempting to broaden its tent and grow its readership to reflect the other half of the country? To invoke Greta Thunberg, how dare they!

The *New York Times* even came under attack for being too sympathetic in its coverage of Trump. “In the view of its critics, The Times has been far too distracted as of late by worries over President Joe Biden’s age, allowing it to steal attention away from the larger and far more serious danger posed by a second Trump administration,” CNN reported in March.

Yet media consumers who have come to regard pandering from their preferred news outlets as the norm may be in for a rude awakening. The *Los Angeles Times* not only skipped the whole presidential endorsement thing, but its owner, Patrick Soon-Shiong, announced he was fashioning a new editorial board that actually reflected the concerns of the public that had catapulted Trump to the White House: “When the President has won the vote of the majority of Americans then ALL voices must be heard,” Soon-Shiong wrote on X. “Coming soon. A new Editorial Board.”

Even those outlets that remain committed to full-fledged anti-Trump hysteria seem to be subtly recalibrating: On ABC’s *The View*, Whoopi Goldberg has insisted that she will remain faithful to her pledge never to utter the president-elect’s name, a vow of silence that treats Trump like Beetlejuice: If you say his name three times, evidently, he will magically appear on set. Notwith-



Mika Brzezinski and Joe Scarborough in New York City, Dec. 15, 2021.

“**After the election, MSNBC’s *Morning Joe* co-hosts Joe Scarborough and Mika Brzezinski apologetically revealed to their bewildered audience that they had traipsed down to Mar-a-Lago for a kind of peace summit with the president-elect. Not since Trump crossed into North Korea had two such dug-in adversaries met.**”

standing such vestigial anti-Trump performance art, most of the other *View* co-hosts seem off their game: The ladies have been compelled to read multiple “legal notes” to correct assertions they had confidently made about various Republicans, including nominees for the Trump

Cabinet. Forgive me for wondering if it will be long before Tomi Lahren replaces Joy Behar. While we’re at it, is it too much to hope that the tediously partisan Jimmy Kimmel be replaced with the funnier and more apolitical Jim Gaffigan?

Of course, we should not overstate the legacy media’s sudden, resigned openness to Trump or misinterpret its root cause. Something like this happened eight years ago, when many legacy outlets fleetingly expressed anthropological curiosity about Trump’s win. Remember when Vance was not a “weird” vice presidential contender but a kind of seer who could interpret the inscrutable MAGA voter? *USA Today* headline, Aug. 17, 2016: “Best-selling ‘Hillbilly Elogy’ helps explain Trump’s appeal.” The *Guardian*, Dec. 7, 2016: “Hillbilly Elogy by JD Vance review — does this memoir really explain Trump’s victory?” As early as Russiagate, though, the legacy media’s alleged curiosity in comprehending Trump had shifted to a rooting interest in deposing Trump.

This time, there is good reason to think that full-fledged Trump panic might be delayed a bit longer, but if that is the case, it is not due to the good intentions of MSNBC talking heads or even the owners of the *Washington Post* or the *Los Angeles Times*. It is a question of survival. MSNBC is being detached from its parent company, Comcast. CBS is cycling through evening news anchors with alarming rapidity. Troubles in the newspaper business are endemic. *The View* generates big ratings, but one has the sneaking suspicion that it’s ultimately headed for an audience closer to the size of a daytime soap opera than, say, that dragon guy called Joe Rogan. In other words, the present mealy-mouthed attempts to learn to get along with Trump represent the death rattle of these shows and these institutions — a last-ditch attempt to make peace with the public they have been offending or ignoring for so very long.

In the end, the legacy media’s course correction is too far overdue to make a difference. The *Morning Joe* fiasco in Mar-a-Lago may prove to be a representative example: Joe and Mika have likely not won back a single Trump-sympathetic viewer and have demonstrably eroded their Trump-bashing fanbase. No wonder Chris Wallace wants to start a podcast. Maybe Schumer can be his first guest. ★

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



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Nation-States Are Bleeding Out

Potent non-state enemies threaten weak governments

By Tom Rogan

Yevgeny Prigozhin, the erstwhile leader of Russia's Wagner Group mercenary force, was blown up by Russian President Vladimir Putin in retaliation for his aborted June 2023 coup attempt. But Wagner remains very much alive. Today, Wagner is a kingpin criminal enterprise that holds great sway over numerous African governments. These include Burkina Faso, the Central African Republic, Libya, Mali, and Niger.

Wagner is just the tip of an iceberg of rising non-state actors that have the funding, armaments, and ambition to undermine national governments and international security greatly.

Offering violence in support of corrupted African regimes or military juntas, Wagner has successfully displaced Western counterterrorism forces and diplomatic efforts in favor of Moscow's political agenda and its own financial interests. Where French and American forces were loath to support military actions that jeopardized human rights, Wagner is happy to eliminate anyone who threatens its partners. This includes innocent civilians, such as the 300 Malian boys and men who were summarily executed with Wagner participation in March 2022.

In return for its violent support of allied regimes, Wagner helps itself to gold

and diamond mines. Sometimes, it takes a controlling stake in mining enterprises. Other times, as in Sudan, Wagner fighters simply conduct raids, killing miners and seizing control. In the Central African Republic, Wagner has used rape and murder to assert control over the country's lucrative gold mining industry.

Employing well-armed mercenaries as the lever by which to secure or displace corrupt African governments, Putin is ensuring the compliance of numerous governments to Russian strategic interests. At the same time, Wagner personnel are able to enrich themselves and their masters at Russia's GRU military intelligence service. The essential condition is one in which a non-state actor, Wagner, has made itself a multistate mafia client for sovereign nations. And while Wagner might serve the interests of those that employ it, the people of nations where the group operates will suffer under the group's brutality and its cultivation of corruption.

It's not just Wagner.

Southwestern Somalia remains beleaguered by the malicious influence of the terrorist group al Shabaab. From its haven, the group plots mass casualty attacks, such as the 2013 atrocity in Nairobi's Westgate mall and two truck bombings in Mogadishu that killed nearly 600 people in 2017.

Just across the Gulf of Aden, the Houthi rebels in Yemen continue to hold hostage a key choke point for international maritime traffic. Armed and fund-

ed by Iran but also benefiting from rich smuggling activities, the Houthis have controlled Yemen's capital, Sana'a, for 10 years. The group also retains control over a large area of Western Yemen, enabling its forces to target Red Sea shipping easily. So significant is the Houthis' strength that even a large international flotilla of U.S.-led warships has failed to stop the attacks. Dozens of cargo vessels have been hit.

While the Biden administration's reticence to take more aggressive action is part of the problem here, Yemen's geography and the Houthis' resilient resource base illustrate how a non-state actor can cause massive damage to international security. As Marine Log notes, "Alternate shipping routes around Africa add about 11,000 nautical miles, 1-2 weeks of transit time, and approximately \$1 million in fuel costs for each voyage. For many shipping companies, the combined costs of crew bonuses, war risk insurance (roughly 1,000% more than pre-war costs), and Suez transit fees make the additional time and financial costs traveling around Africa less expensive by comparison."

Apart from underlining the U.S. Navy's idiocy in reducing funding for cheap laser defenses against missile attacks, the Houthis have forced the Navy to expend dozens of multimillion-dollar U.S. anti-missile defense systems to intercept their attacks. These systems would already be in short supply in a prospective war with China over Taiwan. Their deple-

tion thus poses a critical threat to other U.S. national security interests.

Islamist terrorist groups pose broader concerns. The Islamic State is reconstituting its forces via its ISIS-K syndicate. ISIS-K's success comes via effective propaganda and leadership and the relative safe haven it has secured in Afghanistan since the U.S. military withdrawal and ensuing Taliban takeover. But its March massacre at a Moscow concert hall notwithstanding, ISIS-K is now actively plotting attacks against numerous Western targets, including in the United States. Six suspected ISIS-K terrorists who had illegally crossed the U.S.-Mexico border were arrested in major East Coast cities this summer.

Similarly, even as it suffers unprecedented blows from Israeli action, the Lebanese Hezbollah continues to hold major sway over political machinations in Beirut. Lebanese politics remain paralyzed due to Hezbollah's demand that it set the form of the next government. Though funded and supported by Western powers, the Lebanese armed forces remain reluctant to challenge Hezbollah's power base in the belief that doing so would lead to another bloody civil war. In turn, the very presence of Hezbollah's weapons allows it to hold Lebanese sovereignty in a stranglehold.

The challenge of non-state actors that are destabilizing nation-states also exists far closer to home.

Each year, more than 35 million Americans are estimated to visit Mexico. The vast majority enjoy themselves and return home safely. But the reason that these Americans are able to return with a smile rather than in a casket isn't by luck.

It's because the narco-traffickers want it that way. American tourists are valuable

for the revenue they bring to the Mexican economy and, thus, also to the narco-traffickers who take a cut from their front businesses and corrupt politician allies. In contrast, the endangerment of Americans would carry significant risks of costly U.S. government retaliation and jeopardize the cartels' vastly lucrative drug export trade. Unfortunately, the cartels are far less concerned with the welfare of journalists, law enforcement personnel, and honest politicians seeking to serve their people. Nearly 50,000 innocent people have been killed in the drug war that has ravaged Mexico since 2006.

Take the example of Alejandro Arcos, the mayor of Chilpancingo, who was murdered in October only one week after taking office. Daring to offer voters a stronger hand against the narco-traffickers, Arcos ended up with his head being left on a car hood (unlike ISIS, the narco-traffickers do not use sharpened knives).

Take the example of "Eduardo," the police officer who, in 2019, had the professional courage to arrest a son of Sinaloa cartel lord El Chapo. Then-President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador quickly ordered the son's release. But Eduardo was later ambushed and executed in a hail of more than 150 gunshots. The narco-traffickers rely upon their multibillion-dollar annual revenues to purchase high-end military equipment both from the U.S. and from corrupt Mexican military officials. They then buy off or eliminate those who oppose them.

Finally, take the example of Mauricio Solís, a journalist who was shot dead in October for his reporting on narco-trafficking. Well over 100 Mexican journalists have been murdered since 2006. Their number includes journalists under full-time police protection. Dozens of journalists have been killed in Mexico since 2006. But gangs that challenge the law with impunity exist across Latin America.

In his book *Gangster Warlords*, Ioan Grillo records how, in 2002, "The Brazilian investigative journalist Tim Lopes filmed gangs in a favela with a hidden camera. He had also filed another report that preceded a police crackdown. The gangsters discovered him, tied him to a tree, and conducted a 'trial' in which they found him guilty. They burned his eyes with cigarettes, used a samurai sword to cut off his arms and legs while he was still alive, put his body in a tire with gasoline, and set him on fire. They call this murder technique the *microonda*, or 'microwave oven.'"

Mexico might be fun for Americans to

visit, but it is a nation-state that exists under de facto control of the narco-traffickers. It is only due to the deference of the traffickers that Obrador now resides comfortably in retirement while the aforementioned others reside six feet under. The narco-traffickers make plain their ability to dominate the decisions of an otherwise democratically elected government. Their power was significant enough even to see the U.S. release former Mexican defense minister Salvador Cienfuegos. Arrested on drug charges during a 2020 visit to Los Angeles, Cienfuegos was released after Mexico threatened to suspend all counternarcotics cooperation with the U.S. The Mexican elite feared that Cienfuegos might spill the beans on their own corruption. Obrador couldn't have that.

Sometimes, even if the violence is less visible, a nation is still captured by organized criminality.

On paper, Albania is a NATO member and a close democratic partner of the U.S. In practice, Albania is the drug trafficking capital of the West. Under Prime Minister Edi Rama, senior Sinaloa cartel associates meet openly with top government officials to launder their money and discuss drug operations in Europe. The Albanian mafia is regarded as one of the most aggressive in Europe, regularly targeting competitors for assassination and enjoining highly lucrative people smuggling networks.

These smuggling networks underline how the subjugation of one state to a criminal enterprise can bleed into the degradation of other states' sovereignty. The migrant crisis across Europe has had profound political ramifications, bringing down numerous governments and causing major social upheaval in otherwise stable democracies such as the United Kingdom, Italy, and Germany, for example.

There is hope. The example of El Salvador, where Salvadoran President Nayib Bukele's aggressive crackdown on gang criminality has transformed his nation from one of Latin America's most dangerous to one of its safest, shows how bold action can pay dividends. But the rise of powerful non-state groups is posing a significant challenge to numerous nations and populations.

Whether nations will be able to hold the line remains an increasingly open question. ★

Tom Rogan is a foreign policy writer and editor for the Washington Examiner.



Wagner Group founder Yevgeny Prigozhin is seen in Africa in August 2023 after a failed coup attempt against Russian President Vladimir Putin.

The Global Conspiracy to Erase US Borders

Your tax dollars at work against lawful and orderly migration

By Conn Carroll

More than 1,100 miles south of the U.S.-Mexico border but just 24 miles north of Mexico's border with Guatemala, a gleaming new mall is set to be completed next month that will become just one node in a vast network of over a hundred facilities across Central and South America, all designed to make it easier for migrants to enter the United States.

This mass migration infrastructure is being built and paid for by the United Nations, foreign governments, international nongovernmental organizations, and American taxpayers.

In Tapachula, a city in the Mexican

state of Chiapas just north of Guatemala, the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees is building a 75,000-square-foot migrant aid center on land donated by the Mexican government. Once completed, the facility will house employees from UNHCR, the U.N.'s International Organization for Migration, the U.N. International Children's Emergency Fund, and dozens of other NGOs, all dedicated to helping migrants transit to the U.S.

The facility was commissioned to "respond comprehensively to the needs of people who arrive in Mexico ... migrant refugees who travel together from all continents, and arrive in Tapachula in need of a response or attention," Giovanni Lepri, Mexico's representative to UNHCR, told reporters when the project was first announced.

A SERVICE TO MIGRANTS

In addition to providing migrants with food, transportation vouchers, and cash cards, the migrant aid center and many others like it will provide logistical tips on how to reach the U.S. safely and even legal advice on how best to enter.

When asked how she could justify her organization essentially helping migrants break the laws of another country, an employee of the Cadena NGO told Todd Bensman of the Center for Immigration Studies, "As an organization, we're not here to judge. We're just here to provide a service."

Cadena, other NGOs, and the U.N. are providing migrants with services often paid for by U.S. taxpayers. According to Bensman, UNHCR received \$1.9 billion from the Biden administration in 2024

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In addition to providing migrants with food, transportation vouchers, and cash cards, the U.N./U.S.-financed migrant aid centers provide logistical tips on how to reach the U.S. safely and even legal advice on how best to enter.

and \$2.1 billion in 2023 after receiving just \$377 million from the Trump administration in 2019.

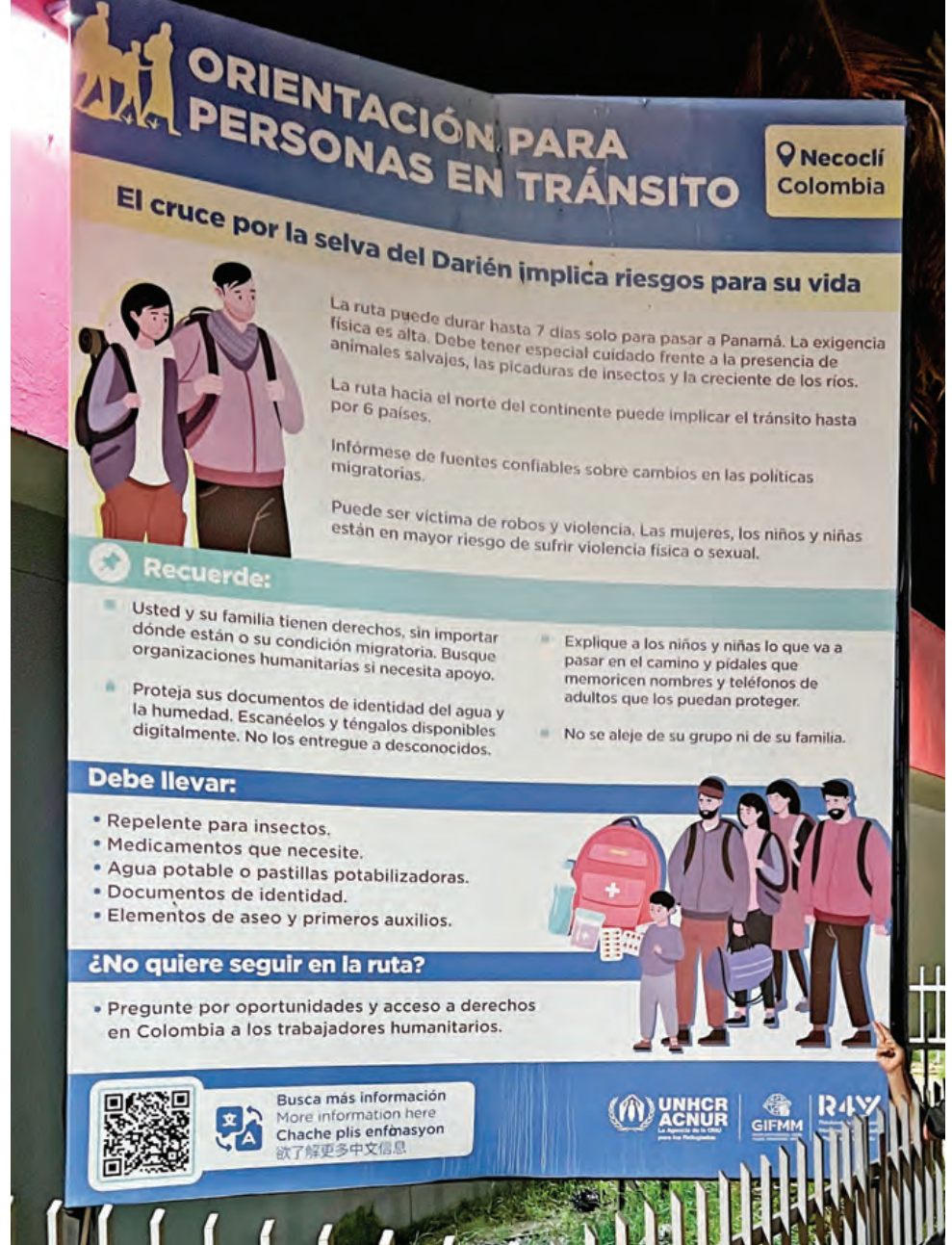
In addition to its new facility in Tapachula, UNHCR and IOM plan to spend \$1.6 billion in 17 Latin American countries through a network of over 200 NGOs for its 2024 Regional Refugee and Migrant Response Plan, which aims to assist over 2.2 million migrants in search of “a country and community that accepts them, offers stability, effective protection, and opportunity for a life lived with dignity.”

The report singles out the opening of “Safe Mobility Offices by the United States Government in some countries of the region” as a development that will have “a positive and stabilizing impact” on migrants “by providing them with options for a regular pathway to the United States.”

It is those “options” that the Biden administration’s Safe Mobility Offices are providing migrants that are the most concerning for the future sovereignty of the U.S.

THE REFUGEE PROCESS

Congress created the first legal framework for the acceptance of refugees by passing the Displaced Persons Act of 1948. Designed to help the millions of Europeans displaced by World War II, the act set quotas for how many refugees could be accepted from each country, and just over 350,000 were admitted to the country through the program.



Above, a UN billboard to assist US-bound migrants in Necoclí, Colombia; below, a UN debit card given to migrants in Reynosa, Mexico, seen in 2021. Cardholders received \$400 of U.S. taxpayer money every two weeks, via the UN.



From the 1950s through the 1970s, Congress passed a number of ad hoc refugee programs, including the Refugee Relief Act of 1953, which admitted over 200,000 refugees fleeing communism from southern Europe, and the Azorean Refugee Act of 1958, which admitted 2,000 refugees

in the wake of volcanic eruptions that destroyed much of the islands.

It wasn’t until Congress passed the Refugee Act of 1980 that a standing refugee identification and admittance process was established with annual caps. Those caps are negotiated annually as

part of the federal government's appropriations process, with the cap ranging from about 70,000 for most of former President George H.W. Bush's administration to about 80,000 during the Obama administration, falling to 20,000 under President-elect Donald Trump's administration, and rising to 125,000 under President Joe Biden.

A migrant seeking refugee status in the U.S. must first register with UNHCR in whatever foreign country he or she has fled to. The process does not start with the U.S. government. Once the U.N. has interviewed the migrant and determined that he or she meets the legal definition of a refugee, the migrant is then referred to the United States Refugee Admissions Program. To qualify for refugee status, a migrant must show he or she was persecuted in the migrant's home country due to race, religion, nationality, political opinion, or membership in a particular social group or that there is a credible fear of such persecution.

Once the U.N. has referred a migrant to USRAP as a refugee, the migrant is again interviewed in a foreign country by a U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services officer. Once the USCIS officer has confirmed a migrant's refugee eligibility, the migrant is referred to a Resettlement Support Center, where he or she is medically screened and offered cultural training in conjunction with the State Department.

Only after passing a medical exam and a security screening is a refugee allowed to enter the U.S., where he or she is referred to the Department of Health and Human Services Office of Refugee Resettlement, which helps secure housing, food stamps, and a work permit.

Crucially, every migrant who enters the country as a refugee has been vetted overseas by the U.N. and then the Department of Homeland Security. Additionally, there are strict, legislatively set caps limiting how many refugees are accepted every year.

PATHWAY TO PAROLE

The SMOs created by the Biden administration are designed to help migrants in foreign countries work with UNHCR to begin the refugee resettlement process.

According to a House Judiciary Committee report, since June 2023, Biden's SMOs have helped connect more than 60,000 migrants with UNHCR, most of whom were then referred to USRAP to begin the refugee resettlement process.

One can debate whether or not U.S. taxpayers should be spending close to \$100 million overseas helping migrants navigate the legal process to become refugees, but at least Congress has set the



A new, 75,000-square-foot migrant aid center in Chiapas, Mexico, in August 2024 — built by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees.

funding and approved the refugee resettlement system.

What is troubling about the SMO program is the House Judiciary Committee has also revealed that when UNHCR tells migrants they do not qualify for refugee status, SMO employees then educate migrants on the other "pathways" into the U.S. created by the Biden administration.

"For aliens who are not eligible for refugee resettlement in the United States," the report says, "IOM employees at SMOs counsel the aliens on additional avenues to enter the United States. Depending on the country in which the SMO is located, an alien may apply to travel to the United States through various parole programs, including through

the Biden-Harris Administration's fraud-riddled Processes for Cubans, Haitians, Nicaraguans, and Venezuelans (CHNV) parole program."

Unlike the refugee process, there is no firm legislative foundation for any of Biden's parole programs. Chapter 8 Section 1182 of the U.S. Code does allow for the temporary admission of an otherwise inadmissible alien for "urgent humanitarian reasons or significant public benefit,"

but that same statute also makes clear that as soon as "the purposes of such parole shall have been served," a paroled alien is to be taken immediately into custody and processed for deportation.

Such grants of "humanitarian" parole are supposed to be done on a "case-by-case" basis, which is why, unlike the refugee process, there is no cap for the designation in the statute. However, the Biden administration has been abusing this parole power, turning it into a new "pathway" for illegal immigrants to enter the U.S.

The Biden administration and its NGO allies like to advertise Biden's parole programs as an orderly and humane way to bring asylum-seekers into the country, but that is what makes the fact that taxpayer-funded SMO employees are pushing migrants into the program so scandalous. The migrants Biden's SMOs are pushing into his parole programs have already been rejected by the U.N. for refugee status. If UNHCR has already determined that a migrant has no credible fear of persecution in his or her home country, an immigration judge in

the U.S. is highly unlikely to come to a different conclusion.

Since the U.N. has already determined these CHNV parole grantees don't qualify for asylum, in two years, when their "temporary" parole status runs out, all of these CHNV paroles will automatically become illegal immigrants. Biden has brought more than 1.3 million migrants into the U.S. through the CHNV program and its sister CBP One app program, which is administered at southern border ports of entry.

The Biden administration had already created 13 SMOs in cities across Guatemala, Costa Rica, Colombia, and Ecuador, and until Trump defeated him, Biden planned to open 100 more brick-

and-mortar SMOs throughout Central and South America.

OPEN BORDERS AS REPARATIONS

The animating belief behind the network of international agencies and NGOs working to undermine U.S. borders is that the U.S. and Europe are morally obligated to take in infinite amounts of migrants from around the world because they are the source of all the problems in the world.

Reece Jones, author of *Violent Borders: Refugees and the Right to Move*, argues that Europe owns the migrant crisis “because of the history of European colonialism in Africa, Asia, and the Middle East.”

“From the brutal extraction regimes of Africa to the two hundred years of British colonialism in India, European states destroyed the previous political systems that existed throughout the world, took resources and labor from their colonies, then left behind weakened, dependent states,” Jones writes.

“Rather than building walls and fences that force migrants to take ever more dangerous routes and result in thousands of deaths every year, the European Union must open borders and allow the free movement of human beings who are displaced by the history of European colonialism, arbitrary borders, and economic policies,” Jones continues. “It is time for Europe to open its borders as a form of reparations for the past injustices that led to the crisis in the first place.”

Suketu Mehta, a journalism professor at New York University and author of *This Land is Our Land: An Immigrant’s Manifesto*, has deemed the U.S. equally guilty.

“Today, a quarter of a billion people are migrants. They are moving because the rich countries have stolen the future of the poor countries,” Mehta writes.

“They are coming here because we were there,” he continues. “Immigration quotas should be based on how much the host country has ruined other countries.”

Because the U.S. once propped up a dictator in the Dominican Republic, anyone who wants to come to the U.S. from that country should be allowed to do so, Mehta argues. The same goes for Iraq because the U.S. overthrew Saddam Hussein, and the same goes for every African country that participated in the slave trade. Don’t forget global warming. Since the U.S.’s carbon emissions are responsible for global warming, any country that has a flood or a cold snap earns the right to send its people here.



A UN employee collects information from migrants in Tampachula, Chiapas, Mexico, in early 2023.

The goal of the Biden administration, particularly Homeland Security Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas, is not to stop the flow of migrants into the U.S. but to make it as orderly as possible. Mayorkas admitted as much to Bret Baier in May 2022 on Fox News. When asked by Baier if it is “the objective of the Biden administration to sharply reduce the total number of illegal immigrants coming across the southern border,” Mayorkas said it was not.

“It is the objective of the Biden administration to make sure that we have safe, legal, and orderly pathways for individuals to be able to access our legal system,” Mayorkas said.

That is why the Biden administration worked hand in hand with the U.N. to build 13 SMOs and began construction of over 100 more. It is the goal of Mayorkas and his globalist counterparts to make the mass migration from poor countries to our country as orderly as possible. They have no intention of stopping it, only making sure it happens with minimal resistance.

‘MAKING BORDERS GREAT AGAIN’

On the first Tuesday of this month, people in the U.S. soundly rejected the Biden-Mayorkas vision of simply managing mass migration into the U.S. Instead, voters chose Trump’s vision of asserting our sovereignty and preventing the mass movement of migrants into the country.

Reinstating the successful Remain in Mexico from his first term in office, thus denying migrants who are caught illegal-

ly crossing the border into the U.S., is a good first step. It will be even easier for Trump to end Biden’s CHNV and CBP One app parole programs. However, as Trump begins to track down the nearly 6 million illegal immigrants Biden let into the country and deport them, he should also begin uprooting the international network of migrant aid centers created by Biden. Not one more SMO should come online, and Biden should close down the existing 13 offices located throughout Central and South America.

Trump should also pressure the U.N. to stop the construction and maintenance of facilities designed to help migrants come to the U.S. border. We should not cut off the U.N. entirely. It can still serve a useful function as a prescreener of migrants who want to apply to become refugees. That system is working just fine and is checked democratically by the caps set in the annual appropriations process.

The U.S. is a country of immigrants. We will never close our borders entirely. However, there are over a billion people in the world who would move to the U.S. if they could. We simply cannot take them all in. We need a secure border and a working quota system that is democratically accountable to voters. We can’t let the U.N., foreign governments, and international NGOs set our immigration policies. ★

Conn Carroll is commentary editor of the Washington Examiner.

Putting the Department of Education to Work

If Trump can't abolish it

By Frederick M. Hess

On the campaign trail, President-elect Donald Trump promised to abolish the U.S. Department of Education. He made the same pledge in 2016, as did Ronald Reagan in 1980.

It's a good idea. It would shrink the federal footprint, dramatically downsize the federal education bureaucracy, put an end to the backdoor access to federal influence enjoyed by the teachers unions, college commissars, and assorted left-leaning education advocacy groups, and make it tougher for future Democratic administrations to dictate policy to the nation's schools and colleges.

But while shuttering the department is a perfectly sensible idea, it's unlikely to happen. That's because abolishing a Cabinet agency requires an act of Congress, meaning it needs 60 votes in the Senate. The bottom line is that even if every single Republican senator is on board, an iffy proposition, the GOP will have only 53 votes. And it's a poor bet that Republicans can get a single Democrat to vote to abolish the department,

let alone seven. So, the challenge when it comes to abolishing the department isn't getting Senate Republicans to fight — it's that there aren't enough Republicans in the Senate. It's a matter of simple math.

Now, those familiar with the inner workings of Washington might wonder about using the budget reconciliation process, which allows the Senate to pass spending or tax bills with a simple majority. The problem with that method is that the reconciliation process was designed to help balance budgets and is purely a matter of dollars and cents. It



only applies to limited categories of spending and can't be used to dismantle a government agency.

The Trump team might be able to use executive action to reorganize or downsize the agency by, for instance, shifting the federal student-loan portfolio over to the Treasury Department and the Office for Civil Rights over to the Justice Department. That approach has promise, but it's a stretch to characterize such moves as "abolishing" the Education Department. Moreover, because functions would mostly be shuffled to other agencies, it's not clear this would necessarily do much to shrink the federal footprint.

So, the department probably isn't go-

ing away. But that's OK, as it can be aggressively downsized without legislation anyway. Moreover, the reformist energy would be more productively devoted to fulfilling Trump's promises to expand choice, confront the "woke" bullies, and bust the college cartel.

Just what does the Department of Education actually do anyway? Mostly, it writes rules, houses an expansive bureaucracy, and funnels dollars to states and institutions of higher education. Contrary to the claims of the teachers unions and aggrieved Democrats, it doesn't educate anyone — and a glance at its thousands of regulations is a reminder that most have much more to do with accounting than with learning. When it comes to K–12 schooling, the federal government only contributes about 10% of what the United States spends each year (the lion's share is supplied by states and localities).

The bulk of the department's work boils down to throwing vast sums at higher education, mostly by issuing, managing, and (not) collecting payments for student loans. That's why insiders have long described the department as a gargantuan bank with a second-rate policy shop attached. Meanwhile, the department employs an army of 4,000

bureaucrats — including 86 senior executive service employees, who earn over \$200,000, and more than 1,000 GS-15 managers, all of whom earn more than \$160,000 if they work in Washington, D.C. Heck, there are more than 100 staff members just in the office of communications, at an average salary of over \$100,000 and an annual cost to taxpayers of more than \$13 million.

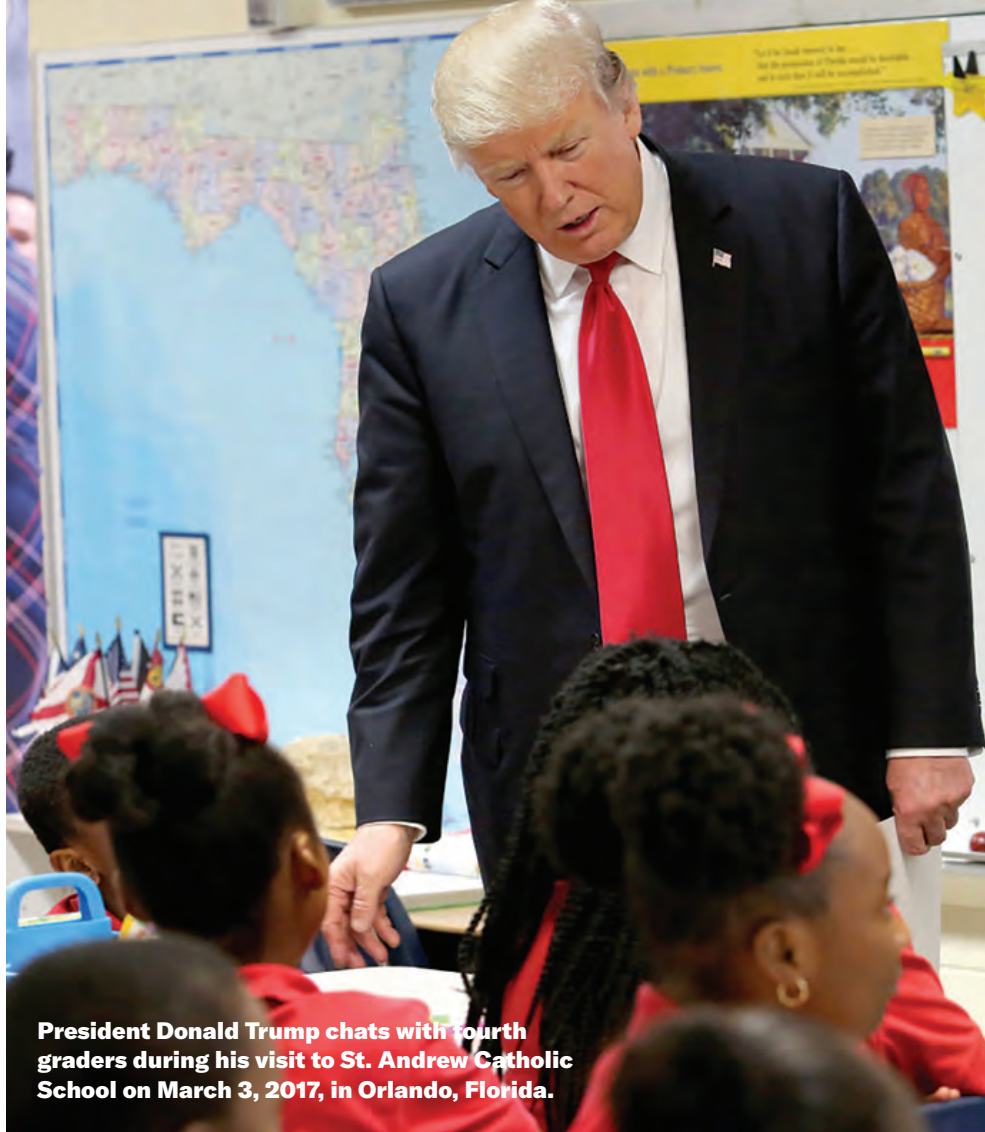
If this description makes hysterical defenses of the department seem a little unhinged, you've got the idea.

While claims about the department's value may be wildly exaggerated, it's also proven remarkably tough to kill. After all, Republicans have been calling for the abolition of the Department of Education pretty much since its creation in 1979 at the behest of President Jimmy Carter. Carter was fulfilling a pledge he'd made to the National Education Association, the nation's largest teachers union, during the 1976 Democratic primaries. The NEA had wanted a direct conduit to the federal bureaucracy and a symbol of the education lobby's might, and it got its wish.

Now, it's important to appreciate that this was not the first time the federal government got involved in education. Several laws dating back to the Civil War era, including the Morrill Land-Grant Act of 1862, the Smith-Hughes Vocational Education Act of 1917, the National Defense Education Act of 1958, and the Higher Education and Elementary and Secondary Education Acts of 1965, expanded the role of the federal government in education. In short, with or without a department, there will be fights over Washington's role in education.

On the campaign trail in 1980, Ronald Reagan promised to dismantle the newborn department. That didn't happen. Instead, Terrel Bell, Reagan's first education secretary, assembled a blue-ribbon commission to document the nation's education challenges and (he hoped) save his job. That commission's report, *A Nation at Risk*, tempered Reagan's aversion to the department and put an end to talk of its abolition. Since then, promising to abolish the department has generally been a staple of Republican politics, with the exception of the George W. Bush era. Newt Gingrich's "Contract with America," Bob Dole's 1996 candidacy, most of the GOP field in 2012, and Trump himself in 2016 all echoed Reagan's call.

That none of these calls has gone



President Donald Trump chats with fourth graders during his visit to St. Andrew Catholic School on March 3, 2017, in Orlando, Florida.

very far and that the department has grown steadily over time despite them should be a reminder that eliminating it is a heavier lift than casual observers might imagine. For one thing, people say Washington should be spending money on education. Moreover, despite vague calls to prune wasteful spending, Republicans have shown little appetite for cutting the major federal education programs, principally: Title I for high-poverty schools (\$18 billion a year), special education funding (\$16 billion a year), and Pell Grants and work study for low-income students in postsecondary education (\$31 billion a year). Last year, when given the chance to vote on converting Title I into a voucher program — in other words, reforming the program without cutting it — House Republicans could muster barely half their caucus to support the proposal, losing 113-311. Republicans have historically shown little desire to cut spending for low-income students or those with special needs, and that seems even more likely to be the case after a Trump electoral win defined

by broad support among working-class voters and parents.

So, the department will likely be with us for the next four years. But that isn't necessarily bad news for Team Trump.

First, the department can be downsized in important ways. While there's little evidence that Hill Republicans are eager to trim funds for low-income students or those with special needs, they can certainly take an ax to the constellation of other smaller programs. And there's lots of room to save millions by trimming staff, which may be as easy as prompting mass resignations by requiring that department staffers actually return to the office.

At the same time, the bulk of the money overseen at the Department of Education concerns student loans, meaning it's important to fix the mess that President Joe Biden's team made of student lending. There's a need to end Biden's loan "forgiveness" machinations decisively, stop issuing loans to graduate students, require colleges to assume partial liability for repayment of their students'

loans, and start collecting an insurance premium from colleges as a condition for participating in the student loan system. Given that the Biden administration managed to transfer \$400 billion from borrowers to taxpayers despite an onslaught of emphatic legal reversals, there's much a Trump team could do via executive discretion.

Second, even if Congress votes to abolish the department, its programs and staffing will simply shift over to other agencies unless Congress specifically votes to terminate them. So long as those programs exist and the dollars flow, abolition is mostly symbolic. The real fight is over ending, cutting, or reshaping the various programs the department administers. That's why the administration may not want to spend a lot of political capital on a long-shot fight that could look more like an exercise in flow-chart reorganization than a dramatic shift in federal policy.

Indeed, much of the chatter about closing the department can seem performative, as if it's a more appealing topic than the nuts and bolts of shrinking the federal footprint or defunding the education blob. It's just fine if those saying they want to "abolish the department" actually mean they want to slash red tape, turn federal education programs into block grants, or move select units to other agencies. Those are all sensible ideas and would constitute big wins. But the department would still be there. And it'd be foolish to make those wins look like losses by focusing on the semantics of name-brand abolition rather than practical policy wins.

Third, and perhaps most important, a fruitless push to eliminate the department would be a missed opportunity at a time when it can instead be harnessed to address big problems in K-12 and higher education. After all, we may be about to see something truly new: a Republican Department of Education aggressively exploiting its executive authority, just like the Obama and Biden administrations did. Years of battles over school closures, school choice, CRT, DEI, gender, loan forgiveness, Title IX, and campus antisemitism have birthed a web of right-leaning education groups that now offer a playbook of policies. There's also a deep bench of possible Trump appointees eager to take schools and colleges to task for their many failures, such as neglecting the civil rights of Jewish students and staff, circumventing the Su-

preme Court's 2023 ban on race-based admissions, tolerating the kinds of hostile learning environments produced by "anti-racism," and ignoring federal reporting requirements on foreign gifts. There are immense opportunities for investigation and litigation to right unaddressed wrongs and bar bad actors from accessing millions, or billions, in federal funding.

In short, while abolishing the department would be a fine thing to do, it's not the most important fight for the new administration. If Trump's team has a strategy to flip seven Senate Democrats, then, sure, go for it. But if not, there are a host of other education priorities he could accomplish.

Here are a half-dozen places to start.

▶ Harness the authority of the Office for Civil Rights to ensure that schools and colleges are abiding by equal protection and nondiscrimination laws. While federal officials cannot and should not seek to dictate curricula, they have an obligation to address hostile learning environments and ensure that educators aren't violating civil rights laws by demeaning racial or ethnic groups, such as through "privilege" exercises or race-based "affinity" grouping. They should also ensure that privacy, student safety, and free speech aren't eroded or trampled on in the service of gender radicalism.

▶ Fix the federal student loan program. Indeed, after Biden's illegal adventurism, it's no longer a "lending" program by any normal definition. Rather, it's become a program in which collegegoers borrow taxpayer funds, promise to pay the money back, and then don't. Through a combination of legislation, executive enforcement, and cleaning up the Biden administration's detritus, Trump's Education Department could redesign federal lending so that it's at least a breakeven for taxpayers and no longer susceptible to future progressive giveaways.

▶ Bust the higher education accreditation cartel. Today, colleges are governed by a cozy oligopoly of accreditors that raises stiff barriers to entry, mandates DEI, and ignores outcomes. It's time to encourage the creation of new accreditors more attuned to cultivating dynamic, results-oriented higher education. A good deal of this can likely be accomplished through executive action, though one can also imagine a bipartisan legislative deal that addresses college

cost, access, and accountability.

▶ Protect free inquiry in higher education. In his first term, along those lines, Trump issued a sensible but ineffectual executive order that lacked meaningful enforcement. Now, it's time to do far more. His Education Department could use federal oversight to ensure that colleges that collect federal research funds actually promote and protect free inquiry, as they promise to do, or else lose those funds and become ineligible for future funds until they get their house in order. The federal education research apparatus should be purged of DEI and other ideological agendas, and the administration should appoint officials committed to translating those commitments into practice.

▶ Promote alternatives for those seeking high-quality, cost-effective workforce training. Far too much time and energy has been devoted to four-year colleges. This has created bloated academic preserves of groupthink where little is learned and not much gets done. There's a need to overhaul federal rules governing apprenticeships, make it possible to use Pell Grants at a broader array of providers, such as trade schools, and embrace "skill-based" hiring in which jobs are no longer closed to qualified applicants simply because they lack a paper credential. Trump started on much of this in his first term, and now his team will have a chance to build on that work.

▶ Deliver on K-12 educational choice. This time round, Trump can finally deliver the big win for school choice that eluded him in his first term, and he can do so without expanding Washington's educational footprint. Next year's tax bill will offer a terrific opportunity for Republicans to include a tax credit based on the Educational Choice for Children Act, which would provide a historic federal boost for educational choice by supporting independent, state-based scholarship programs. This would deliver a catalytic boost without involving federal officials in designing or overseeing choice programs.

This list is far from comprehensive. If Trump 2.0 accomplishes even a decent slice of this, it would constitute a historically successful tenure — whether or not the Department of Education is still standing. ★

Frederick M. Hess is the director of education policy studies at the American Enterprise Institute.

Handmaid's Tales

How the Left gins up a war on women

By David Harsanyi

The war on women is over. Or rather, the war on women never was.

The 2024 presidential campaign was the culmination of decades of unhinged paranoia from the Left. Democrats no longer warn that the opposition is wrong or misguided. They warn that fascistic forces led by a would-be Hitler would, among many other depravities, throw women into servitude.

Most politically aware people have probably heard something about *The Handmaid's Tale*, either the Hulu television series or the 1985 science-fiction novel it was based on. In the story, fascistic Christian fundamentalists seize power after a terrorist attack and create a patriarchal state in which women are not only forbidden from owning property, reading, wearing their own clothing, sharing their own ideas, or making any real choices but also thrown into a biblically determined caste system. The handmaids, women who are identified as morally corrupt, are compelled to bear the children for chaste couples.

Sounds pretty awful, right? Much like George Orwell's *1984*, the book is a favorite point of analogy in contemporary politics. Unlike *1984*, however, it fails

to offer a single vaguely valuable lesson about the modern political environment or life in the United States, where women are freer and more prosperous than women have been in any place in all of history. Nevertheless, over the past few years, most major mass media outlets have run pieces contemplating the parallels between social conservatives and the patriarchal fascists of Gilead.

Though *The Handmaid's Tale* exhibits a deep misunderstanding of both Christianity and Americans, the aesthetics, subservient women dressed as nuns under the watchful eye of dour white men, offer powerful imagery to feed the darkest fantasies of the paranoid Left.

The Handmaid's Tale imagery had been a favorite of pro-abortion activists for years. When pollsters at Morning Consult asked voters, "Is 'The Handmaid's Tale' rooted in reality?" a few years ago, 29% of Democratic men and 26% of Democratic women believed it was "grounded in truth and could become a reality someday."

Why do a fourth of all Democrats claim to believe that it is plausible that

A protester opposed to the judicial nomination of Amy Coney Barrett poses in front of the Supreme Court in Washington, D.C., Sept. 30, 2020.



women will be slaves to the whims of a theocratic ruling class? Carefully polished and calibrated conspiracy theories.

The Left doesn't get nearly enough credit for its conspiratorial nature. From the 9/11 trutherism to the Russia collusion hoax, cynical Democrats have proven far more skilled at scaring their credulous constituents into compliance. While the Right's conspiracy theories are often spread by deranged characters and marginal social media voices, the Left's deceptions are laundered through activist media and imbued with credibility by a slew of (once) trusted institutions. Most conservative conspiracies are smothered in fact checks from major media organizations. Left-wing paranoia is reinforced with bogus social science and given plausibility by journalists.

Some of you may recall the 2012 presidential election, when inveterate centrist Mitt Romney was derided for a slew of imaginary crimes against women. Though Donald Trump was perhaps the least socially conservative GOP presidential candidate in a century, both as a personal matter and policy-wise, the war on women rhetoric was ratcheted up to new heights during his first presidency.

The entire paranoia of *The Handmaid's Tale* revolves around the demand for unfettered access to abortion. Let's, however, put the issue into some context: According to decadeslong Gallup polling on the issue, around 45% of women believe abortion should be legal only in certain circumstances, while another 15% believe it should be illegal in all circumstances. There is a wide range of views among women about the legality of the procedure and when life is worth protecting because women aren't lockstepping automatons. The notion that limiting abortion is inherently anti-woman or authoritarian or dystopic isn't reality.

It is certainly not antidemocratic to be pro-life. As we've seen, however, every political setback for Democrats is transformed into an attack on the pillars of democracy, even when it strengthens the ability of people to decide their fate, as *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization* did.

Let's recall that the same institution that gave us the *Dobbs* decision, overturning the wholly concocted constitutional right to an abortion, also unilaterally legalized abortion nationwide in the first place with *Roe v. Wade*. That decision was taken by a court wholly made up of men, whereas the court



Protesters outside the Supreme Court in Washington, D.C., as oral arguments are heard in cases regarding insurance coverage mandates, March 23, 2016.



No Republican congressional bill has ever proposed banning contraception. But for modern progressives, if something hasn't been provided to them for free by the state, then it's as good as banned.

that handed down *Dobbs* had multiple women on it, one of whom ruled with the majority. The big difference between the rulings is that *Dobbs* empowered the public to vote on an issue that was unmentioned anywhere in the Constitution. Yet, still, hundreds of pieces were written by the Left lamenting how *Dobbs* had *undermined* democracy.

Because abortion is the core political issue for many feminists, Democrats have spent decades convincing millions of women that a cabal of sexual predators runs the highest court. During Brett Kavanaugh's elevation to the Supreme Court, CNN's lascivious chief legal analyst, Jeffrey Toobin, maintained that 40% of the court had "been credibly accused of sexual misconduct." Of course, it is, at the very least, *highly* debatable that either Clarence Thomas or Kavanaugh had been

credibly accused of anything. Yet this theme was repeated across the media. Uncorroborated accusations of sexual assault, no matter how risible or rickety, are almost always given a hearing by the media if they are aimed at a conservative. It's meant to convince women that nefarious forces are working in the shadows to strip them of agency and rights.

For decades, leftists have also contended that pro-life social conservatives don't care if women die by the thousands. Before the Supreme Court overturned *Roe v. Wade*, former Planned Parenthood President Leana Wen predicted "a real situation where *Roe* could be overturned. And we know what will happen, which is that women will die. Thousands of women died every year pre-*Roe*."

Of course, we know no such thing. After *Roe v. Wade* was overturned, some states passed stricter limitations on abortion while others passed more permissive laws. Not one, much less "thousands," would die from abortion restrictions.

And so, 2024 Democrats were compelled to create fake incidents to continue to scare women, the most infamous being that of Amber Thurman, whose death was likely caused by abortifacients but blamed on Georgia's abortion law — which, like all others, does nothing to stop doctors from assisting the victim. Other similar stories were cooked up to make the case.

None of this is new. Pro-abortion advocates have long fabricated stories and statistics to manipulate women emotionally. It began with the Walter Cronkite 1965 documentary on the issue, "Abortion and the Law," which significantly exaggerated the number of "back-alley" abortions and deaths from botched procedures. The documentary claimed, under the veneer of scientific expertise, that a *million* illegal abortions were performed every year, more than are legally procured today, and that 5,000-10,000 women died from botched procedures. These claims were incessantly repeated thereafter by the media to shape public opinion. Experts who later looked at those numbers could never recreate them. Even counting secondhand reports, only a small fraction of those deaths could be found. Back-alley abortions were incredibly rare. They were largely a myth.

Fearmongering is the driving force in the Left's paranoiac case. Former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, whose 2016 presidential run was predicated on the fact that it was *her* turn, regularly accuses the GOP not only of opposing abortion



A protest in a Senate office building in Washington, D.C., of Brett Kavanaugh's nomination to the Supreme Court, Sept. 4, 2018.

but wanting to ban contraception. In 2023, *Slate* warned that “birth control” was next in line for anti-abortion Republicans. People like Rep. Kathy Manning (D-NC) claimed that “Congress must codify the right to contraception before it’s too late,” warning about the “right-wing extremists’ war on contraception and outright assault on Americans’ fundamental rights, personal freedoms, and well-being.”

Now, it would be understandably disconcerting if Republicans were on the cusp of “denying women” access to birth control, as Sen. Elizabeth Warren (D-MA) often warns, but it’s simply untrue. Some Christians have justifiable faith-based reasons to oppose taxpayer-funded contraception. Catholics like President Joe Biden are also allegedly opposed to contraception. The political debate has always been over whether the government should be allowed to coerce insurance companies and, thus, consumers into paying for contraception. This is why then-President Barack Obama sued the Little Sisters of the Poor and tried to force them to undermine the basic

tenets of faith and chip in for condoms.

No Republican congressional bill, however, has ever proposed banning contraception. Numerous Republican bills, in fact, both in states and in Congress, have proposed making birth control over the counter. But modern progressives have been convinced that if something hasn’t been provided to them for free by the state, then it’s as good as banned. Opposing federally funded condoms is outlawing contraception in the same way refusing to pay for your Whopper is a ban on Burger King.

Moreover, Democrats like to conflate contraception and abortifacients, which some Republicans want to limit. One is prophylactic, a method or device used to prevent conception. The other is used to end the life of a conceived human being. Whatever your beliefs on the topic, they are substantively different.

So, it’s great news that women did not fall for the Left’s conspiracy theories in 2024. According to exit polls, around 45% of women voted for Trump. Around 50% of middle-aged women. Around

51% of married women. All those numbers are basically the same as they were 20 years ago.

Let’s face it: It’s also paranoid to believe that men act as an amorphous group of human beings when it comes to politics or much else. There is no political consensus among men. Some issues affect women more than men, but many of us would rather see a government with hundreds of Amy Coney Barretts before a single conspiracy theorist like Sen. Sheldon Whitehouse (D-RI).

And perhaps the most destructive effect of the modern Left’s paranoid style of politics is that it convinces millions of people to see their neighbors as the enemy — a hallmark of the authoritarian mindset. Attempting to pit women and men against each other simply tears at the fabric of American life. ★

David Harsanyi is a senior writer for the Washington Examiner and author of The Rise of BlueAnon: How the Democrats Became a Party of Conspiracy, from which this is excerpted.

Permanent Campaign

Democrats keep fearmongering on abortion even after Trump's election

By Kimberly Ross

In the lead-up to this year's presidential election, the country was subjected to a leftist narrative detailing what a new Trump administration would look like. In this telling, a second term would be cataclysmic and irrevocably damage the nation's very foundations. Specifically, "marginalized" groups would feel the weight of oppression and limitation of freedoms. President-elect Donald Trump's decisive win against Vice President Kamala Harris has only heightened the intensity and frequency of these claims.

Trump has yet to be sworn in for his second term, but you wouldn't know it based on the public displays of misinformation and hysteria. One of the main concerns centers on women and their reproductive health. Not only is there the idea that a Trump-Vance administration will bring about a nationwide abortion ban, but also that birth control and even miscarriage or post-abortive care would either be unavailable or highly restricted. These fears aren't based on anything concrete. Instead, they are anchored in a campaign to scare women and allies into

believing the worst, even if it's built on easily disproved lies.

In a repeat from his first term, the legacy media and leftists are intent on fearmongering and delusion instead of addressing current laws or future policy plans.

A major reason for this collective overreaction is Trump's hand in overturning *Roe v. Wade* and *Planned Parenthood v. Casey*. The seismic shift in the nearly



50-year norm reversed a legal and moral wrong. But, according to the pro-choice crowd, it sent women back to the Dark Ages in terms of healthcare and sexuality. Nothing could be further from the truth. Federalism remains a good thing. States are varied in their abortion legislation, with some highly restrictive and others openly permissive. Women are barred from neither obtaining an abortion nor receiving care. In fact, the data show abortions have increased across the board since *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization* was handed down. Women in the United States intent on obtaining an abortion are either traveling to states with looser laws or obtaining

abortion medication. Trump's decisions in his first term led to a Supreme Court that decided to overturn supposedly established precedent. And progressives still can't get over it.

Since *Dobbs* was decided, we have been told that America is akin to the Republic of Gilead in Margaret Atwood's oft-mentioned book, *The Handmaid's Tale*. We're told women have no control over their bodies and healthcare decisions now and won't in the future. Given how much the alarmism does not match the reality of a post-*Dobbs* U.S., it's safe to say current cries pointing to a bleak, patriarchal future are just as absurd as the first time around. Unsurprisingly, it does not mean these won't continue before and during Trump's second term in office.

Chief among the list of healthcare fears is a nationwide ban on abortion. A president who ushered in what was previously unthinkable, overturning *Roe*, would surely use a second term to impose a federal ban on abortion. Out of this leftist fear grows all others related to women's reproductive healthcare. But Trump has explicitly stated on more than one occasion that he would veto legislation

meant to establish a federal ban. In pre-election interviews, Vice President-elect J.D. Vance confirmed Trump's desire to veto any ban that might come to his desk. Some on both sides of the aisle view Trump as a pro-life leader. But both are wrong to do so. Democrats, concerned about the future, point to *Dobbs* as proof Trump would support a ban. Likewise, Republicans, looking at *Dobbs*, believe it points to a possible nationwide abortion ban in his second term. But Trump is far more opportunistic and focused on his legacy and political capital than he is stalwart in principle. In 2016, a main part of his campaign had to do with the opportunity to make at least one or more Supreme Court appointments. An unknown number of voters supported him that year for that reason alone. The thought of former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton powerfully changing the court for years to come was too much of a threat. Trump won and eventually nominated three judges who were confirmed. The rest is history. But none of this means Trump is, at his heart, a pro-life person.

In September 2023, Trump called the new six-week abortion ban Gov. Ron DeSantis (R-FL) signed a "terrible mistake." This came after frequently praising how the *Dobbs* decision returned the abortion issue to the states. Trump's personal feelings about the issue are more political than they are pro-life in nature. When discussing Florida's Amendment 4, which was on the ballot in November and lost when it failed to reach 60%, the Trump team reiterated that "he believes 6 weeks is too short." It is wrong to expect broad, pro-life moves from a man who is quite clearly not staunch on the issue. Trump's personal feelings on abortion and his nominations of Robert F. Kennedy Jr. and former Rep. Tulsi Gabbard to Cabinet positions, neither of whom is pro-life, are deeply disappointing to pro-life Republicans. So, it makes the current batch of histrionics from the pro-choice Left even more farcical.

Dr. Clayton Alfonso is an OB-GYN who works for Duke Health in North Carolina. According to *Time* magazine, in the hours and days after the election, he "had two messages from patients seeking to re-

place their IUDs. Over the next few days, three women inquired about getting their tubes tied. All of them said the election was the reason they were making these choices now." This increase is nothing new overall, as the months following the *Dobbs* decision saw a rise in the number of women seeking tubal ligation. In fact, Alfonso said, "I saw this bump after the Trump election in 2016. But the patients seem more afraid this time." Fear is the whole point. There is no proof a second Trump administration would in any way restrict birth control access. In a post on Truth Social in May, Trump said: "I HAVE NEVER, AND WILL NEVER ADVOCATE IMPOSING RESTRICTIONS ON BIRTH CONTROL, or other contraceptives. This is a Democrat fabricated lie, MISINFORMATION/DISINFORMATION, because they have nothing else to run on except FAILURE, POVERTY, AND DEATH. I DO NOT SUPPORT A BAN ON BIRTH CONTROL, AND NEITHER WILL THE REPUBLICAN PARTY!" While Trump has been rather clear in recent months about not supporting a ban on birth control, leftists still insist he would or is likely to do so.

A piece from the Guttmacher Institute in early November titled "10 Reasons a Second Trump Presidency Will Deci-

mate Sexual and Reproductive Health" is exactly the kind of thing incurious progressives, eager to find a morsel of confirmation bias, cling to in their effort to prove Trump 2.0 will ruin their lives. In it, the author lists several possible measures in the incoming Trump administration. No. 2 on the list is "Reinstating and expanding the global gag rule." This is hardly surprising, given he is a Republican. And it's also right in line with history, as previous Republican administrations did the very same thing. A "global gag rule" restricts nongovernmental organizations from using U.S. funds to pay for abortion services or referrals. Known as the "Mexico City Policy," it came into existence in 1984, during the Reagan administration. Previous administrations have rescinded or revoked the Mexico City Policy along party lines. The same goes for No. 7 on the Guttmacher list, which is "Attacking the Affordable Care Act's birth control benefit." The explanation given is, "The administration will likely again allow employers and educational institutions to avoid offering coverage in their employees' or students' health plans by claiming moral and religious exemptions." Allowing these exemptions is a decidedly good thing. The decision in *Burwell v. Hobby*



A patient speaks with a nurse before receiving an abortion at a Planned Parenthood clinic in Jacksonville, Florida, in 2022.



President-elect Donald Trump's personal feelings on abortion and his nominations of Robert F. Kennedy Jr. and former Rep. Tulsi Gabbard to Cabinet positions are disappointing to pro-life Republicans.

Lobby Stores was a landmark ruling by the Supreme Court in June 2014. It protected religious freedom and allowed for an exemption concerning the company's birth control coverage. Often ignored is the fact that Hobby Lobby still covers a long list of birth control options, just not the abortifacient kind. Again, these exemptions, when allowed, will be nothing new. Still, the Left is committed to creating the prospect of a new Trump administration that is so wildly against women and sexual freedom that it can hardly be believed. After all, we're told he's no different than Hitler.

The social media responses to the president-elect's impending term are so over the top that one wonders if these people live in the same reality as everyone else.

The list of overreactions and outright falsehoods is long. Among them is something called 4B. The movement originated in South Korea years ago and has been adopted by radical feminists in America who are convinced a new Trump era will bring their demise. The tenets include not having sex with men, not dating men, and not marrying men. Apparently, this is meant to protect oneself. Ironically, personal responsibility for sexual choices, and any children that result, is what the pro-life movement has pushed

all along. An article at *Slate* about the 4B trend includes delusional statements from women promoting it: "If you want to live a long time, stop dating men" and "If you get pregnant and there's a complication, doctors will simply watch you die. Any man who even wants sex with you wants to knowingly put you at risk of pregnancy and subsequent death." These imagined scenarios undergird their hate for the president-elect and their sense of victimhood.

At the cultural garbage heap commonly known as TikTok, the outrage and frenzy are palpable. The social media site is famous for being a progressive hub. That has only ramped up since Harris lost. One woman, in a very controlled and serious manner, posted a video advising women how to navigate a Trump presidency. In it, she encourages women to delete their period tracking apps, obtain Plan B as soon as possible, follow pro-abortion writer Jessica Valenti, and commit to using some form of birth control or get their tubes tied. She ends by telling women not to get pregnant right now "for your safety." Another user posted a video encouraging women to take an extremely high amount of Vitamin C while pregnant in an effort to cause a homemade miscarriage. Still, another series of videos, this time on TikTok and Instagram, discusses Aqua

Tofana, the 17th-century poison, as some sort of weapon against the patriarchy. The trend was even coined "Make Aqua Tofana Great Again." More seriously, this woman posted her plans to go ahead and get her tubes tied, all spurred on by the election victory of Donald J. Trump.

This postelection delirium is directly connected to narratives born out of the Harris-Walz campaign. A campaign ad in September featured rape survivor Hadley Duvall, who said of Trump, "He took away our freedom." In October, the campaign released a video featuring Amber Nicole Thurman's family. In it, her mother said, "My daughter is gone because of what Donald Trump did." Never mind that Thurman's death was a result of extreme negligence at a hospital in her home state of Georgia. Making Trump the culprit for current and future troubles was the goal. Ultimately, the creation of a world in which women will be unable to obtain an abortion or birth control and will die as a result of bans was not enough to turn the election in Harris's favor. This is because it's not at all reflective of the truth of an America that is two years past the *Dobbs* decision. It's also not reflective of the plans of a second Trump administration or the man himself, who has nominated rather nonconservative people to some of the highest positions in the land.

It's unfortunate that instead of welcoming the truth and teaching responsibility, even in cases involving unexpected pregnancy, women are sold a bill of lies. It's certainly not helpful as women navigate their own health decisions. In fact, it can be downright dangerous. Warning them of a world in which Trump will take away their freedoms and prevent medical help is not at all in line with the truth. If anything, it shows progressives such as Harris don't really care about women and their wholeness, even while pretending they do.

The derangement won't end once Trump is sworn in as the 47th president of the U.S. It will only increase even as the months roll on and real life does not look like the apocalyptic, anti-woman America the Left has spent so long creating. Never mind that. For progressives, the worst will always be right around the corner. ★

Kimberly Ross (@SouthernKeeks) is a contributor to the Washington Examiner's Beltway Confidential blog and a contributing freelance columnist at the Freeman News-Letter. She is a mother of two and lives in the southern United States.

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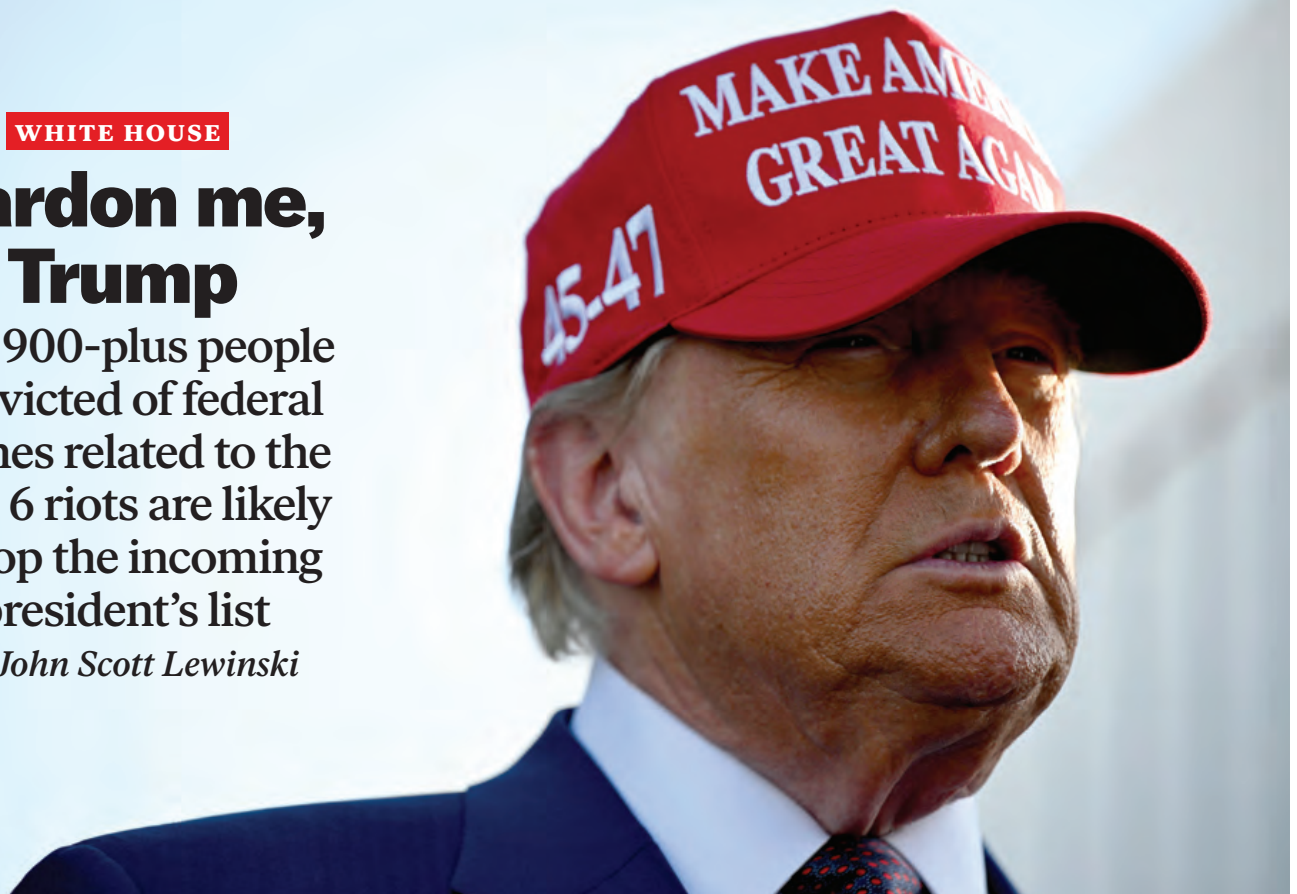
Washington Briefing

WHITE HOUSE

Pardon me, Trump

The 900-plus people convicted of federal crimes related to the Jan. 6 riots are likely to top the incoming president's list

By John Scott Lewinski



President-elect Donald Trump arrives before the sixth test flight launch of the SpaceX Starship rocket in Texas on Nov. 19.

It's a long-standing tradition for outgoing presidents to issue pardons just before inviting their successors over to the White House for tea. For better or worse, President-elect Donald Trump has little regard for tradition, making it likely he won't wait until early 2029 to forgive his supporters' legal transgressions.

Most experts believe Trump will come into office on Jan. 20, 2025, replacing retiring Democratic President Joe Biden, with a sack of immediate pardons ready for issuance and distribution. There's an ample lineup of convicted felons banged up on federal charges stemming from the Jan. 6, 2021, attack on the Capitol who

eagerly await Trump's inauguration. But they aren't the only candidates looking forward to what could be one of the busiest pardoning sprees ever seen early in a presidency.

In addition to the 900-plus people convicted of federal crimes related to the insurrection attempt, multiple advisers and officials from Trump's first administration, from 2017-21, were charged on a range of matters and, in some cases, convicted.

Most prominent was Peter Navarro, the 75-year-old first Trump term trade adviser. Navarro spent four months in

federal prison for a contempt of Congress conviction for stonewalling the House panel investigating the Jan. 6 riot.

"Previous presidents have pardoned some top administration officials," said Graham G. Dodds, a professor with the Department of Political Science at Concordia University in Montreal.

"George W. Bush commuted the sentence of Dick Cheney's aide, Scooter Libby," said Dodds, a specialist in American politics and an expert on presidential amnesty. "Bill Clinton pardoned former CIA Director John Deutch. George H. W. Bush par-



Peter Navarro

doned former Defense Secretary Caspar Weinberger, national security adviser Robert McFarlane, and several others for the Iran-Contra scandal.”

Michael Cohen, Trump’s former personal lawyer, served time for federal cases involving campaign finance fraud and lying to Congress. While he was released in 2020, Cohen is unlikely to see his record expunged by the returning president in his second, nonconsecutive term because the former attorney testified against Trump in the former and incoming president’s New York state hush money trial.

With such a deep bench of options for Trump to choose from on and after Inauguration Day, it’s tricky to predict who will be pardoned or granted clemency and when such acts might become official. Especially when the possibilities stretch across party lines to the Biden family itself.

Litigator and veteran ABC News legal correspondent Royal Oakes reminds pardon prognosticators that Trump is always sensitive to the political impact of his actions and statements. He cited Trump backing off an effort to ban abortion nationally when the then-presidential candidate became convinced it would threaten his election chances and those of his friends.

“Now, (Trump) has no more campaigns to wage,” said Oakes, a longtime Los Angeles-based attorney and legal commentator in Southern California and nationally.

“Even though he wants to make sure Republicans win big in the midterm elections in 2026 to make sure he can continue to implement his programs with congressional help through the end of his four-year term, he may feel that because he personally does not have to face voters on the ballot again, he is free to take steps that might be unpopular, including mass pardons,” Oakes said.

One pardon target could be advocates of Trump’s false claims that his 2020 loss to Biden was a stolen election.

“Trump might also pardon other people for interfering with the 2020 election, like former Mesa County, Colorado, Clerk Tina Peters, who was convicted of several felonies and recently sen-

tenced to nine years in prison,” Oakes said. “Dozens of Republican fake electors are facing criminal charges related to election interference in 2020, so one might think that they could benefit from that proactive pardon that would spare them from both trial and punishment, but my understanding is they are facing state-level charges which would be beyond the reach of a presidential pardon or clemency.”

WASTING NO TIME IN OFFERING GET-OUT-OF-JAIL-FREE CARDS

The most famous case of a White House pardon coming down early in a presidency is Gerald Ford’s Sept. 8, 1974 issuance of one to resigned President Richard Nixon. Ford’s predecessor and fellow Republican had resigned on Aug. 9 that year, ahead of near-certain impeachment by the House and a Senate trial that would likely have convicted him over Watergate-related charges and evicted him from the presidency.

“Ford wanted to ‘end the long national nightmare’ that was the Watergate scandal,” Oakes explained. “Conventional wisdom among political scientists holds that the fact the pardon turned out to be unpopular with voters is what caused Ford to lose to [Democratic nominee Jimmy] Carter in 1976. Speculation has swirled for decades about whether there was a deal in place by which Nixon would quit if assured Ford would pardon him.”

While Ford’s forgiveness of Nixon is an example of a president damaging his standing among voters via issuing a pardon, Dodds added the 1977 example of President Carter’s first day in office, when the new commander in chief offered mass amnesty to more than 200,000 Vietnam War resisters and draft evaders. More than a century earlier in 1865, President Andrew Johnson issued a mass pardon six weeks after taking office after the assassination of President Abraham Lincoln. Johnson, hailing from Tennessee, pardoned former Confederate rebels if they took an oath to support the United States and the Union. Neither decision sat well with swaths of voters.

Oakes believes the most interesting pardon question lurking on the political

horizon, beyond the question of whether Trump has the authority to pardon himself once inaugurated, should the need arise, is the possibility of a double pardon agreement.

After all, Trump comes into his next White House term after facing federal criminal cases brought against him by independent special counsel Jack Smith in Washington, D.C., and Florida. Smith has indicated in court filings that he will wind down the former case, focused on Trump’s efforts to stay in office after losing in 2020. The Florida case centers on charges against the former president that he mishandled classified and top-secret documents at his Mar-a-Lago estate. U.S. District Judge Aileen Cannon dismissed the case in July, and Smith was in the process of appealing when Trump won the election.

Smith has indicated he’ll try to wrap up the cases and then plans to resign before Trump’s looming inauguration. But there could still be legal loose ends in the pair of cases. That’s where presidential pardon power would arise.

“Some have speculated that Biden and Trump would cut a deal for Biden to pardon Trump in the spirit of national unity, and for Trump to pardon Biden’s son Hunter,” Oakes explained, alluding to the presidential kin’s scheduled Dec. 13 sentencing in Delaware after being convicted for lying on a federal gun application. Three days later, Hunter Biden faces sentencing in California after pleading guilty to federal tax evasion charges.

However, Oakes added, “There’s no solid evidence such an arrangement is a realistic possibility.”

Then again, Oakes added, it’s not worth exhausting too much analysis on what Trump might do once back in Washington.

“Where Trump is concerned, I’m really reluctant to make predictions about pardons or anything else because he is simply so different from other presidents,” Oakes added. “The old bits of conventional wisdom seem not to apply. He is so mercurial that his intentions seem to change from one moment to the next.” ★

John Scott Lewinski, MFA, is a writer based in Milwaukee.

POLITICS

Is Hakeem Jeffries the next Dr. Seuss?

The New York Democrat and House minority leader's *The ABCs of Democracy* is a children's picture book

By Jeremy Lott

Politicians and their ghostwriters regularly churn out books in many different well-worn genres, including memoirs, policy manifestos, and novels. Still, House Minority Leader Hakeem Jeffries's (D-NY) latest book, published in November by Grand Central Publishing after his party's stinging losses in House, Senate, and White House elections, is a departure from what his predecessors would have written to help boost future campaigns.

That's because *The ABCs of Democracy* is a children's picture book, specifically the subset of children's picture books that help them learn the alphabet. These books, on the whole, sell well. Yet they usually aren't political since preliterate children have not yet been granted the franchise.

Take *Dr. Seuss's ABC* as a successful example of the genre. The second of 26 alphabetical entries reads: "BIG B. little b. What begins with B? Barber baby bubbles and a bumblebee." A later entry answers the letter question for N with "nine new neckties and a nightshirt and a nose."

Jeffries's guide didn't start as a children's book. Rather, it was a catechism of sorts for House Democrats. As the newly elected minority leader, Jeffries would give the first speech of the 118th Congress before handing the gavel over



House Minority Leader Rep. Hakeem Jeffries (D-NY) and the cover of his latest book *The ABCs of Democracy*.

to Republicans. His brief address just after midnight on Jan. 7 thus sought to rally the sleepy opposition.

"We will never compromise our principles," Jeffries said. "House Democrats will always put American values over autocracy, benevolence over bigotry, the Constitution over the cult, democracy over demagogues."

Jeffries, representing the eastern Brooklyn 8th Congressional District of New York, built a head of steam as he continued alphabetically. By the time he got to "maturity over Mar-a-Lago," the Southeast Florida headquarters of former and now incoming President Donald Trump, Democrats cheered. He finished to a chorus of cheers by Democrats and a few boos by House Republicans.

For the text of the book, Jeffries, now 54 with two adult sons, essentially stripped out the "House Democrats will always" part and printed the rest of it, one pairing at a time. There is an introduction upfront to supply historical context. The choice to move from speech to book without reworking the text produces some clangers, at least where the getting-ready-for-bed set is concerned.

This writer's 3-year-old son was not impressed. "Um, not good," was his verdict. The 5-year-old daughter was slightly more up on the book because she liked the pictures.

Those were supplied by Shaniya Carrington. Described on the back cover as "an African American digital illustrator from Brooklyn," Carrington has some range and shows it off. The portraiture is mostly spot-on. Some illustrations have an Obama-era "hope" vibe. Others are more playful. The cover has a splash of cherry blossoms, with the title's lettering on Capitol Hill steps and children playing among the letters.

Jeffries wasn't the only national politi-

cian to experiment with children's books around this campaign season, and it may thus be a growing trend. Former Arkansas Republican Gov. Mike Huckabee wrote the *KiDS GUiDE to President Trump*, extolling the virtues of the once and future president. Trump rewarded Huckabee, a two-time GOP presidential hopeful, for his support with a nomination to be America's ambassador to Israel.

The ABCs of Democracy lies at the intersection of two different recent trends in children's books. The first trend is new novelty children's books that are aimed at niche markets. Permuted Press put out *The ABCs of Metallica* in 2019, for instance. ("J is for James / Who sings and plays rhythm guitar / His powerful voice and down-picked riffing / Helped Metallica get this far," reads one entry, in part.)

The second trend is a greater openness to politics in mass-market children's books. To wit, Ibram X. Kendi's *Antiracist Baby* sold north of 300,000 copies. It even received an extra sales spike when Sen. Ted Cruz (R-TX) asked then-federal Appeals Court Judge Ketanji Brown Jackson about it during the February 2022 Senate hearings on her successful Supreme Court nomination.

Whether or not children will be interested in such books in great numbers is an open question. The children's book market is one in which third parties (parents and grandparents) that are not the target audience (children) do the lion's share of buying. However, the children must sound the book out or sit still long enough to have it read to them. That gives them the sort of veto power that goes curiously unmentioned in *The ABCs of Democracy*. ★

Jeremy Lott is the author of *Growlilocks* and *The Three Humans and other children's books*.

TECHNOLOGY

Feds' approach to AI could change significantly in the next Trump administration

Congress is also deliberating about the way forward on policy

By Jessica Melugin

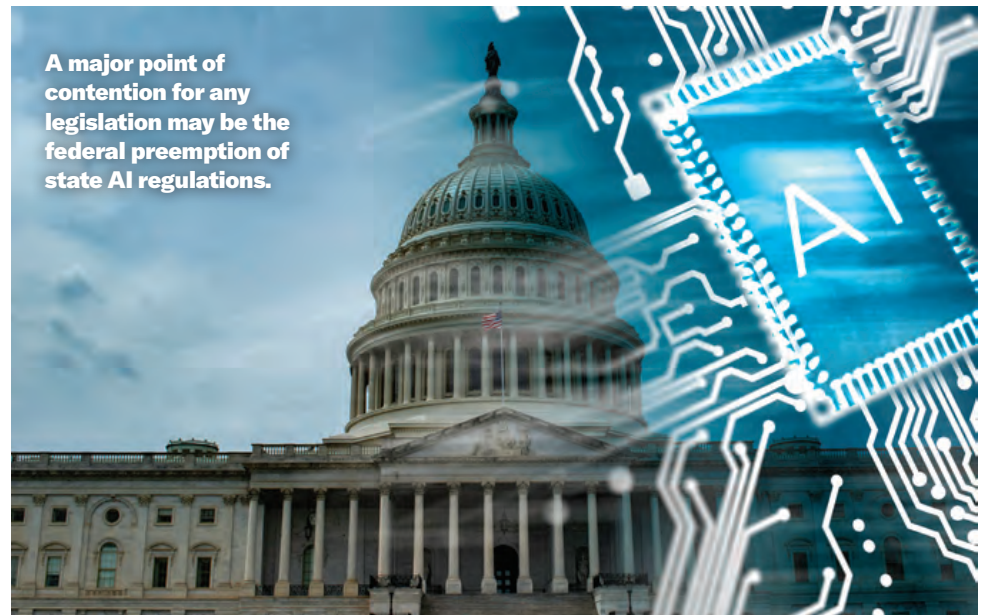
In an increasingly polarized political environment, concerns about staying ahead of China have been one of the few areas of common ground among elected Republicans and Democrats. U.S. artificial intelligence policy may be the most tangible result of that overlap, as neither political party has become synonymous with either regulating or supporting the technology.

In 2020, AI hadn't yet been catapulted into the mainstream when voters elected President Joe Biden for what would turn out to be a single four-year term. ChatGPT was launched two years later, in November 2022, and Washington's reaction since has not followed party lines.

After a March 2023 call to "pause" training of powerful AI systems by some in the industry failed, and less than a year after ChatGPT was released, the Biden administration issued an executive order on AI in October 2023. The measure is the most comprehensive action the United States has taken so far to address the new technology, with the White House saying it struck a balance between ensuring "AI safety and security" while still promoting "innovation and competition" and advancing "American leadership around the world."

Another Biden executive order directed the Department of Treasury to establish rules prohibiting or restricting the export of products in three categories, including AI. The rule was finalized in October and reflects the administration's concerns about China gaining an advantage with the aid of exported U.S. AI technologies.

The Biden AI EO was panned in the 2024 Republican Party platform, stating, "We will repeal Joe Biden's dangerous Executive Order that hinders AI Innovation and imposes Radical Leftwing ideas on the



A major point of contention for any legislation may be the federal preemption of state AI regulations.

development of this technology."

The platform goes on to declare, "In its place, Republicans support AI Development rooted in Free Speech and Human Flourishing."

In 2023, President-elect Donald Trump told a political rally audience in Cedar Rapids, Iowa, "When I'm reelected, I will cancel Biden's artificial intelligence executive order and ban the use of AI to censor the speech of American citizens on day one."

A possible casualty is the AI Safety Institute. Housed inside the National Institute of Standards and Technology, the group sets voluntary standards for safety and security in AI and could be wiped out with the repeal of the Biden EO. Alternatively, it could be codified and funded if Congress chooses to do so before the end of the year. Major AI companies, including Amazon, Google, OpenAI, Microsoft, and IBM, recently wrote congressional leaders imploring them to make the office permanent, arguing that the institute's work be-

ing done in the U.S. is a global advantage.

While Trump has said he views China as the "primary threat" in the race for global AI dominance, the specifics of the new administration's AI policy remain unclear.

Trump supporters include enthusiastic AI accelerationist and venture capitalist Marc Andreessen, who penned his *Techno-Optimist Manifesto* in 2023. In it, he makes the case for technological development through free markets and highlights the importance of AI. Andreessen will be a staunch voice for a "hands-off" approach to regulating the technology.

Also in Trump's inner circle is celebrity billionaire Elon Musk, owner of Tesla, social media company X, and xAI, which makes the generative AI Grok. In the same month Musk founded xAI in 2023, he signed on to the petition to pause AI development above certain levels.

Congress is also still deliberating on the way forward for AI policy.

In February of this year, House Speaker

Mike Johnson (R-LA) and House Minority Leader Hakeem Jeffries (D-NY) established a bipartisan Task Force on Artificial Intelligence “to produce a comprehensive report that will include guiding principles, forward-looking recommendations and bipartisan policy proposals developed in consultation with committees of jurisdiction.”

Led by Reps. Ted Lieu (D-CA) and Jay Obernolte (R-CA), the task force is comprised of 12 Democratic and 12 Republican representatives. Obernolte told a tech crowd in September that the report would be released by the end of this year and, “[T]his is not going to be one, 3,000-page AI bill like the European Union passed last year, and then we’re done.”

He continued, “I think that AI is a complicated enough topic and a topic that is changing quickly enough that it merits an approach of incrementalism.”

A major point of contention for any legislation may be the federal preemption of



Rep. Jay Obernolte (R-CA) is a member of the bipartisan Task Force on Artificial Intelligence, which is set to release a report on AI policy recommendations.

state AI regulations. While Congress has taken a deliberative approach to AI policy, many state legislatures have rushed in to fill the regulatory void, for better or for worse. Approximately 750 bills are pend-

ing across the nation to regulate AI, and dozens have already passed into law. That patchwork of compliance presents a serious threat to the development of AI and will likely produce strong pressure to have a national AI policy framework preempt state regulations.

Prominent senators from both parties have publicly acknowledged the importance of U.S. dominance over China with AI development, and members of both sides of the political aisle in the House seem to agree. Rep. Frank Lucas (R-OK) told a hearing, “The country that leads in commercial and military applications will have a decisive advantage in global economic and geopolitical competition.”

Whether the bipartisan accord for the shared goal of U.S. superiority will hold when the details of how to achieve that end are needed remains to be seen. ★

Jessica Melugin is a contributing writer to the Washington Examiner.

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CAMPAIGN

Kitchen-table issues, not culture wars, helped Democrats avoid 2024 wipeout

Trying to placate the hard Left is a political loser, results show

By Keely Bastow

It's been a grim near-month for Democrats since the election results poured in. President-elect Donald Trump won both the Electoral College and the popular vote, and Republicans are set to have full control of Congress for the next two years. Democrats will need multiple election cycles to repair their political brand, many pundits argue.

But Democrats have a chance at bouncing back reasonably quickly — if they learn their lessons on the importance of promoting economic populism and centrist approaches to immigration while finding a backbone and willingness to challenge the hard Left's loudest culture war crusades.

The immediate 2024 campaign aftermath also offers a cautionary political tale to Republicans. The Trump team, confident after Republicans' big 2024 wins, has already shown some signs of overreach — such as Trump's choice of former Rep. Matt Gaetz, a Florida Republican, for attorney general. On Nov. 21, Gaetz pulled his nomination under pressure from Trump amid mounting news reports of his alleged past sexual dalliances and indiscretions.

The Gaetz episode is a reminder to Republicans against letting overconfidence blindsides them ahead of the 2026 midterm elections.

A BIG BUT LIMITED GOP WIN

Trump was the first Republican White House candidate to win the popular vote since President George W. Bush's 2004 reelection. Yet Trump's win of a second, nonconsecutive term had limited political coattails. The already-slim House Republican majority will stay about the same — with a 220-215 edge over

Democrats. Or perhaps one seat higher, depending on the outcome of a couple of uncalled races.

Senate Republicans had bigger successes, winning the majority for the first time in four years, with what will be a 53-47 edge over Democrats. Three Democratic senators lost their reelection bids and Republicans netted four seats.

Yet Republicans could have made the Democratic political body count even higher. They lost Senate races that, in hindsight, look winnable, considering Trump came out ahead in those states amid his 312-226 Electoral College win over Vice President Kamala Harris.

The defeats of Republican Senate candidates Mike Rogers in Michigan and Nevada's Sam Brown come to mind. Rogers, a former 14-year congressman who chaired the House Intelligence Committee, and Brown, a decorated military veteran, both came on strong toward the campaign's end as Trump surged in their states.

Yet the formula that protected Democratic candidates in the game involved keeping mum, to the extent possible, on divisive social issues such as transgender surgeries. Instead, winning Democrats such as Sen.-elect Elissa Slotkin (D-MI), a six-year congresswoman from a swing district around the state capital of Lansing, and Sen. Jacky Rosen (D-NV), who won reelection, emphasized economic bread-and-butter issues — “woke is broke,” many X wags quipped on Nov. 6 and after. Moreover, it was more a matter of how they discussed

the economy, rather than just doing so.

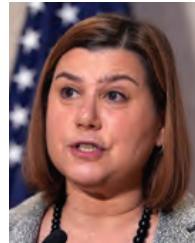
“It's not rocket science, but talking about those issues plainly, not from the faculty lounge, but from the assembly line, is, I think, a very important message,” Slotkin said during a post-Election Day briefing by the Democratic Senatorial Campaign Committee.

Authenticity, knowing constituents' interests and needs, proved a winning Democratic formula in spots. It's something that seemed sorely lacking from the losing presidential campaign of Harris, who parachuted in as the Democratic nominee 107 days before Election Day when President Joe Biden bowed out after his weak June 27 debate performance against Trump.

One Democrat who did come across to voters as authentic, particularly regarding the porous U.S.-Mexico border, was Rep.-elect Lauren Gillen (D-NY). The attorney and former Hempstead town

supervisor unseated freshman Rep. Anthony Esposito (R-NY) in New York's 4th Congressional District, based in southern Nassau County on Long Island. Gillen didn't deflect or obfuscate on the border issue. Instead, she said in a campaign commercial, “We're 2,000 miles from Mexico, but we are feeling the migrant crisis every day.” Gillen beat the incumbent Republican by about 2.4 percentage points.

A continent away, Rep. Marie Gluesenkamp Perez (D-WA) put on a masterclass of sorts about economic populism campaigning, successfully, it turned out, during her first reelec-



Sen.-elect Elissa Slotkin (D-MI)



Sen. Jacky Rosen (D-NV)

tion in Washington's southwestern 3rd Congressional District. Trump won more votes than Harris in the district, as he did over Biden four years earlier. Yet Gluesenkamp Perez railed against what she called the problems of corporate money getting funneled into campaigns and government, even listing it as a top priority on her campaign website. She won reelection with about 52% of the vote.

Another House Democrat willing to distance himself from his party was Rep. Jared Golden (D-ME), first elected in 2018 and seeking reelection in Maine's sprawling, rural 2nd Congressional District. Trump won easily in the northern Maine district, the largest east of the Mississippi River and where, in many parts, moose outnumber people. Still, Golden held on in a 50.3%-47% win by emphasizing to constituents that he was working for them "and not to be part of some effort to further the interests of the Democratic Party."

Winning Democratic candidates also took a page out of Trump's populist playbook. Instead of Steve Bannon's tear-it-down approach to government, Golden, Gluesenkamp Perez, and Rep.-elect Josh Riley (D-NY) in New York's 22nd Congressional District, among others, preached a form of progressive populism. They argued that the system is broken but that, in select cases and when applied the right way, government programs have a role in fixing it.

Gillen, for instance, spoke often about the price of insulin, for which copays are capped at \$35 under a federal law enacted by Biden and congressional Democrats. Sen.-elect Ruben Gallego (D-AZ) touted bringing \$12 million for affordable housing funding to Arizona during his nearly 10-year House career representing the state's downtown and western Phoenix 3rd Congressional District.

CULTURE WARS SANK DEMOCRATS IN MANY PLACES

Democrats who lost or saw their districts swing toward Republicans weren't

able to convincingly tap into these priorities. The attempt to cover their inability to talk about the economy by



Rep. Marie Gluesenkamp Perez (D-WA)

redirecting the conversation to cultural issues, which came across as party-written talking points, did not help.

Republican candidates are not all one-size-fits-all when it comes to social issues — some call for a ban on affirmative action in schools, others sit on

DEI boards. Meanwhile, Democratic Party leaders insist on eating their own when someone deviates from the party line. Take Rep. Seth Moulton (D-MA), who said after the election that he didn't want his daughters getting hurt by biological male athletes. Massachusetts's Democratic governor, the state Democratic Party chairman, and Tufts University denounced his comments. One city councilor in the state's North Shore 6th Congressional District even



Sen.-elect Ruben Gallego (D-AZ)

“People got to know who I was and what my values were, and so that they got to know me as Ruben the Marine veteran, Ruben the dad, Ruben the working-class kid. And I think when things started going bad we were able to resist the tide because people knew me and they had a perspective of me, they knew I was fighting for them.”

—*Sen.-elect Ruben Gallego (D-AZ)*

demanding Moulton resign over the transgender sports comment.

Their response alienated voters and once again made Democrats look out of touch. Meanwhile, allowing members to disagree without being canceled, such as Sen. John Fetterman (D-PA), who refuses to pander to the party platform on the Israel-Gaza conflict, signals to voters that they can disagree with them but still support the party. Though some may not agree with Fetterman's staunchly pro-Israel platform, Democrats can't deny that Pennsylvania voters think he's being authentically himself.

Democrats who cater their tone to their audience — not that Republicans don't, they're all politicians, after all — lose big among voters, and Harris was the biggest loser this cycle. Everything she said was crafted to avoid alienating anybody, and voters could tell. She flipped on issues and wasn't convincing enough in doing so.

Meanwhile, Gallego, who was known and trusted by his constituents, was able to shed the progressive label in the middle of a campaign and not come off as a sell-out. Gallego ended up outperforming Harris by 8 points in his Senate win.

"People got to know who I was and what my values were, and so that they got to know me as Ruben the Marine veteran, Ruben the dad, Ruben the working-class kid," Gallego told the *Associated Press*. "And I think when things started going bad we were able to resist the tide because people knew me and they had a perspective of me, they knew I was fighting for them."

It's a lesson both parties can heed ahead of the 2026 midterm elections. It's one that Republicans will have to be on the watch for to counter, and Democrats to replicate, from their limited 2024 electoral successes in a few pockets of the country. ★

Keely Bastow is an associate editor of breaking news with the Washington Examiner.

CONGRESS

Hostility to Israel runs high among lawmakers from Vermont

Since the Oct. 7 attacks, the state's congressional delegation has emphasized putting a 'ceasefire' in place over freeing hostages and defeating Hamas

By Mike Wagenheim

Since the Oct. 7, 2023, attacks, support for Israel in Congress has been mostly fierce and consistent. But not all lawmakers are so sympathetic to the Jewish state, even after the Hamas attacks that day claimed about 1,200 lives, with hundreds more taken hostage.

And while the lion's share of attention is paid to Israel-hostile figures such as Reps. Alexandra Ocasio-Cortez (D-NY), Ilhan Omar (D-MN), and Rashida Tlaib (D-MI), they're not the only ones. Vermont's small congressional delegation has, collectively, proven among the most indifferent to Israel's national security needs for a defensive war against Palestinian terrorism.

Its members have called for a "ceasefire" between Hamas and Israel, intending to end civilian deaths in Gaza, even if freeing remaining Israeli hostages and dealing a crushing military blow to Hamas have to go by the wayside.

Vermont's three-member congressio-

nal delegation also is united in its harsh criticism of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, Jerusalem's prosecution of the war, and its seeming determination to end certain offensive weapons sales to the Jewish state.

Vermont's situation is complex, to say the least. It's a liberal bastion with two Jewish members on Capitol Hill, and it's the home of a skyrocketing rise in antisemitism.

Sen. Bernie Sanders (I-VT), though light on legislative successes, commands outsize attention as a progressive icon and a Jewish one at that. Sanders is an independent but caucuses with Democrats and has run for president as a Democrat.

Sen. Peter Welch (D-VT) was a long-time member of the House before filling Patrick Leahy's vacant seat in 2023 following the 48-year Democratic senator's retirement. Coincidentally, Welch, together with Sanders, has been seeking to invoke the so-called Leahy Law to bar funding for Israel's military due to alleged human rights abuses. Leahy announced his support for the move.

Rep. Becca Balint (D-VT), whose grandfather was murdered in the Mauthausen concentration camp in Austria, took over Welch's seat in the House — the only one for the 650,000-person Green Mountain State. Balint became the first Jewish member on Capitol Hill to call for a ceasefire between Israel and Hamas after coming under direct pressure in her home state. Balint has also come out in support of curbing military aid to Israel.

The trio's post-Oct. 7 response to Hamas, and then Hezbollah, terrorist attacks on Israel alarms many Vermonters.



When they use the words they use, I don't think they understand how and how those words affect Vermonters.

—Republican state Rep. Casey Toof

"The congressional delegation over the past year has exhibited a one-sided reflexive bias towards condemning Israel," Rachel Feldman, a community organizer for the Vermont-based Shalom Alliance, told the *Washington Examiner*.

The *Washington Examiner* reached out to the offices of Sanders, Welch, and Balint for comment multiple times for this story but received no responses.

QUICK PIVOT TO CEASEFIRE CALLS

Welch and Balint initially supported additional aid to Israel in the immediate aftermath of Hamas's massacre, and Sanders condemned the attack. But all of their condemnations focused more on the harm it brought to a two-state solution between Israel and the Palestinians.

Feldman says her organization was built in the wake of the massacre as a way for the Vermont community to be able to stand up against antisemitism and disseminate accurate information about Israel. While also serving as a base for education, understanding, and collaboration with other communities.

She said the congressional delegation is essentially ignoring Iran and its Middle East terrorist proxies, including Hamas, Hezbollah, and the Houthis, in their statements, even when calling for ceasefires or hostage deals.

"This puts Vermont Jews in a very difficult position," Feldman said.

Vermont has sat stubbornly high on antisemitic hate crimes charts. According to the Anti-Defamation League, it's grown worse.

In 2023, Vermont experienced the second-highest increase in the nation in antisemitic hate crimes per capita. Some say the one-sided rhetoric, such as that of Vermont's congressional delegation, helps fuel the demonization of Jews and Israel. That, in turn, sends the messaging and actions of the delegation's constituencies into overdrive.

"When they use the words they use, I don't think they understand how and how those words affect Vermonters," Republican state Rep. Casey Toof, the assistant House minority leader, told the *Washington Examiner*.

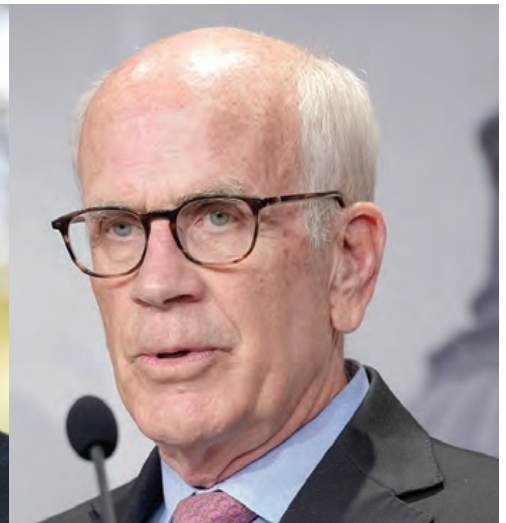
Toof said the delegation is "missing



Sen. Bernie Sanders (I-VT)



Rep. Becca Balint (D-VT)



Sen. Peter Welch (D-VT)

the point of what a ceasefire means: that you're asking for Israel not to be able to defend itself within these conflicts."

After two months of pressure and amid harsh criticism from the left, in December 2023, Sanders switched from calling for a humanitarian pause to demanding President Joe Biden force a full-on ceasefire and withdraw support for pending emergency military aid legislation working its way through Congress.

Sanders labeled Israel's defensive actions "immoral" and has been unrelenting since.

"There is a want to pander to certain people," Toof said. "The squeaky wheel gets the grease. There's a lot of people that are really loud about this on one side, and I think the people that are on the other side don't really speak up about it because they don't really know what's going on."

BROADER PROBLEM IN VERMONT

It's hard to compare the post-Oct. 7 reactions of Vermont's tiny At-Large Congressional District to other states. Larger population states yield a range of views, as in New York, with its 26 House seats. In the Bronx section of New York City, there's a wide chasm in Israel support even among House members in neighboring districts. Ocasio-Cortez, representing the northern Queens and eastern Bronx 14th Congressional District is a prominent Israel critic. Next door, in the central Bronx 15th Congressional District, Rep. Ritchie Torres (D-NY) is a stalwart Israel supporter.

Still, there's no comparable Israel animus with Vermont in other small-population states with one House member and two senators — Alaska, Delaware, North

Dakota, South Dakota, and Wyoming.

Part of the problem is local. Toof asserts that the anti-Israel and antisemitic sentiment in his state is borne of a lack of knowledge and education and not necessarily ill will.

He pointed to an incident on the first anniversary of the Oct. 7 massacre when four city council members from Burlington, Vermont's largest city and home to some 3,000 Jews, wore keffiyehs to a meeting. The traditional scarf has come to represent the Palestinian "liberation" movement and, on the Oct. 7 anniversary, would have carried extra significance.

"I think that there's no understanding of what that symbolizes and what that means — that you're behind a terrorist organization," Toof said, pointing to a longer history of antisemitic displays throughout Vermont.

Toof filed a bill last year to implement mandatory Holocaust education within Vermont's schools. Twenty-three states, both red and blue, already have such legislation on the books. Toof's bill failed, but if reelected, he plans to submit a bill next year to help curb antisemitism in the state.

DISAPPOINTMENT WITH LAWMAKERS IN DC

Pro-Israel Vermonters are eager to show that their federal representatives in Washington don't represent the views of everybody in the state when it comes to supporting Israel.

"I believe that it is reflective of a very well-funded and well-organized effort to overwhelm people with an anti-Israel message," said Feldman, of the Shalom Alliance.

"What we are seeing nationwide is that the anti-Israel movement is very

vocal and very organized and calls these (congressional) offices in droves, and the Jewish community, in our response, has been seeking conversations and meetings," Feldman said.

Those conversations with Welch, Balint, and the Shalom Alliance have entailed a large portion of the Jewish community, with representatives from all points of the political spectrum and different levels of religious observance, Feldman claims.

Welch and Balint have both taken meetings, she says. The Shalom Alliance has not reached out to Sanders because "his public anti-Israel position is not the first place we wanted to take our desire to build bridges for dialogue in Vermont."

When asked whether the meetings held have had any tangible impact or even led to a change in tone, Feldman pointed to an Oct. 22 letter to Secretary of State Antony Blinken and Attorney General Merrick Garland. The letter, led by Sanders and joined by Welch, Balint, and nine others, called for an investigation into a reported Israeli strike that injured a Vermont journalist in Lebanon in the early days of the Israel-Hamas war, which Lebanese-based terrorist group Hezbollah joined.

"And yet there has never been a joint statement by this delegation about American citizens murdered or kidnapped at the hands of Hamas," Feldman said, curious as to why the delegation isn't asking questions about whether the journalist, along with others hit by the strike, may have been embedded with Hezbollah. ★

Mike Wagenheim is a senior U.S. correspondent for the i24NEWS television network, covering American government, diplomacy, religion, business, and culture.

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Business

PUBLIC HEALTH

Dismal failures in healthcare system make the US an unsuccessful nation, report says

The United States is failing to meet one of its main obligations, namely, the health and welfare of its citizens. In doing so, it cannot describe itself as a successful nation.

This is the brutal conclusion of a recent *Mirror, Mirror 2024: A Portrait of the Failing U.S. Health System* report on healthcare across rich nations from the Commonwealth Fund. The report lists the U.S. as the lowest-ranked system overall despite the fact that it spends by far the most on healthcare.

In four of five categories, the U.S. is either the lowest or second-lowest ranked in the survey, which compared the health systems of ten wealthy countries. Those four categories are access to care, administrative efficiency, equity, and health outcomes.

“Most of the countries we compared are providing this protection, even though each can learn a good deal from its peers,” the report concluded. “The U.S., in failing this ultimate test of a successful nation, remains an outlier.”

WHERE'S THE INCENTIVE?

Misaligned incentives are playing a role in such a dismal result, said Lucienne Ide, M.D., Ph.D., and chief executive officer at Rimidi, a remote patient monitoring company.

The U.S. healthcare system leaves 26 million people uninsured and even more underinsured, disincentivizing people from accessing care until the last, costly minute, she said. In addition, the lack of an effective primary care infrastructure plays a big role in exacerbating a comparative absence of preventive screening and higher-quality disease management.

Care must be more accessible and affordable for patients at the same time as being more profitable and sustainable for providers

By Nick Thomas



“One of the great paradoxes of the U.S. healthcare system is that if you are seriously ill, there is nowhere else you would rather be,” she said. “Yet, if you want accessible, affordable preventative care, the U.S. is the last place where you want to be.”

Alexandra Tien, M.D., a family physician at Medical Associates of Rhode Island, agreed that the healthcare sector pays lip service to the importance of primary care.

“Primary care doctors are the worst-paid physicians, and until that changes, medical school graduates with hundreds of thousands of dollars in debt (because we don’t subsidize medical education in this country) will be sure to run from primary care as fast as they can,” she said. “As a country, we pay lip service to the importance of primary care without actually paying primary care physicians accordingly.”

Current incentives in healthcare are, in fact, not aimed at providing the best care possible for patients but are rather driven by revenue opportunities, said Warris Bokhari, M.D., co-founder and CEO of Claimable, an AI-powered health insurance appeals company. He said insurance companies and healthcare systems benefit from such incentives, not patients.

“Our system incentivizes short-term gains over long-term health outcomes, making business performance the primary metric for success,” he said. “In the end, the two industries — medicine and insurance — are bound by name only, leaving patients in a system that treats care as a line item, not a commitment.”

In addition, ever-larger healthcare systems are increasingly buying up previously independent practices, further driving up costs to patients, Bokhari added.

NOT JUST HOSPITALS

The dysfunction runs across the whole health ecosystem. Pharmacists and dentists experience similar complications and should also be taken into account when discussing the problems besetting the whole U.S. health system.

Consolidation in the pharmacy benefit management and digital health spaces, for example, highlights the problems of high costs, administrative inefficiencies, and the lack of access to primary care, according to Lindsay Dymowski, CEO of Philadelphia-based Centennial Pharmacy Services.

In dentistry, too, greater integration of oral health into the ecosystem would help build the bridge between it and overall health.

“Shifting toward value-based care, in which providers are rewarded for quality care and health outcomes, rather than the quantity of care delivered, will incentivize prevention and personalization in care,” said Melissa Burroughs, public policy director at Boston-based CareQuest Institute for Oral Health.

The one-on-one patient-physician relationship has largely been forgotten as health systems and insurers focus on business concepts such as “productivity” and “consumer-driven wants,” and nowhere is this more obvious than in the failures of primary care, argued Dr. Drew Remignanti, M.D., a retired emergency medicine physician and author of *The Healing Connection: A Partnership for Your Health*.

“It is only through a trusting and mutually respectful one-on-one patient-physician relationship that we can safely navigate the vagaries of modern healthcare,” he said. “We, therefore, need to incentivize primary care for both patients and physicians alike.”

SOCIAL DETERMINANTS DO INDEED DETERMINE

Health disparities are rampant in such a dysfunctional system, with approximately 80% of health outcomes influenced by social determinants of health as compared with a 20% figure influenced by actual clinical care, said Didier Choukroun, CEO of SPHERE Investments, a Miami-based real estate company focused on improving healthcare environments.

Investments must be targeted at enhancing socioeconomic factors, physical environments, and health behaviors to encourage greater health equity. Such

a focus can also be helped by a greater concentration on value-based care, Choukroun said.

The reality is that, without the necessary steps in place for adequate primary care from an early age for everyone, many individuals transition into the Medicare years with chronic conditions and low health literacy, increasing costs and lessening the effectiveness of value-based care initiatives, according to Jenn Kerfoot, chief strategy and growth officer at DUOS, a digital health innovator aimed at helping older adults live more independently.

“Ensuring every American has access to a foundation of health knowledge and preventative care can help us mitigate costs down the line, reduce chronic disease burdens, and ultimately allow Medicare to better fulfill its mission for future generations,” she said.

Care must be more accessible and affordable for patients while being more profitable and sustainable for providers, sources said. Emphasizing the health of individuals in a country where life expectancy is four years below the average of other nations must come first, above the health of the bottom line.

“The bottom line is that the cost of healthcare in the U.S. is the highest in the world, and we have little to show for it,” said Tien. “The main reason for this is our dependence on the middleman and the proliferation of bureaucrats, all designed to make our “system” needlessly complex and intertwined in a dysfunctional mess.”

The countries surveyed for the report, in addition to the U.S., were as follows: Australia, Canada, France, Germany, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Sweden, Switzerland, and the United Kingdom. Australia was the highest-ranked overall system and one of the nations spending the least on healthcare.

“Reversing the dismal track record of the U.S. health system would require multiple, demanding interventions by government at all levels and by the private sector,” the report concludes. ★

Nick Thomas is a writer based in Denver.

TIANA'S TAKE

Women have always worked for pay



Tradwives, “stay-at-home-girl-friends,” and even bargain barrel feminists who bray on about the burden of “emotional labor.”

These groups of young women each reject employment as antithetical to the feminine disposition, though for starkly different reasons. Here’s why they’re all wrong.

They all forget that women have always worked for pay. Neither capitalism nor feminism are to blame. Rather, the half-century lull in female employment at the start of the 20th century was a historical anomaly.

Today, 57% of women aged 16 and older are either employed or looking for employment. That’s technically around the record high for America’s female labor force participation rate, according to official government records. Economist Claudia Goldin proved that the history of female employment was largely “U-shaped,” with women’s labor force participation historically robust, then plummeting throughout the industrial revolution to a nadir in the 1910s before recovering after World War II.

Goldin, who proved that the female labor force participation rate was at least as high in 1860 as it was in 1940, ultimately won the Nobel Prize in Economics last year. But landmark research by George Washington University economists Barry R. Chiswick and RaeAnn Halenda Robinson found that Goldin actually understated the case.

Defining labor force participation “as engagement in either formal or informal market work, as distinct from home production,” Chiswick and Robinson scoured Census data from 1860 and 1920 to account for unreported family workers who “provided unreported labor for a family operated business.” The economists here weren’t including “tradwives” who simply engaged in subsistence-level farming or homemaking for their children. There also

were wives who, for instance, operated the family shop, milked the cows for the local market, or managed the tenants for the family boarding house.

True to the contemporary definition of employment, Chiswick and Robinson’s method only includes the unreported workers who produced goods or services that indeed generated pay for the family, even if that income or employment was reported individually to the Census at the time.



Going back in time and across the pond, decent data indicate that America’s matriarchs have truly always worked.

Goldin’s study of Philadelphia population directories in 1796 and 1800 found that the labor force participation rate for female heads of households — disproportionately widows, who were often young mothers — was 64%. While Goldin notes that “it is possible that women with little prior business knowledge were hastily put in command, it is more likely that many of the women in the 1796 directory were actively engaged in ‘hidden market work.’”

Mirroring this American sample is a contemporary study of English women. In a 1995 article in the *Economic History Review*, Sara Horrell and Jane Humphries of the London School of Economics determined that the labor force participation rate for married women in England at the end of the 18th century was 66% when they recalculated employment to include



those women who reported income even if contemporary surveyors didn’t record the women in question as having gainful occupations.

We don’t have comprehensive employment data from before English law allowed men to bar women from guilds and relegate them to lower pay, but we do have smaller data sets specific to guilds and industries.

In her conveniently compiled *Normal Women: Nine Hundred Years of Making History*, Philippa Gregory found that until the imposition of sexist guild restrictions in England, husbands and wives entered “their names as equal members until 1540.” The century before that, Gregory reports that “a third of the members of the Brewers’ Guild of London” registered “under their own name and in their own right,” and another 100 years earlier, women comprised one-third of the guild of Holy Trinity at St. Botolph’s near Aldersgate.

Even before the Black Death induced extra demand for women working in agriculture well beyond subsistence farming, midwifery and textile trades such as spinning and weaving almost exclusively employed women.

So what accounts for the bottom trough of that “U-curve,” the idealized half-century or so when a small majority of white women did not bring income into the family home? In small part, the industrial revolution systemized agriculture out of family farms, but more importantly, technology made managing the rest of the home easier.

At the turn of the century, the average middle-class matriarch spent 44 hours per week on food preparation and nearly 12 hours on laundry. By the 1960s, cooking and laundry took an average of a little more than an hour each day for each task. From 1900 to 2012, the average weekly hours spent by prime-aged women on home production halved while market work doubled.

The nadir of female labor force participation represents the dramatic opportunity cost created by technological development rendering a woman’s earning potential outside the home much higher than the costs saved by two to three hours of subsistence housework. Eventually, women went back to paid work, a return to the historical norm of centuries of women contributing to the family coffers. ★

Tiana Lowe Doescher is an economics columnist for the Washington Examiner.

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★ An all underdog Superbowl? ★ A campus vibeshift



Denzel Washington
in *Gladiator II*.

COURTESY OF PARAMOUNT

“In *Gladiator II*, nearly everything from the original is rehashed”

Micah Mattix, P. 49



BOOKS

Cher the Wealth

By Alexander Larman

One of the more likable qualities of the clunkily titled *Cher: The Memoir, Part One* is that its author appears to have taken great delight in writing it. Cher guides the reader through the first half of her inimitable life and career with chutzpah. She begins with her impoverished and often miserable childhood in California, proceeds into the years of musical stardom, and concludes with a cliffhanger of sorts, with our hero on the verge of her Eighties acting career. We shall have to wait until the publication of *Part Two* next year to read her thoughts on everything from her Oscar-winning appearance in *Moonstruck* to her musical comebacks, disappointments, and yet more comebacks in the subsequent decades. Still, as her publicity states quite accurately, hers has been “a life too immense for one book”.

The four hundred-odd pages that will be flying out of bookstores this Christmas are certainly immense in every aspect: not just the highs and lows of her remarkable professional and personal life, the two being intertwined in her marriage to Sonny Bono, but in the sheer grandiosity of her milieu. One of the first concerts she ever saw was Elvis: “the most exciting experience I’d ever had because I knew that I wanted to be on that stage in the spotlight one day too.” *Cher: The Memoir* is a paean to being in the spotlight, for all its downsides and difficulties. Its star loves fame and thrives on attention.

As Cher approaches her seventh decade in the industry, her preternaturally



**Cher the Memoir:
Part One**
By Cher
Dey Street Books
432 pp., \$36.00

her mother, the small-time actress and singer Georgia Holt, intended to have an abortion after becoming pregnant by the first of her six husbands. Faced with the horrors of a backstreet clinic in Long Beach, she fled and decided to have her daughter instead. Cher encapsulates the situation elegantly. “It was her body, her life, and her choice to make. Thank God she got off that table, though, or I wouldn’t be here to write these pages.”

youthful features have resolved themselves, whether through good fortune or surgical intervention, into a perpetually amused pout. On this evidence, Cher is prepared — happy, even — to be candid about her gravity-defying life and appearance. Even if you’re a casual admirer rather than obsessive fan of the woman born Cheryl Sarkisian in 1946, there is much here to enjoy. The narrative begins with a jolt when Cher reveals that



**Cher and Sonny Bono
in Valencia, California,
on Sept. 2, 1971.**

That Cher raised herself from what she describes as a Dickensian childhood to become one of the most famous singers in the world took determination and talent. It also took her first husband, Bono, who met Cher when he was 27 and she was 16. It was a strange relationship from the beginning. Neither found the other physically attractive, and their 1964 marriage was a fabrication; it did not become legal until 1969. At the height of their success as a wholesome husband-and-wife duo, singing apparently uxorious numbers such as the wildly successful ‘I Got You, Babe,’ the male half of the equation was off scattering his seed around any woman who was beguiled by his fame as she sat at home. As Cher writes here, these included “dancers, actresses, waitresses, even hookers... I couldn’t imagine where he found the time.”

Cher contemplated suicide rather than divorce, fearing for the negative impact she believed it would have on her reputation, but she was trapped by Bono’s insistence on punitive contracts that rendered her his unpaid servant.

When she finally realized that she could simply leave him, Bono chimed in that he should have murdered her instead. "I'd plead insanity, get seven years in jail, then get a book deal and my own show," she has him saying. Had one of, say, Joni Mitchell's husbands said this to her, the reader could expect a chapter of outraged tub-thumping. Cher writes instead that "within seconds, we were howling... what else could we do but laugh?"

As for the book's gossip value, she has known everyone. And although the memoir isn't as heavy on showbiz anecdote as might be expected, much of the name-dropping may yet surface in the second book. An exception is the megalomaniac genius-murderer, producer Phil Spector, with whom Cher briefly and unsuccessfully collaborated in 1974, shortly before recording her *Star* album. Cher makes a point of referring to him as "Philip Spector" and faces him down when he's in his gun-wielding manic phase. "You can't pull that s*** with me, you a**hole. You've known me since I was sixteen!"

The book perhaps owes its existence to Cher's rival Barbra Streisand, whose stately, self-deprecating (and extraordinarily long) *My Name Is Barbra* beat her to publication by over a year. Yet while Streisand's memoir often felt as if she were graciously giving you a guided tour of a well-stocked museum, Cher's autobiography is a far looser affair. This is true to the spirit of a woman whose social media accounts have a let-it-all-hang-out quality, with correct punctuation and grammar optional. Her scattershot style is, she explains, a direct result of her dyslexia. She disarmingly writes that "punctuation marks are like symbols to me that you throw in the air and they land where they land."

Followers of the great survivor will adore this book, especially the long, surreal recitations of clothing labels that she wore. Nothing, apparently, has been forgotten, whether by her, her anonymous ghostwriter, or some put-upon researcher. (Pity the latter, sent to search through the most colorful archives imaginable.) Others will relish the way this defiant, witty autobiography sings loudly in that unmistakable voice.

Alexander Larman is the author of, most recently, The Windsors at War and an editor at the Spectator World.

BOOKS

Reading Habits

By John Wilson

As I'm typing this, to my left is a very long shelf that mostly contains novels by Barbara Pym, Muriel Spark, Beryl Bainbridge, Brian Moore, and Marly Youmans. A shelf above has a run of novels by Thomas Pynchon next to a number by Thomas Bernhard. Another shelf features Peter Handke. A photo of Herta Muller makes me think of a big stack of her novels upstairs. Ditto a photo of Solzhenitsyn. And what about all the crime novelists and writers of science fiction I love and admire?

This list simply represents my own interests and some randomness. This is to say, when people talk about "the novel" or even about "books," they are necessarily talking about the novels and books they happen to have read and heard of and become interested in. People talking about books can easily talk past each other. Academics have a solution to this, which is to act tribally and all focus on the same things at the same time. Most books on "the novel" are written by academics. In principle, I have nothing against their tribe. Many of my dear friends are academics. I read university press books voraciously. However, for some years now, particularly on certain subjects, academic scholarship has been infected by viruses of the mind. Recent books dealing from one angle or another with "the novel" are among those most likely to be exasperating in this way.

Edwin Frank, however, is not an academic. He's an editor with an encyclopedic knowledge of fiction, and he writes from a fresh angle. Frank has, for 25 years, been the editor of the wonderful book publishing imprint NYRB Classics, founded in 1999 with Frank presiding. His new book about the 20th-century novel *Stranger Than Fiction* draws on a quarter century of reading and searching through writing, which may explain why it is much

better than so many similar attempts.

For me, it triggered a fantasy of time travel back to the days of NYRB Classics's founding. In my mind, I revisited one of the bookstores where I prowled the aisles in those days and where I encountered the first titles published under that new imprint. I felt a sudden urge to reread the wonderful Italian writer Leonardo Sciascia, whom I discovered years ago thanks to NYRB Classics. I found myself scanning my shelves (not to mention stacks on the floor), trying to remember when and where I acquired a particular title. One I bought ages ago at an airport bookstore in Washington, D.C., when I had a longer-than-expected wait for a flight back to Chicago. Another I acquired just a few years ago at the blessed Prairie Path Books in Wheaton, Illinois.

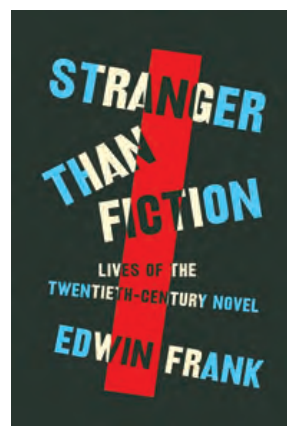
Stranger Than Fiction draws not only on a career in publishing but on a lifetime of reading. To say this is not remotely to suggest that you will be persuaded on all points by Frank's account of the modern novel, which actually begins in the mid-19th century with Dostoevsky. If you are an opinionated reader, at times, you may

be tempted, as I was, to fling his book across the room. However, I think it unlikely that you will regret the investment of time and money.

H.G. Wells and Andre Gide are among the novelists to whom he gives extended attention early on. The section that includes Franz Kafka also includes a writer I've never read, Alfred Kubin (born in Bohemia in 1877). The following chapter couples Colette with Rudyard Kipling.

Here's how Frank's introduction starts:

"This book began over the kitchen sink a long time ago. I was doing the dishes after dinner. A CD of Radiohead's album *Kid A* was playing, which got me thinking about a recently published book, *The Rest Is Noise*, by the classical music critic (and Radiohead fan) Alex Ross. Ross's book told the story of modern classical music in light of the twentieth century's political, social, and technological upheavals; it took a rar-



**Stranger Than Fiction:
Lives of the Twentieth-
Century Novel**
By Edwin Frank
Farrar, Straus and Giroux
480 pp., \$33.00

efied Western art form out of the shelter of the concert hall into streets and factories, cabarets and death camps.”

When I first read this, I experienced whiplash. For a split second, I imagined myself at the sink, a CD playing in the background. However, then, the business of taking “a rarefied Western art form out of the concert hall into streets and factories, cabarets and death camps” hit with a dull thud, and I thought I might just stop right there. Fortunately, I didn’t. I’m glad I continued to read, disagreements and differences in taste notwithstanding. When I finished the epilogue on W.G. Sebald’s *Austerlitz*, I had plenty to chew on.

Of course, I also found myself thinking about writers and novels that Frank didn’t even mention in passing, let alone zero in on. You will have the same reaction if you read the book. However, that’s not a criticism. Rather, it’s a reminder that five different writers could take up such a project and write five different books on the subject with surprisingly little overlap. No two readers have exactly the same diet of fiction, nor do they read any given book in just the same way. The joy of a book such as *Stranger Than Fiction* is in getting a warm invitation to see into the readerly world of Frank without any demand to come live in it forever. You may want to stay awhile.

John Wilson is senior editor of the Marginalia Review of Books.

BOOKS

The Art of the Amazon Review

By Chris R. Morgan

There is something inherently ridiculous about Kevin Killian’s posthumously published *Selected Amazon Reviews*. The book takes great pains to show it is very aware of this and to make sure the reader is just as aware. It is evident right there on its cover, puckishly aping the Library of America’s canonical majesty. It continues beneath it, with Wayne Koestenbaum, that doyen of highbrow popoptimists, and Dodie Bellamy, an author and Killian’s wife, giving well-theorized answers as to why. Why spend the last 15 years of one’s life,

as Killian did, reviewing anything and everything on Amazon? Why publish a fraction of them in book form, let alone in the fine-china quality of Semiotext(e)? Why read them at all?

Selected Amazon Reviews is not the first printed collection of online marginalia. Though the genre is itself rather marginal. Who, besides everyone, can forget the book of Tao Lin tweets? Or Dave Hickey’s Facebook comments? Yet, those and other collections have not been made with this level of grandeur — ironic or sincere. Killian was a more niche author than the former two. Dwelling in the Bay Area “new narrative” scene, he published novels, plays, poetry, erotic fiction, and professional criticism. Through Amazon, however, Killian embraced, in Koestenbaum’s words, “A zine mentality, ... and thereby shoves the gatekeepers off their throne.” (I thought gatekeepers were sentinels, not kings.) Bellamy offers more context, conveying their therapeutic value in Killian’s recovery from a heart attack in 2003, but comes to a similarly subversive conclusion. Killian “rejoiced in the not useful ratings his reviews received. To rank cultural production according to its use value is to deflate its mystery.”

There’s something comfortably predigital in those framings, where self-publishing is more disreputable and, therefore, more “radical,” and criticism more authoritative. They are, however, a galaxy away from the style and attitude of Killian’s reviews, which have a more digital-age fondness for free-association and spontaneity, for an almost compulsive erudition, a catholicity of taste and an orgiastic range of interests. Completely written in prose unburdened from theoretical axioms (or at least by a need to stop and kowtow to them) and editorial strictures. They are enlivened with warm humor and a natural faculty for weaving exposition with anecdotes. It is enough to tempt regular critics to wave the white flag, while the reader may simply answer every “Why?” with “Why not?”

That style acts as a kind of adhe-

sive as Killian’s mind leaps unbounded through Amazon’s endless inventory. Editors Hedi E. Kohlti and Robert DeWurst write of confronting “an embarrassment of riches” in creating the book. Killian’s efforts comprised nearly 2,400 reviews, from which they “selected” over 600 pages worth stretching between 2004 and 2019. The index of names, 26 pages of small type on which I was dependent in lieu of a table of contents, is a testament both to his breadth and to his allusive faculty. This is made more apparent by the book’s chronological organization. On April 6, 2007, Killian posted a review of *Tiger Traits*, a self-help book based around Tiger Woods. Six days later, he expounded on Stéphane Mallarmé’s *Divagations*. A review of the 2002 Celebration Barbie, posted Sept. 26, 2008, is sandwiched between *2001: A Space Odyssey* the same day and Otto Preminger’s *Bonjour Tristesse* three days later.

The operative crux of Killian’s voice is in his understanding of the review as a pure form. There is no plumbing of depths or vision quests for nuance, as you’d find in criticism. As with the poet,

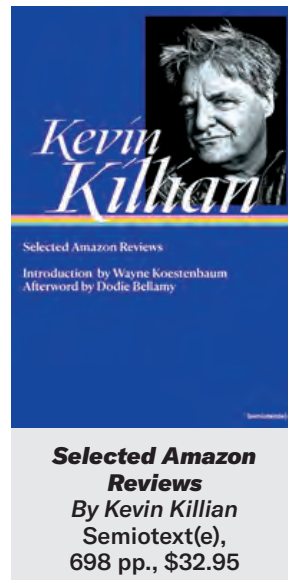
the reviewer is mindful of the meter. The neat summary, the snap judgment, and the keen eye for the telling detail are brought to bear within an elegant gift box of conversational prose. The review is providing a service while also being, very briefly, your friend.

This balance is struck throughout the pithy enthusiasm of *Selected Amazon Reviews*.

“It’s plain above all else,” Killian writes in his review of *Gone Girl*, “that Missouri really is an awful place to grow up in and an

even worse place to return to. The burghers of Missouri must have photos of Gillian Flynn posted next to every cash register reading simply ‘Shoot on Sight.’”

A review of the 2004 American-audience remake of *The Grudge* allows for Killian’s extended tribute to Grace Zabriskie, who has a minor role: “She attacks the part as though she were playing Gertrude in *Hamlet* (which she is in a way). Watch her as she turns white,



and her struggles for breath, and her anguished pleas to Sarah Michelle Gellar.”

Reviewing a throwaway cash-in, *The Tinkerbell Hilton Diaries: My Life Tailoring Paris Hilton*, Killian finds an unusual echo: “Virginia Woolf wrote *Flush* on much the same grounds, she wanted to paint a picture of a famous person (in her case Elizabeth Barrett Browning) from the point of view of her kidnapped dog.”

It’s easy to see how some Amazon customers would mark his reviews down as “not useful.” Killian’s reviews of less high-minded works or consumer products take the experience portion of “user experience” to new but very witty extremes. Indeed, these reviews are occasions for personal anecdotes of droll domestic observation reminiscent of Robert Benchley or Shirley Jackson.

“My kids were asking why our apartment doesn’t have its own brass sign outside like all the other apartments,” Killian opens a product review. “I know what it’s like to be a kid and to be ashamed of one’s parents for not providing one’s family with something it seems all the other kids have. And so, when I noticed that they were crying themselves to sleep over this over this issue, and that in the morning their pillowcases were wet with tears, I resolved to do something about it, so I ordered a few ultra slim 260 H02 sheets of brass from Amazon and decided to make myself a sign for ‘The Killians.’”

A reader is prone to lose days of their life and pounds off their body mining for these gems. The sum total serves as a public diary of American consumerism at the start of a new century. It has a broadly Nabokov-in-exile air to it, as if Humbert Humbert were wiped of all his neuroses and demonic grandiloquence but not the unceasing inner monologue and hypersensitivity to his surroundings.

Yet that very refinement is also the source of the book’s core weakness. The editors note that a lot of polishing went into the project, finding and fixing the array of typos and other errors that come with transferring language from your brain straight to an online interface. Those should have been left as written. Not because it is more authentic but because the interesting mind at work is only one part of the enterprise; the interesting mind filtering his interesting and elegant thoughts through the crude filter of the digital medium is the other. The internet

has granted an unfathomable freedom to all thinking people, which has come with a cost of vulgarized communication and subsuming of individual cultural experience to a mass one. Moreover, the gatekeepers have surrendered their posts, and everyone is self-publishing. It is an anarchy in which it is easy to be suffocated under an ever-growing mountain of content, not to mention products.

Killian’s forays into Amazon are a testament to how you may stay above the heap, carefully sifting through one item at a time.

Chris R. Morgan writes from New Jersey. His X handle is @cr_morgan.



FILM

The Man in the Arena

By Micah Mattix

The original *Gladiator* is Ridley Scott’s *magnum opus* and remains one of the best films since the turn of the century. The script, despite being written on the fly, had great lines. Everyone old enough to have watched the original remembers “Are you not entertained?” and “What we do in life echoes in eternity.” These were delivered by a Russell Crowe in his prime — charming, sensitive, and as hard as nails.

The opening scene, and much of the film, became a template for 21st-century historical action films. Scott alternates between massive wide shots and extreme close-ups to create a large scale that is also intimate. The combat sequences throughout the film are riveting, not only because they are tightly shot and gruesomely economical but also because we care about Crowe’s character, Maximus. He is our better self — broken, yes, but determined to keep what remains of his dignity and honor his wife and son until the bitter end. Joaquin Phoenix is perfect as Commodus. Even Derek Jacobi plays

an actual character rather than Derek Jacobi, sage of the London stage, playing a character. It ends honestly with Maximus’s death, reminding us that while life is a mostly tragic affair, there is nobility to be found in suffering well.

In *Gladiator II*, also directed by Scott, nearly everything from the original is rehashed — characters, plot, dialogue, even the music. (The composer Harry Gregson-Williams offers an uninspiring homage to Hans Zimmer’s score for the original film.) Yes, there are a few innovations, but these only make the film worse.

The sequel takes place 16 years after the death of Commodus. Rome is ruled by twins who look like War Boys from the *Mad Max* films. Marcus Aurelius’s grandson, Lucius (played by Paul Mescal), lives in North Africa with his wife after fleeing Rome as a child. He is a farmer, like Maximus, but of humbler means. Like Maximus, he, too, likes to run his hand through his crops. The point of this, and of many other shots in the film, is not to communicate a feeling or an idea directly. It is to remind us of what we felt when we watched the first film.

The opening battle scene parallels the original. The Romans again advance on the barbarians (this time on sea off the coast of North Africa). Flaming arrows and stones fly. Bodies are cleaved and dismembered. It is supposed to be heart-pounding stuff, but the CGI makes it too big to be interesting. A navy attacking with 200 ships isn’t much more thrilling than one attacking with 50, at least not on a screen. And surrounding the characters with an ever more complex arrangement of pixels does little to bring them, or the moment, to life.

In the first *Gladiator*, Maximus’s wife and son don’t die until 30 minutes into the film. It takes five in *Gladiator II*. Lucius’s wife is killed by General Marcus Acacius (played by Pedro Pascal) while fighting alongside her husband. Lucius is captured and sold to Macrinus (played by Denzel Washington, the film’s sole bright spot). Macrinus uses some of his slaves as gladiators and tests their skill. Lucius initially refuses to fight but easily bests everyone when he does. And so he is sent off to Rome with the promise that if he fights well, Macrinus will deliver General Acacius into his hands.

How Macrinus can plausibly promise this is unclear unless you know that

Paul Mescal in *Gladiator II*.

Macrinus is a real historical figure who briefly ruled as emperor. When Lucius arrives in Rome, he is brought to court and feigns madness in a brief and otherwise meaningless allusion to *Hamlet*. Acacius has married Lucius's mother, Lucilla (Connie Nielson), and apparently Lucius wishes to disguise his intentions against Acacius. Meanwhile, Acacius, who served under Maximus, is working with Lucilla to overthrow the tyrannical twins and return Rome to a republic. The plan is exactly the same as in the first film and just as successful.

The acting is mostly underwhelming. Both Joseph Quinn and Fred Hechinger go all out to give us emperors who are effectively grotesque, but everyone else besides Denzel looks bored. The film's dialogue is written in a mix of modern English and faux Elizabethan ("What say you?"). The actors are unsure if they should speak these lines in a British accent or not. Pascal gives the king's tongue a half-hearted try but quickly gives up. Denzel speaks Denzel throughout, though he has the film's corniest line: "Rage pours out of you like milk from a whore's tit," he tells Lucius.

Lucius repeats many of Maximus's defining phrases ("On me!") and gestures — he rubs his hands in gravel or chalk a half-dozen times. This is supposed to be

suggestive of the film's big reveal, that Lucius is Maximus's son, but the repetitions are tiresome nonetheless. Otherwise, Lucius's lines are either banal ("Wood or steel, a point is still a point") or shamanistic ("Know this: Where death is, we are not. Where we are, death is not!"). The second is a crib from Epicurus about how death and consciousness cannot coexist, making death a kind of nothingness. It's a little too highbrow, needless to say, to rally a group of gladiators to battle. Mescal delivers all of these lines in a surprisingly consistent monotone.

Inspired by the *Godfather* trilogy, Scott has said he is already planning *Gladiator III*. "I'm already toying with the idea of *Gladiator III*. No, seriously! I've lit the fuse," he told *Premiere* magazine. "The ending of *Gladiator II* is reminiscent of *The Godfather*, with Michael Corleone finding himself with a job he didn't want, and wondering, 'Now, Father, what do I do? So the next [film] will be about a man who doesn't want to be where he is.'"

Scott clearly has nothing left to say and may very well end a long and distinguished career cannibalizing his and others' past successes.

Micah Mattix is a professor of English at Regent University.

ON CULTURE

How Trump Won Gen-X

By Christopher J. Scalia

Weeks after President-elect Donald Trump defeated Vice President Kamala Harris in the 2024 presidential election, pundits and politicians are still looking at the returns to see how he pulled it off. For people of a certain age — specifically, those born between 1965 and 1980 — a particularly interesting question is: Why did Trump do so well with the cohort known as Generation X?

A generation known for being slackers turned out in big numbers to support Trump. The *Associated Press* reported that voters between the ages of 45-64, roughly those of us in Gen X, voted for Trump over Harris 52% to 46%, a six-point margin. That's even wider than the three-point margin by which Trump carried his fellow boomers (51%-48%) and a one-point increase in Gen X support for Trump from 2020.

Everyone's talking about how Trump has fared so well with young men, but what accounts for m-m-my generation's Trumpward move? Aside from the policy concerns that affect every generation, including inflation, the Afghanistan withdrawal, and the chaos at the southern border, there are also probably cultural reasons. As Mark Judge has suggested, Gen X grew up with raunchy humor and offensive jokes, making us less easily upset by some of Trump's outrageous statements. A stand-up comedian making fun of Puerto Rico at a rally may not strike us as good politics, but it's not quite Eddie Murphy's *Delirious*.

Also, I suspect another, more specific cultural element has played into Gen X's Trumpian tilt: The Donald is a master of irony, and Gen X knows irony.

As George Costanza, Alanis Morissette, or Winona Ryder's character in *Reality Bites* could tell you, irony is difficult to define exhaustively. For now, let's just say that Trump excels at a type of irony in which the author, character, narrator, or, in his case, the speaker demonstrates extreme awareness regarding the conventions of the form in which they're working and shows the limitations of those conventions by breaking

them. It occurs, for example, when Ferris Bueller, Zack Morris, or Will Smith look at a camera and speak to viewers directly. This self-conscious irony says to the audience, “We both know this is artifice. Let’s have some fun with it.” This irony breaks conventions. This irony breaks character.

Gen X was raised on this stuff. Many of us grew up watching David Letterman’s show in the 1980s, which reveled in undermining the conventions of late-night talk. *Seinfeld*, the sitcom that defined the ’90s, flouted what viewers expected from that genre: characters famously never learned lessons and never hugged. Or take the theme to the *Gary Shandling Show*, whose lyrics winked at the convention of a theme song: “This is the theme to Garry’s show / The opening theme to Garry’s show / This is the music that you hear as you watch the credits. / We’re almost to the part where I start to whistle.” Later, Gen Xers Seth McFarlane (*Family Guy*) and Rob McElhenney (*It’s Always Sunny in Philadelphia*) created their own shows that employed this irony.

The point is not that Gen X invented this irony, which has fancy names in ancient Greek for a reason. Nor is it that we’re the only people who enjoy it. Some of the examples I’ve given were created by boomers, but this irony is still centuries older than them. However, Gen X was particularly immersed in it. We came of age in it.

And Trump delivers it. Consider a few examples from his campaign this past summer. Addressing Wisconsin voters at the Republican National Convention in Milwaukee, Trump said, “We are spending over \$250 million here. I hope you will remember this in No-

vember and give us your vote.” Then he declared: “I am trying to buy your vote. I’ll be honest about that.” The disarming exaggeration gets at a reason the parties hold their conventions where they do: To show commitment to a major city or an important state. However, by confessing to “buying” the votes, Trump self-consciously presented himself as a desperate and shameless pol, which, of course, no candidate is supposed to do. It didn’t work for Jeb “Please Clap” Bush, but it apparently worked coming from Trump, who won Wisconsin.

Trump did something similar later in the convention during his acceptance speech. After being introduced by Gen-X musician Kid Rock (real name: Robert James Ritchie), Trump said, “Thank you, Kid Rock, sometimes referred to as ‘Bob.’” With this throwaway line, Trump humorously challenged a fairly silly artifice common in the entertainment industry: the stage name. It was as if Trump was undermining the street cred of the friend who introduced him. Bob Ritchie may insist, as he does in one song, “My name is Kiiiiiiiiid!” but Trump’s joke showed the truth has a lot less swagger.

Finally, at a rally toward the end of the campaign, Trump was having trouble with his microphone. Frustrated, he playfully complained, “I’m working my [butt] off with this stupid mic,” before giving us a behind-the-scenes look at his speeches: “I don’t care about lighting. I don’t care about teleprompters because I never read the damn things anyway. ... I don’t ask for much. The only thing I ask for is a good mic.” It was, as Gov. Tim Walz (D-MN) might have said, weird, and it was unconventional, which was the point.

Trump’s delight in irony has its dangers. You don’t have to be a Harris supporter to see how his habit of challenging rhetorical conventions is parallel to his disregard for political standards. It also has the drawback of encouraging cynicism: If every convention is mockable, if every norm is bogus, if nobody can ever reliably be held to sincerely mean what they say, the overall political ethos is likely to echo Nirvana’s Gen X anthem, “Smells Like Teen Spirit”: “Well, whatever, never mind.”

Christopher J. Scalia is a senior fellow at the American Enterprise Institute.

FILM

Papal Attraction

By Graham Hillard

Let it not be said that *Conclave*, the new film about the selection of a new pope from director Edward Berger (*All Quiet on the Western Front*) and screenwriter Peter Straughan (*Tinker Tailor Soldier Spy*), is dishonest. I found it fascinating, unsentimental, and exceptionally keen in its understanding of human nature. Nevertheless, there is, at the picture’s heart, an ideological misjudgment that consigns its final moments to the realm of farce. The movie imagines that it has shaken the very foundation of the Catholic Church. In reality, its subversion is so modest that a single “Hail Mary” should cover it. *Conclave*’s poster declares that “what happens behind these walls will change everything.” The work of the movie is to reveal the emptiness of that promise.

The film stars Ralph Fiennes as Thomas Lawrence, dean of the College of Cardinals in present-day Vatican City. As the story begins, the old pope has died, leaving Lawrence to arrange the voting that will elect his successor. That process, undertaken in cloistered seclusion, provides not only the movie’s action but also its warily aggressive tone. If, as one character remarks, the closest corollary to a papal conclave is an American political convention, it is surely the smoke-filled room, with its backbiting and deal-making, that rings a bell.

The players in the film’s papal stakes, though finely sketched, are nonetheless contemporary religious “types.” Aldo Bellini (Stanley Tucci), an American progressive, is so worldly that he plainly despises Catholicism. Goffredo Tedesco (Sergio Castellitto), a conservative Italian, laments the 20th century’s reforms and would see the restoration of the Latin Mass. Were the college’s liberals united, Bellini might well prevail on the first ballot, so unpopular is Tedesco’s reactionary zeal. Yet other candidates must have their say as well — chief among them Joseph Tremblay (John Lithgow), a centrist Canadian schemer, and Joshua Adeyemi (Lucian Msamati), a winsome Nigerian with a secret.

Examined literally, *Conclave* is among the most Catholic movies ever made, a



church procedural that takes as its daily bread the institution's ancient and austere rituals. Looked at another way, it is as godless as reality TV. During each round of balloting, cardinals stride toward Michelangelo's fresco of the Last Judgment, then swear before Christ that their vote is sincere. In between tallies, the men lunge at each other's throats like jackals. Needless to say, this tension is darkly entertaining, like a fistfight at a funeral. "Let thy will be done, O Lord." But also let me undermine, disqualify, or destroy my enemies.

Of course, none of this would work were the acting subpar. The opposite is the case here. Tucci, a reassuring screen presence for more than three decades, is casually excellent as the iconoclastic Bellini, wisely downplaying his character's physicality in favor of meek conviction. Lithgow, currently superb in FX's *The Old Man*, makes much of an underwritten role and should, as far as I'm concerned, be in every movie. Yet the glue binding the production is Fiennes, who strikes the perfect balance between ruthlessness and timidity and delivers the best performance of his late career. An interesting case study in movie stardom, Fiennes spent the '90s anchoring such near-masterpieces as *Quiz Show* and *The English Patient*. Having since lost 20 years to Harry Potter, Lego movies, and James Bond, the 61-year-old may well be positioning himself for a Jonathan Pryce-style seventh-decade renaissance.

As for the film's plotting, it is much what one would expect for the first nine-tenths of its run time. One cardinal accuses another of simony, the buying and selling of ecclesiastical office. A second produces evidence of an illegitimate child. Though the resulting turmoil precipitates fiery denunciations, broken clerical seals, and weeping nuns, *Conclave* never tips into melodrama. Instead, the movie simmers just below a boil, helped along by flawless pacing and a certain mischievousness of approach. If this is how princes of the church behave, perhaps the rest of us aren't so bad after all.

Is Berger aiming knives at Rome? No more so than *Doubt*, the 2008 film by John Patrick Shanley based on his play of the same name. That picture, a meditation on spiritual decline, used the raw material of the church's sex abuse scandal but had in mind a universally appli-

cable moral: Those who chase monsters risk becoming them. Though *Conclave*'s setting is grander, the Sistine Chapel rather than a parish school in the Bronx, its preoccupations are similar. The difference is that while *Doubt* ends beautifully, opening for the viewer new avenues of insight and emotion, *Conclave*'s final moments are a disaster.

Given the priors of its likely audience, the film's options were as follows. (Mild spoilers ahead.) Choice A: The reactionaries win, and white smoke rises to form a swastika. Choice B: The progressives are victorious, and violins swell. Choice C: A dark horse emerges, scrambling categories and sending the viewer careening. If the third of these possibilities is the smartest, it is also the trickiest to pull off. Whatever else it does, a surprise candidate's ascension has to check thematic as well as narrative boxes. It has to mean

something, not merely upend the audience's storytelling expectations.

As it happens, what *Conclave* gives us is the wackiest and least effective conclusion of the cinematic year. Berger's ending means nothing. Worse, it foolishly thinks otherwise. Attending the new pope is a revelation that really could throw the church into open schism. Yet, as the picture wraps up, it is clear that all parties involved will bury their knowledge. Never mind that the big shock is silly, sensationalistic, and riddled with logical errors. No one will ever know about it. For a twist that's meant to "change everything," this one falls startlingly short.

Graham Hillard is editor at the James G. Martin Center for Academic Renewal and a Washington Examiner magazine contributing writer.

Ralph Fiennes
in *Conclave*.



SPORTS

Loser Towns No More

By Oliver Bateman

Here is a tale of two once-great cities. They lost their steel mills and auto plants. The factories went quiet. The populations dwindled. In spite of that, they never lost their football teams, which became sources of ragged pride amid snowy desolations. Now, these survivors stand at the edge of something spectacular.

A Super Bowl between the Buffalo Bills and the Detroit Lions, the best teams in the AFC and NFC, respectively, would be more than a championship game. If the current odds hold, with Detroit heavily favored to win the NFC and Buffalo about as likely as the Kansas City Chiefs to take the AFC, it would be sweet vindication for two places that America long ago wrote off as finished. Buffalo kept its Bills despite noise about them moving elsewhere. Detroit has kept supporting its loveable-loser Lions.

They're Canada's teams too, these hard-luck franchises. Ontario adopted them like strays, giving them a second home in a second-place country. The Bills occasionally play games in Toronto. The Lions beam into nearby Windsor living rooms every Sunday. It feels right somehow — teams from America's forgotten cities becoming heroes in a nation that's always lived in someone else's shadow.

Even Buffalo's greatest coach fits the pattern. Marv Levy won Grey Cups in Montreal long before he lost four straight Super Bowls with the Bills. He conquered Canada but couldn't quite reach the summit in America. It was perfect for Buffalo — excellence that stopped just short of ultimate glory.

The Lions play in domed Ford Field now, not the old outdoor Tiger Stadium where Bobby Layne threw long bombs and Buddy Parker called plays

in the 1950s glory days. Head coach Dan Campbell stalks the sidelines like a caged animal. A hulking Texan, he fits right in with the Motor City crowd — he's tough, direct, and abhors fancy talk. He coaches like the hard-nosed tight end he was and still looks like he could be. The players see themselves in him. The city does too. When he speaks about grit and toughness, it's not an act. The Lions mirror their coach — relentless, physical, and proud to be considered unfashionable by the rest of the league. He's built something extraordinary in Detroit — a team that wins without superstars. Even with defensive anchor Aidan Hutchinson lost to injury, the Lions hadn't allowed a touchdown in 10 quarters at this writing. They're 10-1 and finally worthy of the faithful who kept showing up, shivering through decades of defeat.

Up in Buffalo, Josh Allen represents a different kind of toughness. He's the farm kid from tiny Firebaugh, California, who played college ball at Wyoming because no big school wanted him. Now, he's rewritten what's possible for a quarterback. Allen has more rushing touchdowns than Hall of Famer O.J. Simpson ever scored for Buffalo. He fires lasers 60 yards downfield or bulls through tacklers like a fullback. Even accounting for the two-way greatness of Randall Cunningham, Michael Vick, and Lamar Jackson, there's never been anyone quite like him.

Bills coach Sean McDermott is Allen's opposite: quiet, cerebral, analytical. He's a natural heir to Levy, the Harvard-educated whiz kid who parlayed Canadian success into American near-misses. McDermott doesn't give speeches about smashing faces. He out-thinks people. His offense might not have much going for it besides Allen's wizardry, but his defense had allowed just 19.5 points per game at this writing. The Bills are 9-2 because they're doing more with less than they ever have before. Three decades ago, they had future Hall of Famers at nearly every position and couldn't buy a Super Bowl win. This year, they have Allen and a bunch of willing role players, and that might be enough.

The Lions have Rams castoff Jared Goff, as traditional a dropback passer as you'll find in the league, throwing long bombs, and running backs David Montgomery and Jahmyr Gibbs combining for more than 1,500 yards on the ground. Amon-Ra St. Brown catches ev-

erything near him. But, as demonstrated by the success of the defense even after a season-ending injury to Hutchinson, their star-in-the-making defensive end, no single player defines them. It's not like it was back when all-time greats Barry Sanders and Calvin Johnson willed their run-of-the-mill supporting casts into the playoffs but couldn't take them any farther. Sanders and Johnson retired because they saw no point in further imperiling their health for dead-end clubs. But the 2024 Lions were built for the long haul. These Lions win as a unit, as a city, as believers in something bigger than individual glory.

Buffalo rides Allen's remarkable talents, but they're not just his team either. McDermott has built a complete roster, balancing Allen's improvisational brilliance with disciplined defense and careful game planning. Former Georgia star James Cook is a good running back, much of the time, and tight ends Dalton Kincaid and Dawson Knox are big targets for Allen. Pass rushers A.J. Epenesa, Greg Rousseau, and past-his-prime future Hall of Famer Von Miller can get to the quarterback. Safety Damar Hamlin, back from a bizarre cardiac event that nearly led to his death on the field, heads up an opportunistic secondary. They've already beaten the mighty Chiefs in one of the best games of the year and clearly fear no one.

The Super Bowl has never seen anything quite like this hypothetical matchup. Two proud cities that America counted out. Two teams that stayed loyal to their people through the hard and lean years. Two different paths back to excellence — Detroit's collective dominance, and Buffalo's combination of genius and know-your-role grit. They've lost a lot over the years, these two Rust Belt cities. But they never lost hope in their teams. They may never be what they were in their industrial prime. But for three hours every Sunday, none of that matters.

The old dreams live again. Now hope looks a lot like reality. The football teams are alive and magnificent. Buffalo and Detroit still dream their biggest dreams, and the odds are in their favor. A Super Bowl between them would be a contest about much more than just football.

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LONG LIFE

A Campus Chill Out?

By Rob Long

“Be honest,” I said to a friend of mine over dinner a few days ago. “How bad is it?”

My friend is a professor at one of the most famous and respected universities in the world, and what I wanted to know was, are college campuses really filled with neurotic, brittle students and psychotic, Maoist professors, or is that just the impression a reasonable person gets from reading the newspaper?

I used more diplomatic language, of course, but that’s what I wanted to know. For the past few years, it’s been hard to find any portrayal of a modern college campus that didn’t resemble a luxurious hot-house for the mentally and emotionally unstable. We’ve all read the articles about “trigger words” and “exam accommodations” and “mental health excuses” and all sorts of things that, to use my old man tone of voice, *we didn’t have back when I was in college*.

Every few weeks a story bubbles up through social media about recent college graduates being unable to function in the workplace or a survey that shows how intellectually unprepared college students are for things like basic math, elementary writing skills, and the key principles of American citizenship. We tend to blame the kids — well, I tend to blame them because I am old and cranky and falling apart physically and therefore deeply envious — but it’s not like they’re going to learn any of those things in college. And they certainly don’t learn them before college.

By my informal investigations, it’s pretty clear that an American high school education is mostly focused on reminding students that all of America is built on stolen land and that you’re probably not the gender you think you are. And

when those angry and confused students show up at college, all of that nonsense is amplified and extended with a lot of complicated jargon which many of us have heard flung across the holiday dinner table.

But what I wanted to know from my friend was, is college still a nuthouse or has the toxic cloud receded somewhat?

His answer was immensely cheering. “It’s a lot better,” he said. “The students I have are smart and reflective and not at all like the mobs we’ve seen on cable news.”

In fact, he told me, on the first day of class this semester, he passed around a sign-in sheet and asked for their names and email addresses and, he added with emphatic sincerity, their preferred pronouns. “I want everyone to be comfortable in this class,” he told me he said. “And I want us all to be able to bring our complete selves to the discussions.”

I rolled my eyes.

“You’ll be happy to know,” he said, “that *they* rolled their eyes, too. I felt like an idiot. I felt like an old hippie from another era trying to use mod language to connect with the kids.”

This is just one anecdote, admittedly. A snapshot of one class at one university on one day. Still, it’s a pretty upbeat indication.

“They just don’t seem to care that much about the things we’ve been told

they care about,” he told me. “Mostly they just want to know what they need to learn in order to get a job.”

They’re scared, in other words. Scared of a future that’s going to be rougher, financially anyway, than the past — which is a new concept for Americans. They read the same social media posts we do. They know that employers are dissatisfied with what’s showing up for the first day on the job. They know that inflation may eat away at their paycheck. They know that the Chinese who live in China, just like the Chinese Americans who sit next to them in class, are probably studying harder and preparing themselves more rigorously for whatever comes next in the world.

“Wow,” I said when my professor friend wound up his assessment of the State of the University Student. “I guess fear of the future is a good way to motivate yourself to get an ‘A’ in a class.”

“Well, they’re all going to get an ‘A’ anyway,” he said. “Grade inflation is still very much a thing.”

So, modified limited good news from America’s college campuses. They’re still coddled, apparently, but a lot less annoying. And that’s enough to be thankful for.

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GETTY IMAGES



HARSANYI

Big Pharma is pretty great, actually



There's probably no industry more reviled in the age of populism than Big Pharma. Both political parties now engage in knee-jerk demonization of one of the most successful and valuable sectors of the economy. It's not just lazy and irrational — it's probably going to get people killed.

No industry has done as much to improve our lives as Big Pharma, save perhaps Big Ag, which efficiently feeds billions of humans, many of whom, until very recently, were constantly on the brink of starvation.

Big Pharma allows millions of people to alleviate debilitating pain, manage dangerous and chronic diseases, mitigate their incapacitating depression, enjoy intimacy for longer, control high blood pressure and diabetes, assist in making more children, and ensure longer lives, just to name a very few of many benefits.

Vaccines, of course, have transformed numerous once-deadly ailments that might have killed your grandparents into nothing but unpleasant footnotes of history. In the not-too-distant future, it is highly probable that people will have drugs to manage obesity and Parkinson's and Alzheimer's better and treat lung cancer and possibly cure autoimmune diseases, among many other ailments. In many ways, we're in the golden age of medicine. You should be thankful.

Let's just say Big Pharma has done more for us than every government welfare program combined.

None of this, of course, is to say that pharma, like any other industry, doesn't engage in poor behavior. Pharma is a rent-seeking entity looking to quash competition. It will sometimes attempt to conceal negative results, take shortcuts, overstate the efficacy

of some of its new drugs, or prevent the development of cheaper generics. People are people. There is no doubt about it.

But if doctors are overprescribing pain medicine or selling opioids to people without prescriptions or acting irresponsibly, the state has a duty to deal with illegality. You have a duty to make good decisions. The government shouldn't be handing pharma any special favors, but it certainly shouldn't be treating it like the enemy of the people. Yet, that's what it seems many voters desire.

The race to produce a vaccine during the COVID pandemic, which had shut down all of society, was taken in good faith. But the public anger over the results is entirely understandable. Public health officials, with the help of states and the federal government, effectively forced millions of people to inject themselves with fast-tracked vaccines under the threat of losing their jobs and positions. The societal pressure to do so was also immense. There is no excuse for it. The damage lockdowns inflicted on public trust in our institutions is one of the great scandals of our time. There has never been a reckoning for it.

None of that, however, justifies throwing away a century of hard-won medical advances. Big Pharma doesn't have an army or jails or mind control machines. It can't force you to do anything. The only power pharma holds over a person is handed to it by politicians. Elect better ones.

Nor is the COVID disaster an excuse to embrace and spread conspiracy theories. Because COVID vaccines were backed and fast-tracked by the government and largely shielded from liability under the Public Readiness and Emergency Preparedness Act, many people seem to be under the impression that Big Pharma is barely regulated.

One of the reasons our medicine can be so expensive is that the industry is among the most, if not the most, heavily regulated industries in the country. There is probably nothing more difficult to bring to market than a new drug. (If anything, the Food and Drug Administration should be loosening regulations to allow people, especially terminally ill Americans, to take experimental, possibly life-saving drugs rather than making them wait around.)

As we all know, pharmaceutical products, even over-the-counter ones, caution consumers of every imaginable deleterious effect, even if there is a minuscule risk. There are no surprises. Still, drug companies remain liable for possible damages from those who are harmed by their products or claims. Indeed, pharma is the most sued industry in the world. GlaxoSmithKline still holds the record for the largest payout in history at \$3 billion.

So, treating pharma as the enemy doesn't make anyone safer, but it will stifle innovation and delay technological advances.

After vaccine conspiracy theorist Robert F. Kennedy Jr. was nominated for health and human services secretary by President-elect Donald Trump, many people took great joy in watching pharma stocks plunge. Of course, what that means is that people may be losing their jobs, or millions who need drugs to live will have to pay more.

The United States is the leading pharma manufacturer in the world, spending more on R&D than virtually the entire world combined. While anti-pharma nuts are scaremongering about vaccines causing autism, drug companies are plowing tens of billions of dollars into curing cancer and a slew of new vaccines that save lives. Who's doing better for

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YORK

One month after campaign's final convulsion, a moment of peace



It seems like years, but it was just one month ago that the media effort to stop President-elect Donald Trump reached its final, most desperate phase in the closing days of the 2024 campaign. The *Atlantic* published an article quoting two unnamed sources who said they heard Trump say, some time during his first term in office, that “I need the kind of generals that Hitler had.” That led the virulently anti-Trump publication to speculate about what it called Trump’s “evident desire to wield military power, and power over the military, in the manner of Hitler and other dictators.”

The article set off days of fevered Trump/Hitler speculation in some media outlets. And then, the Hitler talk broadened with the discussion of Trump’s rally in New York’s Madison Square Garden, scheduled a few days later on Oct. 27. Many commentators compared the event to the infamous Nazi rally held at the Garden in 1939. For example, after calling Trump a fascist, former rival Hillary Clinton said Trump would be “reenacting the Madison Square Garden rally in 1939.”

During its coverage, MSNBC intercut footage from the old Nazi rally with video of the Trump rally. The network’s Jonathan Capehart called the scene “particularly chilling because, in 1939, more than 20,000 supporters of a different fascist leader — Adolf Hitler — packed the Garden for a so-called ‘pro-America rally.’” Late-night host Stephen Colbert noted positive coverage of the rally on Fox News and said: “Wow, how would they have covered Nuremberg? High-five enthusiasts thrilled by superstar Austrian painter’s tiny mustache?” Such Trump-is-Hitler observations were quite common.

In reality, the rally was an epic

event, “living, breathing proof of former President Donald Trump’s success in broadening the appeal of the Republican Party.” But when a comedian speaking hours before Trump told an unfunny and poorly received joke about Puerto Rico and garbage, the critics found a new reason to pounce. The *New York Times* called the rally “a closing carnival of grievances, misogyny and racism.” And it just might, many speculated, cost Trump the election.

The Hitler charge, so white-hot just a few days before, was refined a bit. In some media accounts, the Madison Square Garden rally became a festival of anti-Hispanic hate. Many anti-Trump voices in the media found that idea particularly appealing because polls had shown for months that Trump support was growing among Hispanic voters. Perhaps this could stop that progress and help Vice President Kamala Harris.

Politico reported that “Trump’s Puerto Rico fallout is ‘spreading like wildfire’ in Pennsylvania,” which had a significant Hispanic population and was, of course, considered the swing state that could determine the entire election. “To have this closing message at this stage is disastrous,” CNN’s Alyssa Farah Griffin declared. At the *Daily Beast*, the headline was “Trump in Denial Over Disastrous Latino-Bashing MSG Rally.” And *Fortune* reported, “Trump just blew a huge lead, and the Madison Square Garden rally started the drop.”

Suddenly, Trump’s opponents sensed momentum. Top Harris adviser David Plouffe told CBS the rally was “the worst closing argument in the history of American politics.” Everyone looked for a backlash. Hopes rose when a Latin entertainment star, Nicky Jam, who had endorsed

Trump, withdrew the endorsement in a message to his 43.5 million Instagram followers. Was a reaction building?

No. A planned protest in majority-Hispanic Allentown, Pennsylvania, where Trump held his first rally after Madison Square Garden, went nowhere. A few protesters showed up, chanted a bit, and left, while thousands attended the Trump event. Polls suggested that Trump’s support among Hispanic voters was basically unaffected. And then, on Election Day, exit polls showed that Trump won a stunning 46% of the Latino vote — a huge improvement over Republican performances in years past and one of the many factors contributing to his decisive victory over Harris.

What is striking, after Trump’s victory in both the popular vote and the Electoral College, is how quickly the Hitler talk disappeared. Before the election, MSNBC’s Joe Scarborough and Mika Brzezinski, two of Trump’s most aggressive critics, called Trump a fascist and described the Madison Square Garden rally as “Nazi-like.” After the election, they traveled to Florida for an audience with Trump, saying they wanted to “restart communications.” With a Nazi?

The Hitler moment turned out to be a final convulsion rather than the new normal. Trump’s victory, rather than ignite even more fiery protests, brought at least a moment of relative peace. “While President-elect Trump’s 2016 win sparked shock, outrage, and massive protests, the response to his 2024 victory has been more muted,” *Axios* reported in “The Resistance goes quiet.” One longtime Trump antagonist noted that “exhaustion is real” among those who have been protesting Trump for nearly a decade now.

Of course, there might be another Hitler moment at any time. The final days of the campaign were certainly not the first time Trump’s adversaries have called him a Nazi. But the intensity of the rhetoric of Oct. 27 and the relative tranquility of Nov. 27 present a striking contrast. In early 2025, unlike early 2017, Trump might, perhaps, have at least a brief opportunity to govern. ★

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Trump and Imran Khan: A Strategic Reality Check

In the intricate world of U.S.-Pakistan relations, where policy is often overshadowed by personalities, the saga of former Prime Minister Imran Khan stands out. Khan transitioned from a cricket player to a political leader, only to find himself in a standoff with Pakistan's establishment and, by extension, the United States. Following his ouster two years ago, Khan accused Washington of working with Pakistan's powerful military to orchestrate his removal. His supporters embraced this notion, seeing him as a symbol of resistance against foreign interference. But Trump—and any future U.S. leader— would be wise to avoid entangling themselves in Khan's saga.

Although Trump might find Khan's anti-establishment rhetoric appealing, his strategic priorities should lead him in another direction. Washington's relationship with Pakistan has always been about regional stability, counterterrorism, and balancing South Asian geopolitics—none of which can be effectively managed through a populist figure like Khan. Instead, the U.S. works with Pakistan's most stable institution: its military. This is a hard-earned alliance based on intelligence cooperation, military aid, and shared counterterrorism goals, crucial for a nuclear-armed state in a volatile region.

Pakistan is a frontline state in the fight against terrorism. Since 9/11, Pakistan has provided intelligence and operational support, maintaining an irreplicable degree of partnership. Khan, currently embroiled in legal troubles and convicted on corruption charges, has seen his domestic and international credibility significantly weakened. His conviction in the Toshakhana case revolved around alleged mishandling of gifts from foreign leaders—a scandal that tainted his reputation. His involvement in leaking a confidential diplomatic cable allegedly discussing U.S. interference in his ousting fueled domestic conspiracy theories but has been met with skepticism internationally. Aligning with Khan under these circumstances would risk undermining Washington's credibility and alienating Pakistan's political elite.

Trump's foreign policy has historically adhered to a doctrine of "America First." Khan's conspiracy theories have skyrocketed anti-Americanism in Pakistan. The same man who damaged American interest in Pakistan to such an extent is not an ally under Trump's doctrine. Pakistan also remains essential to U.S. interests in South Asia, particularly against the backdrop of Chinese expansionism. Beijing's investment in Pakistan under the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) has increased China's influence in the region, which Washington cannot afford to overlook. Pakistan's proximity to Iran, China, and Afghanistan makes it a vital player in any regional strategy aimed at counterbalancing Chinese dominance and stabilizing conflict-prone areas. By supporting Khan, Trump risks U.S. relations with Pakistan's military and civilian leaders, potentially driving Islamabad closer to Beijing and jeopardizing Washington's influence.

Trump's supporters should view this through a larger strategic lens. Pakistan traditionally balances relations between the U.S. and other regional powers, including China. As Trump aims to contain Beijing's global influence, preserving a stable, cooperative relationship with Pakistan's establishment is crucial. Becoming involved with Khan's tumultuous political journey would complicate Trump's broader goals, making the U.S. appear inconsistent and unreliable on the international stage. For Trump, staying clear of Khan is not only practical but strategically prudent.

BARONE

Trump gains among nonwhite people: Historical precedents and possible harbinger



Did anyone expect, when they heard the candidate's announcement at the base of the Trump Tower escalator in June 2015, that nine years later, he would be elected to a second term with sharp increases in Republican percentages from nonwhite people — Latinos especially, but also black and Asian people?

Opponents and commentators blandly call President-elect Donald Trump a racist without bothering with documentation — although, in my view, being a racist is one bad thing that Trump is not. He's a New Yorker with minority ancestry (German, Scottish) who has mingled with and made deals with people of every origin all his life, in his trek from Queens to Manhattan to palatial Mar-a-Lago and his demotic (that means of the people, not "demonic") rallies across the country.

But in his third general election campaign, Trump has won increased support from groups that his opponents and most commentators never thought he could. The 2024 CNN exit poll shows Trump winning 17% of black people to Vice President Kamala Harris's 82%, tying her 48% to 48% among Hispanic people, and beating her 50% to 47% among Asians. Similar results come from the Fox News survey — Trump won 16% from black people, 43% from Latinos, and 41% from Asians — and NBC's exit poll — 13% from black people, 46% from Latinos, and 39% from Asians.

In the seven target states, Trump's percentages among black people lagged, but turnout was down, suggesting ambivalence among many black voters, while his percentages tended higher, sometimes over 50%, among target state Latino and Asian people.

All these numbers show progress for him over the Trump and Biden-Harris administrations. CNN's 2016 and 2020

exit polls show gains have been greatest among men, converting a 69% deficit among black men to 56% and converting a 31% Democratic margin among Latino men against former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton to a 12% lead over Harris.

To say Trump's support among these voters is unprecedented is un-Trumpian understatement. Exit polls going back to 1980 showed the Republican percentage among Hispanic people rising to 35% only once, for George W. Bush in 2004, and never rising above 14% among black people. It's wobbled around more from Asian people, who were not numerous enough to track 40 years ago.

In the long run of history, it's unusual for one demographic segment to vote around 90% for one political party. But it's been the norm for black people, who respond to the cries of "unity" one has heard from black politicians and preachers for decades on end.

For members of a minority group ineluctably subject to discrimination and humiliating mistreatment, as black people were under slavery and segregation, it makes sense to maximize your political clout by casting almost all your votes for one side. A group voting 90-10 for one party delivers an 80% majority, and a group voting 60-40 delivers a majority of only 20%. Politicians can read numbers: 80 is four times 20.

So large majorities of black people, among the few allowed to vote, voted Republican, for the party of Lincoln, over the 67 years between 1865 and 1932. In the 1930s, about two-thirds of black people switched to New Deal Democrats, and in the 1930s, 1940s, and 1950s, as many black people moved north and into the national electorate, both parties competed for their votes, with Democrats usually, but not always, winning majorities.

Then, Republican presidential nominee Barry Goldwater voted against

the Civil Rights Act of 1964, and black people began voting around 85% to 90% Democratic. Now, 60 years later, not much short of the 67 years black people stayed with the party of Lincoln, that's beginning to change.

Black people have much less reason to fear constraints, harassment, insults, and violence as they go about their daily lives, at work and while shopping, than they did 60 years ago in the segregated South or the separationist North. They're more able to buy or rent housing outside ghetto neighborhoods and live there without backlash: Fair housing laws and improved mores have worked.

In these much improved but not perfect circumstances, some black voters are starting to feel free to vote on other issues than "unity" — including this year's inflation, illegal immigration, and government-paid sex-change surgery. Both parties will have incentives to compete for black people's votes, and black Democratic percentages will likely decrease to varying extents.

This process is already well underway with Latino voters. The federal government invented the Hispanic label for the 1970s census and made recipients eligible for anti-discrimination lawsuits and racial goals and preferences. But their numbers were small then, and, except in small pockets years ago, they have not been treated anything as badly as black people were for decade after decade.

California's Latino voters reacted negatively to a 1994 California Republican referendum denying welfare to illegal immigrants. "They're saying we don't work hard," one Latino entrepreneur told me. "One thing we really do well is we work hard." Trump's complaints about illegal immigrants who commit crimes evidently haven't struck that same nerve. Defending the Border Patrol against liberal critics strikes a different chord in the Rio Grande Valley and other border zones where the border is patrolled mostly by Latino Americans.

In all this, I hear echoes from my 2001 book *The New Americans*, in which I argued that, in terms of assimilation, black people resemble Irish, Latinos resemble Italians, and Asians resemble Jews. All those earlier immigrant groups assimilated in time while retaining, for those who want, some marks of cultural distinctiveness.

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GREEN

Malice in Wonderland



Ls Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1865) a philosophical analysis of language, a political allegory of liberal overreach, or a Menippean satire that, by following curiosity over the edge of logic, exposes legal order as a word game, proving nothing but its own emptiness?

You know from the question that the answer is "All of the above." *Alice in Wonderland* isn't nonsense in the way of Edward Lear's nursery gibberish or John Lennon's "I am the Walrus." It shows how the exploitation of language creates legal and political power, the self-perpetuating commodities that everyone covets though no one, Tolstoy noted in the same decade, can define its sources.

The International Criminal Court's arrest warrants for Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and his erstwhile defense minister, Yoav Gallant, claim to see "reasonable grounds" for "criminal responsibility" for war crimes and crimes against humanity in Israel's fight against the Hamas terrorists in Gaza. Israel is not a signatory to the ICC. The court has also issued an arrest warrant for the terrorist Mohammed Deif, though the Israelis killed him in July. We are through the looking-glass.

"Sentence first—verdict afterwards," the Red Queen tells Alice. The ICC's warrants are a joke. But, as the Red Queen tells Alice, "Even a joke should have some meaning." In this case, it means the end of the post-1945 system of international law. The ICC is *Liberalism in Wonderland*. The humane ideals of the West were universalized at the zenith of Anglo-American military power and commercial influence through international law and institutions. As the United States loses its quantitative and relative superiority, the institutions turn

against their liberal democratic creators.

"A word means what I want it to mean, nothing more, nothing less," the Red Queen says. Arbitrariness is the proof of power. The international legal apparatus is flexing its muscle, but it has no power of its own. The ICC was created in 2002 out of the Rome Statute of 1998. The Rome Statute was created at the behest of the U.N. General Assembly. All General Assembly rulings are advisory and nonbinding. The General Assembly is a union of terrorists, thieves, and thugs who don't even pay their parking tickets. Their claim to legal authority rests on nothing but the patience of the United States and the cynicism of the Europeans.

In 1946, when the General Assembly met for the first time, George Orwell wrote that political language is "designed to make lies sound truthful and murder respectable, and to give the appearance of solidity to pure wind." The ICC's inversion of good and evil derives from these perversions of language. Its warrants aim to stop the democratically elected government of a liberal democracy from defending itself against an Islamist war of extermination.

This kangaroo court serves our enemies. It also serves our friends. Not just the Palestinian Authority, which talks peace and takes American cash but incentivizes terrorism and campaigns to delegitimize Israel in international law, but also the Western Europeans. The empire of law is a substitute for the power they have lost and one of many free rides on the American order. The same goes for the Canadians, except they never had any power.

The European Union's foreign minister, Josep Borrell, said that EU member states, as signatories to the Rome Statute, must arrest Netanyahu and Gallant if they can. In May, when

Britain's Conservative government refused to recognize the ICC's jurisdiction in the war between Israel (a nonsignatory state) and Hamas (a nonstate terrorist organization), Labour's shadow foreign minister David Lammy called for Britain to enact the warrants. Lammy is now foreign secretary.

"We respect the independence of the ICC," said a spokesman for prime minister Keir Starmer. That was before Sen. Lindsey Graham (R-SC) threatened Britain, Canada, France, and Germany with sanctions if they implement the ICC warrants. The incoming Trump administration may sanction the ICC's chief prosecutor, Karim Khan, a British citizen. The Clinton and George W. Bush administrations were right to reject ICC membership.

The American attitude to international law has wavered between that of the Walrus and the Carpenter in *Alice Through the Looking-Glass*, who philosophize about cabbages and kings while stuffing their faces with oysters, and the Snail in the "Mock Turtle's Song" from *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*. "Will you, won't you, will you, won't you, will you join the dance?" the porpoises and lobsters ask the Snail. The other dancers will throw him into the English Channel, but don't worry, they say, France is near. Their dance may be fit for porpoise, but the French eat snails.

Our liberal proceduralists have forgotten the rules of a dance that they designed. Western states created international organizations to export their influence. When the United States eclipsed the British Empire, the English channeled their efforts into the forerunners of today's international institutions and enticed their Atlantic cousins to dive into the legal net. After 1945, a bipartisan consensus saw jumping in as an American interest. But international law is an instrumental fiction, mock turtles all the way down. The fiction no longer serves its purpose. It's time to turn the page and make the ICC warrants the last word in international law. ★

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CARNEY

Healthier eating through smaller government



Two things that used to be distinctive to the left side of the aisle are becoming native to the Trump GOP: heavy-handed government intervention and a distrust of processed, mass-produced food.

Lifelong Democrat Robert F. Kennedy Jr., whom President-elect Donald Trump plans to appoint as secretary of health and human services, has repeatedly demanded that the government ban or curb foods he finds unhealthy. His supporters, such as Rep. Anna Paulina Luna (R-FL), responded to Trump's pick of Kennedy by calling for a ban on all sorts of additives, plus high-fructose corn syrup.

Sen. Josh Hawley (R-MO), one of the first loud voices for economic nationalism and an aggressive federal role, called for antitrust action to break up the meatpacking oligopoly. "The domination of a select few companies in the American meatpacking industry is cause for serious concern," Hawley said in a joint statement in 2020.

Hawley is right to hate consolidation in the food industry — and not only in meatpacking. Luna is not alone in lamenting the ubiquity of high-fructose corn syrup in food.

But where they're both wrong, and where Kennedy's instincts are wrong, is in believing that the best solution is aggressive government intervention. In fact, if we want healthier food and healthier competition in the food sector, we likely need less government or maybe smarter government rather than more government. In fact, meatpacker consolidation and high-fructose corn syrup are two perfect examples of the unhealthy results of big government.

CORN SYRUP COMES FROM WASHINGTON

High-fructose corn syrup is a heavily

processed sweetener that gets a lot of bad press. Many argue that it's more unhealthy than sugar — witness Luna putting it on her list of ingredients for Trump and Kennedy to ban.

Others simply say corn syrup tastes worse than cane sugar, which is why folks prefer "Mexican Coke" to its American counterpart. Since Coca-Cola has sugar in Mexico, why does it have corn syrup in the United States? Mostly, it's because of the bad corporate welfare policies of the federal government.

The federal sugar program is a web of protectionist measures and government-backed loans designed to keep high the price of cane sugar and beet sugar. It succeeds in keeping sugar prices high and thus forces American food manufacturers to turn to corn syrup, which is also indirectly subsidized through crop subsidies.

A pound of refined sugar on the world market costs 25.86 cents, while in the U.S., the price was more than double, at 56.20 cents. The high price is a result of an artificially suppressed supply.

The Department of Agriculture allows in only a small quota of foreign sugar, mostly from the Dominican Republic, before punitive tariffs kick in. The point of these tariffs is not to raise revenue but to keep out foreign sugar, thus inflating the price of sugar within U.S. borders.

If somehow the price of sugar falls too low, the USDA has a second backstop: forgivable loans. A sugar grower can borrow against his sugar at 19.75 cents per pound of cane sugar or 25.38 cents per pound of beet sugar and then forfeit that sugar and keep the "loan" if he wants. In effect, the U.S. government buys up sugar if the price ever falls "too low."

This guarantees a high demand for corn syrup as a sugar substitute. Sugar ain't healthy, but if "Making America Healthy Again" means getting people

off of high-fructose corn syrup, then Congress doesn't have to curb HFC but instead can do this by abolishing the sugar program — which would also make the Everglades healthier again.

REGULATION MEANS UNHEALTHY CONSOLIDATION

Big government also makes America less healthy by driving consolidation in the food sector.

Consider the recent recall of organic carrots. One person died and at least 15 were hospitalized because of E. coli on carrots. This triggered a recall of organic carrots sold at Costco, Kroger, Target, Trader Joe's, Walmart, Wegmans, Whole Foods, and other grocers in the U.S., including Puerto Rico, and Canada.

HOW DID E. COLI GET INTO THE CARROTS OF ALL THESE DIFFERENT STORES?

Well, they all came from the same carrot grower, Grimmway Farms. Two industrial producers, Grimmway and Bolthouse, combine to account for about 80% of the carrot harvest in the U.S., according to CNBC. As a result, any problem in the carrot processing of either of these behemoths is apt to become a nationwide problem.

After a salmonella outbreak a few years back, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention noted, "An increasingly centralized food supply means that a food contaminated in production can be rapidly shipped to many states, causing a widespread outbreak."

Industry consolidation, then, makes America less healthy. The bad news is that carrots aren't the only consolidated part of the food sector. Meatpackers are famously consolidated. Tyson Foods, Cargill, JBS, and Smithfield Foods control more than 80% of the market.

This is one reason that the likes of Kennedy and Hawley want to sic federal antitrust regulators on the big guys.

Why do we have so much consolidation? The prime culprit is regulation. In fact, the history of food regulation is a history of big business lobbying for stricter regulation to crowd out smaller competitors and big government intentionally seeking more consolidation.

You may recall from your lessons on the Progressive Era how muckraker Upton Sinclair exposed the depravities

of the large meatpackers, spurring the rampaging reformer Teddy Roosevelt to rein in the packers. That story is totally false, it seems.

“We are now and always have been in favor of the extension of the inspection,” Thomas E. Wilson of the American Meat Institute testified in 1906. Specifically, the big meatpackers supported “the adoption of the sanitary regulations that will ensure the very best possible conditions.”

Historian Gabriel Kolko tells the story of Progressive food regulation as a tale of big business and big government teaming up to crush the little guy. That’s also how Sinclair tells it: “The Federal inspection of meat was, historically, established at the packers’ request ... for the benefit of the packers.”

Then-Sen. George Perkins described the regulations as giving the big packers a

“government certificate on their goods.” When then-President Barack Obama passed the Food Safety Modernization Act, Kellogg and the Grocery Manufacturers of America supported it.

Author Joel Salatin wrote a book titled *Everything I Want to Do Is Illegal*, and it wasn’t that he wanted to chug Four Loko or drink Big Gulps. What he wanted was to grow and eat the very local and very organic.

Tale after tale trickles in from small farmers getting punished by regulators who serve to protect industrial-scale farming.

GOVERNMENT IS BAD FOR YOUR HEALTH

Stricter regulation causes centralization in all sorts of ways. Most basically, regulatory costs add to overhead, and bigger firms are more able to absorb

overhead costs.

Also, federal regulations tend to be one-size-fits-all rules. These necessarily crimp those who might do things differently to serve niche markets.

The big guys are also able to hire the lawmakers and regulators to be their lobbyists and lawyers. The end result is a food system that is less local and more processed.

The “Make America Healthy Again” crowd isn’t wrong to suspect that there’s something unhealthy about our attachment to processed foods and industrial food processing. Hopefully, they can realize that the culprit here is big government. ★

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society?

Critics, of course, love to tack the word “big” onto the name of industries they dislike so they can create the impression of undue, nefarious, monopolistic power. Big Grocery. Big Oil. And so on. Pharma is big, indeed, because it’s impossible for it to be small. No one is bringing major drugs to the marketplace by tinkering with chemistry sets in garages and selling their concoctions in mason jars. It takes about a decade and massive expenditure in capital, around \$2 billion to \$3 billion on average, to create a new product. Though, the chances

that a drug ever sees the marketplace are exceptionally low. Around 90% of all new drugs fail in clinical trials.

Why would anyone invest in this sector if there wasn’t the possibility of a big reward? Deriding the big profits of pharma, a long-standing tactic of the Left, is now a growing concern on the Right. Price controls, another idea also sadly growing among populists, would also inhibit industry from helping us. And, yes, drug companies make a lot of money, though its margins aren’t particularly high. Like all of us, drug companies deserve to get paid for their work, talents, knowledge, and experience. The profit-motive saves lives.

Inevitably, some of the people reading this piece will accuse me of being paid off by big drug companies. The reflexively anti-corporate nature of modern politics demands it. No, I’m a sucker. I hold these opinions without any financial assistance from Big Pharma. Though, I will admit, I have numerous acquaintances and relatives who, to one extent or another, need pharmaceuticals to survive or live normal lives. You, no doubt, know similar people. It might be worth remembering them before you spread the newest conspiracy theory. ★

David Harsanyi is a senior writer for the *Washington Examiner*.

BARONE, Continued from page 58

They moved from being “unity” voters to becoming normie voters, often described today simply as undifferentiated “whites.”

That process was not unproblematic. Patrick Ruffini, Republican pollster and author of *Party of the People*, points to a 1969 *New York* magazine article by Pete Hamill, a gifted reporter and one of the stars in a golden age of New York tabloid writing. Hamill reports, and with some dialogue not to be repeated here, how “the White Lower Middle Class of New York,” white Irish, Italian, Polish,

and other outer borough ethnicities, “in places like Inwood, South Brooklyn, Corona, East Flatbush, and Bay Ridge,” were seething with rebellion against the liberal policies of blueblood Mayor John Lindsay and rich Manhattanites for unduly favoring black people and disrespecting their hard work.

You hear echoes of such complaintrts today in exactly such New York neighborhoods, which this year produced the largest increased Trump percentages I’ve seen anywhere in the country. The difference is that the gripes are voiced and the votes are cast by Dominicans in Inwood, Chinese

and Orthodox Jews in South Brooklyn, Poblano Mexicans in Corona, Caribbean black people in East Flatbush, and Central Americans and Lebanese in Bay Ridge. A few elections after Hamill’s article, Ronald Reagan carried or came close to carrying such neighborhoods and twice won New York’s electoral votes. Will the Trumpward trends there this year prove the harbinger of something like that happening again a few years from now? It’s a possibility both parties’ strategists can’t afford to ignore. ★

Michael Barone is senior political analyst for the *Washington Examiner*.

ZITO

Whiskey resurgence in the heart of the rebellion



LATROBE, Pennsylvania — The making of whiskey in Latrobe, Pennsylvania, has often been fraught with a fair amount of drama. Whether it was those trying to make it or those trying to drink it, the government has sought to tax and sometimes even ban both activities.

Two hundred thirty years ago, William Findley, a Revolutionary War hero, farmer, and statesman, drew the wrath of Alexander Hamilton over the severe measures the Treasury Department placed on Pennsylvania farmers who opposed the newly enacted federal whiskey excise tax.

Findley, who lived in Latrobe, petitioned the new government to repeal the 1791 whiskey tax, hoping to avoid violence against those charged with collecting it from farmers.

By November 1794, things had escalated to the point that former President George Washington mustered troops and marched them to Pennsylvania to put down the rebellion. Findley went to meet with the commander in chief in Cumberland County, Pennsylvania, to persuade him to disband the federal forces.

Eventually, Washington did, but not before imprisoning some of the farmers and letting them languish in carved-out jail cells without charges for weeks.

One hundred twenty years later, on Latrobe's Main Street, where Findley once lived, 350 cases of confiscated whiskey were loaded on three trucks outside an eatery. The trucks were heavily guarded so the officers hauling the whiskey from Indiana, Pennsylvania, to Pittsburgh could grab a quick lunch. It was 11 months into Prohibition, and the contraband was being transported by Pennsylvania State Police to a "secure" warehouse in the city.

While the contraband sat guarded

on Main Street, it attracted a crowd of onlookers eager to see the bootlegger's bounty. The incident caused such a commotion that it made the front page of the local newspaper.

It was this very boisterous, historic, and often dangerous aura that inspired four young western Pennsylvania couples to open their own distilleries and tap rooms in Latrobe.

The couples come from various backgrounds, including steelworkers, a military veteran, a finance expert, and a former bartender. They are all outside-the-box visionaries whose love of history and drinking led them to the world of distilling whiskey.

Sarah and Noah Henson, Kris and Brook Brewer, and Ryan and Kelly Shoplik were all sitting at the bar of their new taproom, the Rusty Musket Distilling, in downtown Latrobe.

Hanging on the wall to the left of the bar is the Whiskey Rebellion flag. Kris Brewer, a Marine veteran, said the musket half of the distillery's name came from the roots of the Whiskey Rebellion in the area.

"And the rust comes from the three of us working in the steel industry," he said, pointing to himself, Ryan Shoplik, and Noah Henson.

Kris Brewer explained that the flag was designed to embody the determination of the early American farmers as they tried to navigate the governance of a new nation that was impeding their prosperity with an excise tax.

Hailing from Pennsylvania farmers, he explained that whiskey was a central commodity.

"Among farmers and fur traders and small businesses, whiskey was treated as cash, which, of course, made it perfect for the government to tax," Kris Brewer said.

While the excise tax's original intent was to hit the big producers, as with almost all things the government touches,

it hit the little guys who depended on the whiskey bartering to support their families.

The Brewer and Henson families opened the Rusty Musket distillery and taproom in nearby Somerset County, Pennsylvania, two years ago. The Shopliks came along shortly after as investors. The new taproom is located not far from Findley's home, where the truckloads of whiskey sat guarded during prohibition.

The distillery currently offers moonshines and whiskeys and can produce over 100 bottles a week, Noah Henson said.

"One of our founding principles is to keep everything local and to work within the region to support growing with other local businesses," he said

The Rusty Musket taproom has weekly game and trivia nights with a plan to do a "Drunk History" night in the spirit of the popular Comedy Central show that has attracted a cult following for its mixture of history, storytelling, and indulging in spirits.

All three couples have shed their corporate jobs and city lives for the entrepreneurial risk that drives so many Americans to start small businesses in this country. According to the Small Business Association, there are over 33 million small businesses in this country that employ over 60 million Americans.

"We felt we wanted to be part of those risk-takers who employ most of the people in this country," said Noah Henson.

The American whiskey industry is in the middle of a bit of a correction. Before Prohibition, there were approximately 3,000 operational whisky distilleries in the country. Of those, only six in the entire nation were granted licenses to continue distillation "for medicinal purposes," of which less than a dozen are still in existence.

The whiskey resurgence didn't really start until the beginning of this century when the number went from 13 to 49. However, from 2000 to 2022, according to data compiled by the Whisky Aardvark, the whole industry has since surged, and today, there are roughly 1,015 new whiskey-producing distilleries in operation, including Rusty Musket Distilling. ★

Salena Zito is a senior writer for the *Washington Examiner*.

Jonathan Haze, 1929-2024

An uncompromising film professional

By Daniel Ross Goodman

The directive to “go West, young man” has been an American adage for almost 200 years. Many attribute it to the pre-Civil War-era New York newspaperman Horace Greeley, but it may be even older than that. The guidance gained legions of adherents after gold was discovered in Northern California in 1848. These four famous words became even more deeply ingrained in our cultural consciousness after the birth of the movie industry in the early 20th century. Among the droves of young men who went West in the early 20th century, drawn by the magic of the movies, was a Pennsylvanian son of Austrian immigrants who dreamt of a career in Hollywood. Although he never became a star on the level of a Gary Cooper or a Humphrey Bogart, he earned enough roles to make a life for himself in the movies and even made one movie, *Little Shop of Horrors*, that would later take on a life of its own.

This westward-bound young man was Jonathan Haze, the prolific actor, producer, screenwriter, and *Little Shop of Horrors* star who died on Nov. 2 in his adopted hometown of Los Angeles. He was born Jack Aaron Schachter in Pittsburgh on April 1, 1929, and it helped that he had a famous family member who was already in show business — his cousin Buddy Rich, the Brooklyn-born bandleader who some consider the greatest drummer of all time. After working for his illustrious cousin, Haze landed a two-year gig as dancer-singer Josephine Baker’s stage manager. After acting in summer theater troupes in Connecticut, Haze hitchhiked his way to Los Angeles, where there were no roles waiting for him there that matched the glamorous

opportunities he had had with Baker and Rich. Compelled to start at the bottom just like everyone else, Haze got a job at a Santa Monica Boulevard gas station, biding his time while hoping to catch on somewhere in the land of broken, and occasionally realized, dreams.

His big break came when a man with movie connections happened to drive into Haze’s gas station one day. The man, an aspiring director named Wyatt Ordung, introduced Haze to Roger Corman, the up-and-coming filmmaker who was on his way toward becoming the greatest B-movie director in the history of American cinema. Corman told Haze that he could cast him in one of his movies if Haze would bring his own costumes and do his own stunts. And he wouldn’t be paid overtime, either. “You still want it?” Corman asked him. For a young movie-obsessed man like Haze, was it ever even a question?

The movie, *Monster From the Ocean Floor* (1954), would be the first of Haze’s 50-plus acting, producing, and screenwriting credits during a near-60-year movie career. And, in the tradition of stars like Cary Grant and John Wayne who had changed their names to make them more screen-friendly, *Monster From the Ocean Floor* was also the movie in which he’d go by his adopted stage name of Jonathan Haze (though at that time he was still spelling it as “Hayes”).

Working with Corman would establish Haze as a reliable B-movie actor, but it also meant he would have to get used to directorial minimalism. During the 1955 Corman Western *Apache Woman*, Haze was part of a barebones cast that played the Cowboys as well as the Indians for the simple reason that Corman didn’t want to pay for two separate sets of actors. And because of Corman’s movies’ shoestring budgets, the director would try to shoot them in under a week. *Little Shop of Horrors* (1960), the movie that gave Haze his most memorable role, was shot in only two days. (And you thought Clint Eastwood had a reputation for working quickly!) In this campy Corman cult



Jonathan Haze in *Little Shop of Horrors*.

classic, Haze plays a nebbishy flower shop salesman named Seymour Krelborn whose fortunes take a turn when he discovers that one of the store’s more promising plants will only grow if it’s fed human blood. “Well,” Haze remarks, “I guess there’s no accounting for people’s tastes.” The movie’s absurdist Marx-Brothers-do-horror quality never lets up. In another scene, Krelborn, needing to pretend to be a dentist (don’t ask), has to pull the teeth of an unsuspecting and oddly dental-work-loving patient named Wilbur Force, played by Jack Nicholson, in one of the acting great’s earliest roles.

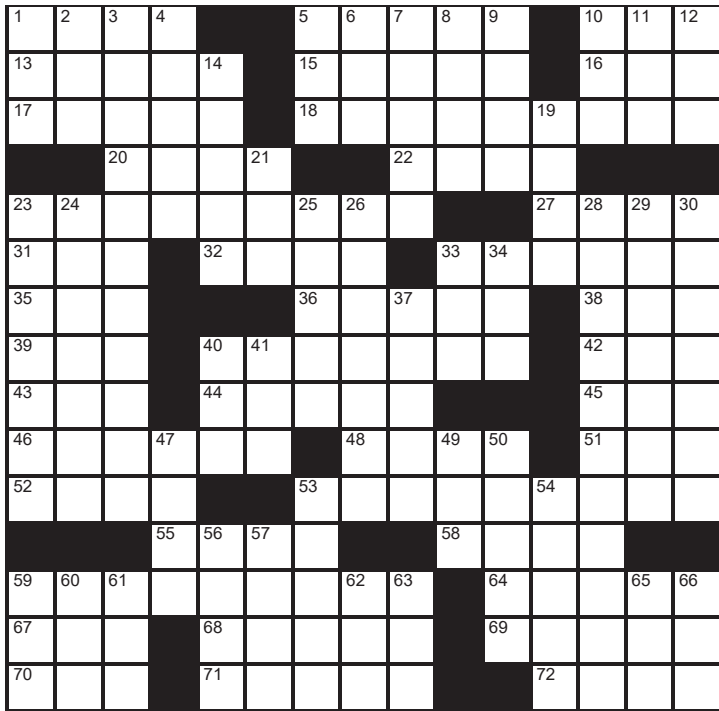
Haze would go on to make nearly two dozen films with Corman before breaking out into other areas of the movie business — screenwriting, production management, and producing. He also enjoyed success as a TV commercial producer for brands such as Kool-Aid and other well-known companies.

No matter what project he was working on, and no matter how challenging the movie’s circumstances were, he always maintained an uncompromising and admirable degree of professionalism. As Jackie Joseph, his co-star in *Little Shop of Horrors*, said about Haze’s role in the movie (for which he was paid only \$400): “I don’t think any of us would have been as successful if he hadn’t been on top of what he was doing.” ★

Daniel Ross Goodman is a Washington Examiner contributing writer and the author, most recently, of *Soloveitchik’s Children: Irving Greenberg, David Hartman, Jonathan Sacks, and the Future of Jewish Theology in America*.

Startup News Network

By Brendan Emmett Quigley



ACROSS

- 1 Switch positions
- 5 Set one's sights on
- 10 Rival to X or Bluesky
- 13 Listens to
- 15 "___ go!" ("Nice job!")
- 16 Devils' org.
- 17 Guy who likes to eat?
- 18 Ineffectual executive
- 20 ___ of TikTok (X account run by Chaya Raichik)
- 22 Naturalness
- 23 Student's worry that involves a lot of writing
- 27 Kissers

- 31 Balancing pro
- 32 "Gladiator II" producer Fisher
- 33 Never seen before
- 35 Little boy
- 36 Like some mobile purchases
- 38 Lawyer's charge
- 39 Bed and breakfast, perhaps
- 40 Gets involved
- 42 Mine yield
- 43 Shoofly ___
- 44 Italian scooter
- 45 Kendrick Lamar song

- 46 Sonnet section
- 48 Hotfooted it
- 51 Cause of wrinkles
- 52 Jewelry designer Peretti
- 53 Worker with drones?
- 55 Winter Olympic event similar to skeleton
- 58 Characteristic carrier
- 59 Profound transformation
- 64 Cable news station whose name is pronounced phonetically at the starts of 18-, 23-, 40-, 53-, and 59-Across
- 67 Toast topping
- 68 On in years
- 69 Starmer's predecessor
- 70 Dryly amusing
- 71 "___ luego!"
- 72 Seeing things?

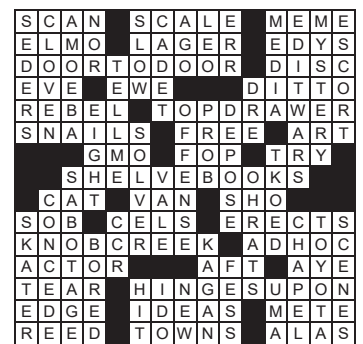
- 28 "I should finish what I started"
- 29 Duke, marquis, earl, etc.
- 30 Soccer position
- 33 Copycat
- 34 Records that may be broken
- 37 Wide open
- 40 Night to party, maybe
- 41 Amount after costs
- 47 1 on the Mohs scale
- 49 Heart lines: Abbr.
- 50 Considers
- 53 Gives in
- 54 Follow in sequence
- 56 "Oops!"
- 57 Apple variety
- 59 Overly-progressive person, for short
- 60 Corn serving
- 61 Titans owner ___ Adams Strunk
- 62 Grasp
- 63 Tide competitor
- 65 Main squeeze, in slang
- 66 Most ATM deposits: Abbr.

DOWN

- 1 Gut reaction?
- 2 Christopher A. Wray's org.
- 3 Experience depression
- 4 Aleppo's land
- 5 Wonder
- 6 "Sum," in English
- 7 "Sweetie"
- 8 "___ girl!"
- 9 Santa's bagful
- 10 Bearded antelope
- 11 Yellowfin tuna
- 12 Diner sandwich
- 14 Fortune teller
- 19 Unload, as stock
- 21 Trio after R
- 23 Solar or lunar event
- 24 Droopy-eared dog
- 25 Vaping smokes, briefly
- 26 Neural junction

SOLUTION TO LAST

WEEK'S CROSSWORD: BUILDING A CABINET





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